Digital Culture and Visual Studies: Nostalgia and Dreaming After COVID-19 Event in Iran

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Abstract

The event of the epidemic of Covid-19 had a massive shock to the borders of the order of Iranian everyday life. The emergence of death and disease from the Covid-19 put Iran in an exception state. Universities and schools were shut down and people went to lockdown. Also, the event of the epidemic of Covid-19 led to other events such as quarantine and it caused economic, mental, and family crises. The crucial event of the epidemic of Covid-19 was coincident with the traditional ceremony of Iranian New Year accompanied by shopping, traveling, and visiting families. But all of them were destroyed. By shutting down the city and the necessity of not coming together, digital geography was the most important space for retrieval of relationships and people could share their emotions of fear and anxiety and they make an emotional connection. Thus, one of the most important emotions which were shared in virtual social networks included nostalgia about the time before the epidemic of Covid-19 in Iran and dreaming the coming future. Then by applying a multidisciplinary approach through digital cultural studies and visual studies, the main object of the article is to analyze how emotions of nostalgia and dreaming of Iranian people were expressed on Instagram and Facebook. Consequently, remembering the city as a lost secure home and thinking of a vague future as dreaming indicates of getting stuck in the present time of the field of the event.

Keywords: COVID-19, event, digital geography, nostalgia, quarantine, Instagram

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INTRODUCTION

In Iran, on February 19th, the breaking news of the epidemic of COVID-19 came as a bombshell. As Iranian people are under the strictest international sanctions, the epidemic of COVID-19 shattered the economy. Besides, the time of the epidemic coincidence with the cultural time of being prepared for Iranian New Year called *Norouze*. Then economic and cultural dimensions of the epidemic were too devastating. For controlling the red situation, the government suggested the necessity of quarantine, although government did not announce the quarantine as an emergency law. Economic stress and trapped in voluntarily quarantine and worrying about catching the virus ended in emotional expressions and sharing them in social networks like Instagram and Facebook.

PURPOSE

The object of this article is to study the states of expression of emotions about the nostalgia for the pre-epidemic days and dream of the post-epidemic era.

METHODOLOGY

It is a digital cultural study about the structure of feelings in a field of an unexpected event such as the epidemic of COVID-19. Teti el al. (2020, 2) Explain how the qualitative method in social events like the epidemic of COVID-19 is a proper way to comprehend a variety of different categories and variables constitute the event. Event is a field with lines of flight and collapses of the structure of ordinary space-time. While the event ruptures the ordinary lifestyle, the states of expression of emotions expand. In digital culture, social networks are a common space to express and share ideas and emotions. Photos, texts, or video clips are types of digital narratives.

For this article, Instagram and Facebook are two fields of study. Facebook, in Iran is filtered and recently Facebook's popularity has been declined. On the contrary, Instagram is not filtered and it is very popular among Iranian people. Through these social networks, we selected the posts which conveyed the feel of nostalgia and the signs of dreaming about the features of post-Corona virus era. We found 40 posts, which most of them are from Instagram, and we applied the visual thematic analysis to analyze the types of expressions of nostalgia and dreaming.

Based on the types of expressions of the nostalgia of the pre-Corona virus time and the dreaming of the post-Corona virus era, we created different opening codes but without reducing them to the axial codes. The fields of opening codes and reading them again make a strategy to write the analyzing narratives trough which

codes perform their potential to generate concepts and transforms the narratives to the performativity of the other code. This is a rhizomatic analysis.

RESULTS

Field of the event is a process of rupturing the ordinary linear causality of space-time and chronological movement of everyday life affairs. Getting people thrown in a field of chaos makes them struck by the ideas of a vague situation that is coming. Future of the crisis of the epidemic of the COVID-19 is not transparent and exact; hence the dreaming is the possible way of thinking of the vague future. Iranian people under the pressure of the international sanctions have not had a reliable view about the future and the chaos of the epidemic has fueled the disaster of an insufficient secure future.

Also, remembering and referring to the ordinary lifestyle of the pre-epidemic days have made the nostalgia and emotions of good lost days. Most of the Iranian people shared photos or videos of their traveling, hanging out with friends, even personal calm moments and write some nostalgic captions about them. The melancholia state of calling the past for Iranian people is a singular moment while the future is full of ambiguity in the ability of the government to manage the epidemic integrated by the crisis of the international sanctions and threats.

DISCUSSION

Event as a field is a moment for the rupture of the borders of the order and releasing of the forces form the chain of ordinary life so as to turn it into a state of exception. Features of events are crisis and the void of orders (Badiou, 2005, 289) which results in a liminal space-time between the before and after the event. The liminal space-time is the darkness of becoming in which there is not any secure sense of life as it used to and any pure sense of what life is going around. The field of the event is a revolutionary transition from the past to the future out of the ordinary phase.

