Controversies on Twitter about the gamification of recruitment practices and associated ethical issues

Abstract:

Our article aims to understand the reasons for an unusual resonance in the traditional media and on the Twitter social network of an article published specifically following the integration of the TV show concept "The Voice" into the recruitment practices. Introducing a game into a work environment is a gamification process, i.e. associating game mechanics with contexts that do not originally have them. The Voice is a TV entertainment to recruit future singers. Some job search agencies have organized events inspired by the TV show. Our study is based on a semantic analysis of the conversation on twitter about these events. By focusing on the increased use of Twitter we show that this wave of media and twitter messages may reveal ethical issues related to this form of gamification. Specifically the non-respect of the magic circle could be revealed by the controversies via and on Twitter. Potential applications of this research include the use of gamification in the field of professional insertion and the professional ethics to be followed by designers of training through serious games.

Key words: gamification, ethical issues, social network, Twitter, recruitment

1- INTRODUCTION

The work environment is increasingly confronted with the advancement of technology and the challenges and difficulties associated with the use of social media (Cavico et al, 2013). These developments are occurring while our society, based on work until then, is shifting towards a civilization of leisure (ref). The collective imagination associates play with leisure and opposes it to work. However, some job search agencies are now drawing inspiration from practices previously dedicated to leisure activities. An example of inspiration is the TV show "The Voice" in which prospective singers compete against each other in front of four coaches, installed in turned chairs, i.e. in "blind auditions".

The unemployed population is a vulnerable population. Indeed, it has a higher prevalence of certain diseases such as depression, anxiety and somatization (Kessler et al. 1988). Using an activity associated with leisure in this context can therefore question the underlying ethical issues. Indeed, even under the pretext of the activity being a game, ethical issues are not suspended (Martin & Lhuillier, 2016). However, the use of gaming risks reducing the ethical sense of professionals, in an action that then becomes strictly instrumental in the service of various institutional objectives and to the disadvantage of the beneficiaries. We will refer to the four ethical principles introduced by Beauchamp and Childress (2009) and Ebbesen, Andersen and Pedersen (2012): respect for autonomy, beneficence, non-maleficence, and justice.

Domenget (2012) describes the Twitter micro-blogging service as a platform organized around two axes: "activity and visibility", which are in line with the logic of a media focused on interest and content publication. Analysing the content broadcast on Twitter about the activities studied can help us better understand the perception of an activity by people who choose to express themselves about these processes. Voirol (2005), by analysing the processes by which individuals make themselves visible and recognize each other in order to carry out public deliberation, distinguishes four aspects of the visibility of the activity: formal, practical, mediatized and social. Mediatized and social visibility is the one that best reflects the social forms resulting from interactions between individuals via and on social networks. Individuals do not passively suffer the moral suffering that anyone can experience in front of reprehensible acts. Collective defence strategies (Dejours, 1980) emerge within a social group to fight against a danger and a real risk if this suffering is not transformed by imagination, creativity and sublimation. Web users search, interact, and share information on social networks on a mix of topics including work (Ehrlich and Shami, 2010). Their motivations are

diversified and include communication, friendship maintenance, job seeking or self-presentation (Lampe et al., 2006 ; Joinson, 2008).

Henriot (1989) explains that the playful attitude is the one adopted by the individual who participates in what is commonly called playing. The player enters the "magic circle", in a space and a temporality specific to the game (Huizinga, 1952). Players cross this invisible boundary between the real world and the game world making an implicit contract, with the "game master", that guarantees their protection against potential consequences. It is therefore important, for ethical reasons, that players are effectively protected from potential consequences (Taly, 2019). We question here the respect of the magic circle (and the influence of potential non-compliance) revealed by the controversies via and on Twitter.

We identified a project that reveals the influence of television and media. Then we analyzed the conversations and exchanges from the first media article published about this project. An analysis of the number of messages produced as well as a semantic analysis of the comments allows us to highlight the reactions generated by this article, including a strong expression of negative comments. The resonances of this article open up avenues for reflection.

3 METHOD

3.1 Subject selection

The Streetpress article entitled "X organizes recruitments inspired by The Voice: a "humiliating" system for the unemployed" highlighted a practice and was picked up by many media including national and regional newspapers. Among the published derivative articles that we were able to identify, five took up the subject with a neutral eye. Three of these articles were entitled: ""Be the best candidate": at X, interviews based on "The Voice"", "Recruitment: X is inspired by "The Voice"" and ""The job", X in the age of reality TV". But ten of the derivative headlines had a negative focus. Four of these articles were entitled: "X is

inspired by "The Voice" for its recruitment... and it doesn't make the unemployed laugh", "Recruitment based on "The Voice": an initiative of X considered to be humiliating.", ""Humiliating", "infantilizing"... X's "The Voice" recruitment sessions are controversial" and "Job search is not a game".

