



## **Book Review**

***Alexandru-Brăduț Ulmanu:***  
***Cartea fețelor (The Book of Faces)***  
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We have entered the era of social media. This pronouncement might seem far-fetched for some, though it is common for communication theorists to link new communication technologies and methods to era turnouts. The basic assumption of most related theories is that the methods and habits of communications define our basic social constructions. Alexandru-Brăduț Ulmanu also refers to a revolutionary change in the subtitle of his work: “Facebook”. The phrasing: “Facebook revolution in the social medium” points to the fact that the appearance of Facebook and other community websites have radically changed and keep shaping important sections of social life.

Ulmanu’s aim was a scientifically acknowledgeable, but primarily entertaining book about the Facebook revolution. In his words, his book is neither an academic work, nor a textbook. (p. 23.). The inspiration for the book was the amazing story unfolding by the appearance of Facebook and other social sites which the writer tries to document and present through examples, persons, happenings. This design shows in the buildup of the book and the presentation of topics. Ulmanu’s book is not a dry, theoretical commentary about social media though clarification of concepts and theoretical approach of propositions is also present. It is more important to him to present the appearance and life-shaping effect of social media in its event-like existence. For this reason the answers to controversies and questions held important by him are often presented through

interesting stories, his references frequently use newspaper, TV-show quotations, and examples. Since most of the stories presented are of Romanian quotidian and public life, we get a kind of a sample of how social media affects Romanian society. This style fits best for Ulmanu who is a practicing journalist also teaching journalism at the Bucharest College and is an international trainer in different programs set up for journalists.

The book comprises three parts. The first presents the history, features and mechanisms of social media, the second discusses the questions of effect and relation, while the third part analyses the actual reshaping ability of social media.

The traits of social media can be defined by its differences to mass media. These differences bring Ulmanu to separate the era of mass media and that of social media. Ulmanu adopts A.M. Kaplan's and M Haenlein's definition and discernments regarding social media. According to this the basic difference between the two types of media is that while mass media is actuated by professional journalists who have limited space to post information selected by its newsworthiness, social media has unlimited space filled by the users themselves (user generated content) according to their own interests. The most important fulfillments of social media are collaboration-claiming projects, blogs, content-generating communities, networks of online socializing, virtual worlds and virtual communities.

The book presents in detail how Facebook came to be using the vast number of pertinent writings. By Ulmanu's reconstruction we witness a success-story which started as an altruistic movement. This success story has already been retold in a novel and a movie. The Internet is full of avant-garde initiatives which were still able to effect radical changes. In the author's opinion, the Facebook story is one of these.

The success of Facebook is not due to coincidental initiative. One of the most interesting chapters in Ulmanu's book is the one explaining this success with the concepts of neurobiology. The hypothesis of the social brain explains that in order for the species to survive the brain mobilizes significant amount of energy to recognize others' emotions and likenesses (resemblances). The brain automatically responds to these signs sent by others. The Facebook, which could be regarded as the interactive network of our social connections, relies on this feature of our brain. The most important outcome of the Facebook revolution is that it has changed the nature of the internet which has started to become a network of human connections instead of just a network of computers.

The existence of Facebook makes us rethink some of our basic concepts we use to describe social collaborations. The book analyses the concepts of virtual-real and that of friendship, these being the notions applicable to the Facebook nexus. This nexus does resemble the real-life acquaintance relation-system but it is also different from it. Reading Ulmanu's examples and its explanations, the different

characters of relations is conspicuous, as well as the permeability of the virtual-real, friend and not-friend borders. The existence in the nexus realizes its own inherent laws. The most important among these is that we shape the network, the number and density of relations and our own place within the network. The effect of this is that the network shapes us too, its effect depending on our position within the network. Social networks have emergent features which cannot be deduced from the features of its components. The community actions initiated on Facebook frequently surpass their initial goal which proves the previous statement.

The third part of the book analyses those successful mechanisms that were generated by social media in different areas of social life. Highlighted areas referred to by Ulmanu are economics, politics and journalism. The book naturally also refers to the Egyptian uprising in which Facebook relations had a great organizing part. New communication platforms ease interactions that otherwise would need great organizing and coordinating effort. Even so, motivation and timeliness are two factors that are also needed for the Facebook initiated actions to happen. It is also important that the posted messages to be consequent and honest as well as the recipient parties to be adequately chosen.

One of the most important effects of social media is that it increases the power of the consumer/customer who can exercise a better control over the services offered. One's reactions and opinions quickly travel through the network igniting similar reactions. Different companies quickly realized the possibilities of this and do count on it frequently operating their own social network as well as it is also rewarding for politicians to appear on social media pages.

Ulmanu's book is characterized by a certain kind of technological optimism which is mainly driven by a belief in the user and it emanates the author's commitment to social media. Though some negative effects are highlighted, the final conclusion is quite clear: in the complex nexus of social life social media makes the individual more important. This effect, though still a novelty and blurry, is nonetheless creditable. Ulmanu analyses in depth the questions relating to this transition from mass media to social media. His examples are enlightening and interesting though it does happen that, from time to time, he makes assumptions based on singular, sensational cases. Ultimately the book is what the author intended it to be: a documentary on an interesting phenomenon.