Epidemic of COVID-19 was an event that ruptured Iranian ordinary life. It puts Iranian people under the pressure of a singular situation, in which the pressure was absolute, plus the international sanctions and threats, catastrophic economy, and the weakened government for managing the crisis the epidemic. Then Iranian people expressed their emotions of insecurity and uncertainty in the digital geography of Instagram and Facebook.

Sharing ideas and emotions of nostalgia of being in safe streets and city and continuing an ordinary life transformed the Iranian city as a lost home. Having missed the safe city as a lost home, the home for people in quarantine became a strange space for a long continuing stay. The epidemic disclosed the face of the city

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as a home and home as a strange place in the long time. Moreover, the imagination of the returning to the city as a lost home when everyone is safe and feeling the secure space-time in the city were the other types of shared photographs and images. These images were from the pre-epidemic city as an ideal image for the post-epidemic Iranian city (figure 1).

Figure 1. A photo of the city of Shiraz, in 2017, as an ideal space-time for walking again in the post-epidemic days

Figure 2. A nostalgic photo of gathering of Iranian people for the Iranian New Year (*Norouz*) in the streets when there were safe

CONCLUSION

A society under constant economic and political pressure is nostalgic about the past since the future is not secure anymore. The permanent-liminal-mind is the result of a nostalgic culture that the secure future is just an unrealized promise. For Iranian people, the rupture of the ordinary life, by the epidemic, intensified the Iranian permanent-liminal-mind to express and share the nostalgia of the pre-epidemic days and dreaming about the post-epidemic future. As these expressions were performed in digital geography, we call it the digitalized permanent-liminal-mind.

NOVELTY

The limitation of this article is about surfing the social networks while most of the pages are private. However, the theoretical implication of the article is the creation

some concepts to comprehend the Iranian field of the Corona virus epidemic event. Moreover, this study shows how Iranian culture encounters a crisis in a state of the national obsession with the nostalgia of the past and dreaming of a secure future while there is a historical lack of official expert strategies for dealing with social events.
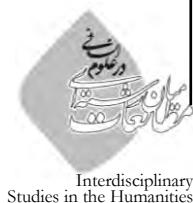
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فرهنگ دیجیتال و مطالعات بصری: نوستالژی و خیال‌بافی در رخداد شیوع ویروس کرونا در ایران

حامد طاهری‌کیا[1]

چکیده

شیوع ویروس کرونا با شدت هرچه تمام‌تر به مرزهای نظم زندگی روزمره ایرانی شوک ایجاد کرد. مرگ و بیماری حاصل از شیوع ابتلا به ویروس کرونا موجب شد تا در ایران وضعیت اضطراری ایجاد شود. مدارس و دانشگاه‌ها تعطیل شد و مردم باید در خانه قرنطینه می‌شدند. همچنین، شیوع ویروس کرونا به رخدادهای دیگری مانند قرنطینگی منجر شد و به‌دنبال آن بحران‌های اقتصادی، روحی، و خانوادگی نیز به‌وجود آمد. بزنگاه رخداد شیوع ویروس کرونا در ایران همزمان با مراسم سنتی خرید شب عید، مسافرت، و دیدوبازدیدهای نوروزی بود، درحالی‌که تمامی سنت روابطی ایام عید از هم فروپاشیده بود. با تعطیل‌شدن شهر، ضرورت عدم جمع‌شدن در کنار یکدیگر و ماندن در قرنطینه، فضای دیجیتال مهمترین ابزار ارتباطی مردم بود که به‌واسطهٔ شبکه‌های اجتماعی می‌توانستند احساسات خود ناشی از هراس و اضطراب پرتاب‌شدن به میدان رخداد را با یکدیگر در میان بگذارند و پیوند عاطفی ایجاد کنند. بنابراین، یکی از مهمترین احساساتی که در فضای مجازی به اشتراک گذاشته می‌شد احساس نوستالژی دربارهٔ زمان پیشاکرونا و خیال‌بافی پیرامون آینده بود. بر این اساس، با اتخاذ رویکردی میان‌رشته‌ای بین مطالعات فرهنگی دیجیتال و مطالعات بصری، هدف اصلی مقاله بررسی چگونگی خودبیان‌گری احساسات نوستالژی و خیال‌بافی کاربران ایرانی در شبکهٔ اجتماعی اینستاگرام و فیسبوک است. در نتیجه، یاد کردن شهر به‌مثابه خانهٔ امنی که از دست رفته است و فکر کردن دربارهٔ آیندهٔ مبهم و پیش‌رو در قالب خیال‌بافی نشان از گیر افتادن در میدان رخدادِ شیوع ویروس کرونا است.

کلیدواژه‌ها: ویروس کرونا، رخداد، جغرافیای دیجیتال، نوستالژی، اینستاگرام، قرنطینه

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