To anonymize, we will not mention the name of the relevant job search agency called here "Job Search Agencies X". This agency has set up an activity, inspired by "The voice", called "This is the job". This article is based on data collected in a French-speaking environment.

3.2 Data collected

Press publications began on 18 October 2018, with an article on the Streetpress information website, paper entitled: "Job Search Agency X organises recruitments inspired by The Voice: a "humiliating" program for the unemployed". We evaluated the sharing of the article via the Facebook network, according to Webrankinfo.com. We interviewed the Followthehashtag service to identify communications and comments on Twitter about "This is the Job". We have followed the terms "The Voice" and the name of the Job Search Agency X.

On December 19 2018 we looked for conversations on twitter about the initial streetpress article. With the advanced search tool from twitter we identified the tweets pointing to the article and selected those which generated conversation, excluding simple retweets. We collected all of the 206 comments referring to the streetpress article published on Dimagou, on Press briefs and on Streetpress from November 4 to December 19, 2018 for our semantic analysis data.

We used the semantic analysis developed in the TROPES software (version 7). For the processing of our Twitter data, we have chosen to use the ontology of emotions from the EMOTAIX scenario (Piolat, 2009), inspired by the work of Pennebaker, Francis and Booth (2001). EMOTAIX's ontology and automated processing approach classifies the different

nouns, adjectives and expressions into hierarchical categories of concepts designating feelings, emotions and affects.

The analysis gives us quantitative indications of the number of occurrences classified into major categories of emotions, structured in a hierarchical organization: 9 super-categories, themselves grouped into 3 supra-categories: Maliciousness, Unhappiness, Anxiety in contrast with Kindness, Well-being, Cold blood. The EMOTAIX lexicon does not provide categorization to express the intensity of emotions.

4 RESULTS

4.1 Evaluation of level of engagement within social networks

The article on the Streetpress information website about "This is the job" has been shared nearly 59,000 times on the Facebook social network, according to Webrankinfo.com, as of December 13, 2018. This article was selected in the site's summer selection as one of the most successful articles for this site.

The Follow the hashtag service from November 4 to December 11, 2018 provided us information to identify communications and comments on Twitter about "This is the Job". During this period, 37 Twitter messages were sent and viewed by 46,525 people, with a peak of people reaching on November 12, 2018. Among the Twitter accounts analyzed, we found links to this list of press titles on the subject: Capital ;Streetpress (two publications) ; Werf& (Netherlands human resources information site) ; Practices ; Affordance (Blog of an information-communication researcher) ; Talent Blog (LinkedIn Blog) ; Mncp (the website of the national movement of unemployed and precarious workers) ; Cnews and Ge-RH.

On December 19, 2018, we collected three sets of conversations on Twitter about the Streetpress article, on three accounts: Dimagou (142 comments); Press briefs (56 comments)

and Streetpress (8 comments) which corresponds to 206 comments. We use all those comments for our semantic analysis data.

On January 16, 2019, in order to see the dynamic evolution of the comment flow one month after collecting our data, we have carried out a final consultation, and found 472 messages (without comments). We have observed that the publications of generalist media, all of which have Twitter accounts, generate little or no conversation when they have published articles on "This is the Job". It is mainly the individual accounts of service users that meet the most interest.

4.2 Semantic analysis of data

4.2.1 Mainly negative reactions

The EMOTAIX scenario applied to this corpus of 206 comments informs us about major emotional categories and also shows the use of the figurative sense, often carrying irony and sarcasm. We observe the following breakdown: Unspecified emotions 16, Negative emotions 120, positive emotions 48, surprise 4, composure 1. The negative words therefore account for the vast majority of the interventions, while the positive part consists mainly of expressions of humour, irony and support for the interventions of the other contributors. For example, "Let's go have fun with the unemployed" is classified as positive because it contains "funny". The occurrence of negative emotions can be described as follows: Anxiety 8, Unhappiness 93 and Maliciousness, 19.

4.2.2 Analysis of the supra-category "Unhappiness ", expressing humiliation and confusion.

The most frequent category corresponds to humiliation's expressions which include 46 of the 48 occurrences of Frustrations. The forms of intervention falling within the scope of

"humiliation" are mainly in the literal sense, they are divided into "Shame, Humiliation in the strict sense, Ignominy, Irrespect" (Figure 1).

Figure 1 : Semantic clouds generated with the Wordle.net service for EMOTAIX lexicon categories located on the axis representation "Frustration - Satisfaction".

Examples of verbatims on "humiliation": "Yes, it's always effective to humiliate people, it's well known"; "It's outrageous to humiliate job seekers like this."

Examples of verbatim on the "Shame": "The shame of our administration how can they allow this?" "What a shame, the organizers and employers involved in this denigration deserve a: *[swear words]*" "I'd pay to see that[me] too. But, more seriously, it would really be worth spreading this kind of story and embarrassing them a little."

4.2.3 Analysis of the "Trouble" category

The "Trouble" category weighs for "**Unhappiness**" with 17 occurrences, it concerns the "Disturbance" entries with 17 occurrences, Instability, Loss. The most frequent words are: (Turn around, Weird, Problem, Scandal, Access, Shock). "Scandal" is present 6 times in the corpus.

Examples of verbatim: "Give me the names of these companies so I can boycott them!"; "When precariousness becomes a source of amusement, scandalous!"; "It is not the advisors who are the problem but the hierarchy of X".

4.2.4 Analysis of the supra-category "Maliciousness", the expression of indignation

Maliciousness (19 occurrences) brings together the interventions of Aggressiveness, including Anger and of "Hatred" (Irritation, Contempt, Resentment) (Figure 2). Anger and hatred are noticeably targeted against the few participants in the conversation who do not denounce the system, against high public officials and against what Agencies X represents.

Figure 2 : Semantic clouds generated with the Wordle.net service for EMOTAIX lexicon categories located on the axis representation "Hate - Kindness".

4.3 Analysis of the arguments

4.3.1 About the speech on Pragmatism

The pragmatic point of view, which states that "the end justifies the means", is present among the interventions, but it is rare and often ambivalent. In addition, the situation of the game is perceived as not pragmatic, as it does not give the results that would justify that the beneficiaries have to override their initial conceptions.

Examples of verbatim: "The only effective method to reduce unemployment is... to create jobs, not to humiliate people who are struggling"; "Is the method effective for job seekers. Remember, that's the main thing"; "The principle is acceptable on a television channel in front of the whole of France? But the educational and motivating system behind it is not allowed for a job seeker? »

4.3.2 Opposition between play and work

The opposition in the social imagination, between play and work, emerges in several messages: "When precariousness becomes a source of amusement, it is scandalous"; "It is the circus games, it is totally degrading"; "Well, yeah, the most important thing is access to employment, of course! And as a bonus, the dead gladiator makes one less unemployed!"; "Looking for work is not a game for the unemployed"; "The weakest people have become toys for the most powerful"; "But it's not entertainment if the person has to live, feed, take care of their children", "The weakest people have become toys for the most powerful... [not] happy to humiliate them, underpay them, weaken them... Next step: playing with the bodies of employees like the cat playing with the mouse?".

4.3.3 Class struggle

We find reactions on the opposition between those at the top and those at the bottom with regard to political speeches:

Examples of verbatim: "Welcome to the France of Y...*[swear words]*"; "We are regressing to the time of slavery Mr Y"; "How to reduce unemployment under the reign of his majesty Y and his astonished supporters. Thank you"; "I thought you just had to cross the road to find a job (Addressed to Y)"; "if you can recruit deputies like The Voice, why not us? Pitiful in both cases".

5. DISCUSSION

This paper does not follow a direct observation of the "This is the job" activity, but the resonance that an article on this activity has encountered both in traditional media and social networks has attracted our attention. Indeed, this article was relayed by about fifteen traditional media, met a high engagement rate compared to other streetpress articles and was

one of the most successful articles of the year. We noted the predominantly negative nature of both the titles containing the information and the comments following its publication. The initial article conveying a negative message may have fostered this negative dynamic¹, but the extent of the propagation of the message led us to reflect on the potential reasons for this resonance. Analysis of twitter conversations can allow to detect tension through sentiment analysis². Our data suggest that the analysis of the emotional register in a twitter conversation might similarly inform on the existence of ethics issues.

5.1 Breaking the magic circle?

We have identified other initiatives that have been publicized, with little reaction and even positive reactions to some of them. It is therefore likely that it is the "This is the job" system itself that raises specific issues. "This is the Job" has the characteristic of mixing "play" and work. Many verbatim underline the indignation at this mixture of genres. It therefore seems plausible that it is the failure to respect the magic circle that is at the root of the massive rejection of this experience.

Collective reactions of anger and indignation often take the form of hyperbole and humorous reference in the statements analyzed. What could be a collective defence strategy against ethical conflicts (Martin & Lhuillier, 2016), and would also make it possible to understand the sarcastic and ironic tone that would overcome anxiety in order to de-dramatize this situation and approach it in a different way. Laughter and its astonishment make it possible to separate oneself from the activity, to "play with it", to overcome its vital conflicts in order to "take control" of the situation, which could also turn against the subject himself (Werthe, 2001).

¹ Nigmatullina, K., & Bodrunova, S. S. (2018, October). Patterns of emotional argumentation in Twitter discussions. In *International Conference on Internet Science* (pp. 72-79). Springer, Cham.

² Burnap, P., Rana, O. F., Avis, N., Williams, M., Housley, W., Edwards, A., ... & Sloan, L. (2015). Detecting tension in online communities with computational Twitter analysis. *Technological Forecasting and Social Change*, 95, 96-108.

Twitter would thus become a space conducive to "public" deliberation and an indirect reflection of situations presenting real ethical issues.

5.2 Group Effects and Collective Defense Strategy

5.2.1 Anger: an emotion shared collectively

From these conversations, there is strong support for the editorial line of the StreetPress article. The phenomenon known as "Viral" by communication specialists is described from our point of view as "Groupal". Indeed, it could be considered viral because emotions expression is known to diffuse via social networks³, and to favor message diffusion⁴. However, the analysis of the emotions show a predominance of the expression of humiliation for a situation that the people have not lived themselves and therefore demonstrate empathy, i.e. interactions constitutive of a group. People who express themselves on Twitter, and who we assume have a "mirror" relationship with the social position of job seekers, are caught in ethical suffering, which can be described with Butler (2004) as "Ethical Violence". This ethical suffering, which raises the question of the use of a form of gamification, would make a social and political movement visible (Voirol, 2005).

5.2.2 Communication on social networks as a way to release of ethical tension.

According to Parisier (2011), a "filter bubble" could be created, in which internet users interact with similar people. This phenomenon has become common on social networks, and

³ Kramer, A. D., Guillory, J. E., & Hancock, J. T. (2014). Experimental evidence of massive-scale emotional contagion through social networks. *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*, 111(24), 8788-8790.

Chong, M. (2016). Sentiment analysis and topic extraction of the twitter network of# prayforparis. *Proceedings of the Association for Information Science and Technology*, 53(1), 1-4.

⁴ Brady, W. J., Wills, J. A., Jost, J. T., Tucker, J. A., & Van Bavel, J. J. (2017). Emotion shapes the diffusion of moralized content in social networks. *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*, 114(28), 7313-7318.

there are very separate communities on Twitter (Smith, 2014). We did not take into account the network structure between individuals participating in the observed conversations. However, the network structure is known to influence the diffusion of tweets⁵, as well the tone of following tweets⁶.

Hochschild (2003, 2017) refers to an "emotional work" allowing professionals to adapt and regulate their emotions in order to make them "appropriate" to the situation and context. Emotional work is most harmful to health when the emotions prescribed at work do not accurately represent the person's experience and feelings (Hochschild, 2003). Moreover Zapf (2002) argues that social support prevents dissonance. This support can reduce perceived tensions. This may be the desired effect on social networks. Job seekers do not have colleagues to talk to and their situation can be difficult to discuss within the family circle. For readers of the articles, as the subject is controversial, choosing social networks and possible anonymity could be a good way to express themselves. Indeed, Twitter can help isolated individuals to find support⁷.

6. CONCLUSION

In this article on the use of gamification in the field of professional insertion, the professional ethics to be followed by designers of training through serious games is questioned. How and why an action like "This is the Job" meets with controversy? The use of gamification as an innovative selection process, which is currently very much encouraged, needs to be studied and analysed to better understand their ethical issues and their impact on job seekers.

⁵ Mønsted, B., Sapieżyński, P., Ferrara, E., & Lehmann, S. (2017). Evidence of complex contagion of information in social media: An experiment using Twitter bots. *PloS one*, 12(9), e0184148.

⁶ Ferrara, E., & Yang, Z. (2015). Measuring emotional contagion in social media. *PloS one*, 10(11), e0142390.

+ Chong 2016

⁷ Cole, D. A., Nick, E. A., Varga, G., Smith, D., Zelkowitz, R. L., Ford, M. A., & Lédeczi, Á. (2019). Are aspects of Twitter use associated with reduced depressive symptoms? The moderating role of in-person social support. *Cyberpsychology, Behavior, and Social Networking*, 22(11), 692-699.

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