**SR 890 Research Project Prospectus**

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Daniel Kahneman’s *Thinking, fast and slow* (2011) concludes through his research experiments that human beings are *not* predisposed to making decisions utilizing logical, critical processes; challenging long-held views that people are first logical, then emotive. Instead, people toggle between two processing systems, one fast, and one slow. Fast thinking, according to Kahneman, is directly linked to emotion. Slow thinking, on the other hand, relates to rational reasoning. Visual stimulus, like a transmitted meme, directly interfaces with fast thinking processes, gaining adherence by attaching to “feelings” of agreement or disagreement, instead of logical critical reasonings. He notes that these two systems of operation often work independently from one another and may result in different outcomes if not somehow joined together.

The digital medium of algorithmic memetic influence creates virtual *Frankensteins*; an eccentric amalgamation of negatively influenced, emotive collective groupings, disconnected from organic relationship due to viral ghettoed, algorithmic barriers. The medium of visual, digital memetics is a negatively slanted, emotionally influenced spectacle. It appeals to the deeper “felt” and emotive impulses due to being image oriented instead of word based. The message produced by this medium is “join in ‘our’ perception of the distress and find comfort in the community of the disquieted.” The Gutenburg world of the written word produced a culture committed to thinking and cognition. The Googler world of visual stimulus gathers adherents more gutturally around emotive and experiential concerns. Interestingly, it is the Gutenburg world which produced the IQ (intelligence quotient) test. Of note, it is the emerging Googler world that produced the EQ (emotional quotient) test.

The solution cannot be to go back to the days of the written word. The visual meme, with its multiplex of meaning and ease of transmission, is here to stay, as it solves the problem inherent in the age of information overload. The good news is that we are not quite 20 years into the ubiquitous effects of this new technology. By comparison, it took until the 1800s for the literacy rates of the nations to break the 60% barrier and begin to catch up to the “new” technology of the printing press unleashed in the 1400s. We have arrived at another such time in history. Digital, visual, memetic literacy must become a primary focus.

In 2021 the *International Journal of Adolescence and Youth* published an article by M. Bajovic and K. Rizzo, *Meta-moral cognition: Bridging the gap among adolescent’s moral thinking, moral emotions and moral actions,* the researchers “propose a meta-moral cognition process as an active mediator of the cognition and emotions involved in moral decision making.” By combining perspectives from cognitive-development and social domain theory, the researchers look for a bridge between thinking and feelingtheorizing that both processes are needed to contribute to a healthy balance within the individual.

Critical reflection is a thought vaccine necessary to build up individual and cultural integrity, thus becoming immune to “react first, think later” clustering. Carter and Nicolaides’ 2023 *Transformative learning: An emotional revolution*, distinguishes the process of moving a participant through certain phases of reflection to arrive at critical reflection, which is the most non-biased of the phases; the most non-influenced. The authors specifically enhance the knowledge of “edge-emotions” toward a “comfort zone”, whereby new stages of reflection come more easily. The initial phase, the emotional phase, is termed as the “disorienting dilemma”, requiring a movement toward critical process to rectify the dilemma. They, too, are pursuing adaptive strategies to articulate and accelerate the transformative learning process.

A growing body of social research is being conducted to disperse the deluge of information generated in the digital arena. Research teams are fastidiously probing the negative and positive realms of this new medium of memes. The team of Gina Ugalingan, et al (2022) published their pilot study *The pedagogy of multiliteracy and multimodality through memes* proposing classroom activities utilizing memes to teach logical fallacies in argumentation. Their study reinforces the use of multiliteracies as an aid to growing as critical thinkers. They conclude, “memes generated by students are reflective of the multiliteracies employed in their conceptualization and execution and the interaction between multiliteracies and multimodalities is instrumental in teaching and promoting critical thinking” (Ugalingan, et al, 2022).

B. Zeinedine and C. W. Leach’s *Feeling and thought in collective action on social issues: Toward a systems perspective* (2021) introduces a helpful new literacy concept of a co-evolving “system of systems.” In matters of social issues, they advocate for recognizing the corresponding systems related to thought, feeling, motivation, action, and context that are immediately influencing the current social issue. It is a call for a multiliteracy approach in order to properly orient the relationship modes within society. This terminology, although tangential to memetics, provides a great descriptive for what a meme in culture represents; it is a visual adaptation of a system of systems multiplied together to communicate one overarching influencing agenda. Just as in math, a process for factoring out the component parts is necessary to properly sort the contents of a meme to better understand and reflect upon the various systems being showcased.

Matias (2020) suggests the possibility of integrating memes for the development of critical thinking skills necessary when learning a particular subject. The researcher suggests a meme-based learning method to assist in the cognitive development and competencies for a given subject. This idea is akin to the utilization of the newspaper political cartoon which often combined in a single image a visual representation of political affiliation, social standing, and personality quirks of the person being represented in the image. A reader who understands all three of these categories as it relates to the person in the image would thus “get” the cartoon. They simply had to have the multimodal literacy of each category in representation to follow along. Kayali and Altuntas (2021) similarly conclude that the utilization of memes in the classroom showed significant results in the vocabulary recall for medical students, and thus advocate for the increase of critical strategies and innovation of meme utilization in education.

It will be through multiliteracies and multimodal critical reflection that our digital visual society will find its way out of the algorithmic ghettos we have each unwittingly been placed into. The division of culture into enclaves of collective distress is systematic, not relational; Each placed into collective units by the influence of a negatively slanted medium. Yet, this “system of systems,” working by dispassionate algorithms, can be critically sorted. It must be sorted in hopes of reintegrating the proper community relationships of human beings living and acting in society alongside one another, properly gathered and appropriately influenced one to another, intellectually and emotively connected to the real world in which we must live and respond together.

I propose a local community project intended to decipher both individual and community truth architecture from the various fragments of scholastic, memetic, and knowledge bits within the mobile digital commons (i.e. people group) related to a “hot topic” of cultural or spiritual relevance. This project will attempt to measure the acceptability of truth statements pre and post community reflection sessions. It will also consider not only what individuals themselves “think,” but what those individuals think others think, based on Gruntterink and Meister’s 2022 work with meta-perceptions implication in affect, cognition, behavior, and relationships.

Each participant will be given a pre-test assessment of the current issue. The test will be a series of “think, feel, know” self-assessments with a 1 to 5 Likert scale ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree. Three question/statements will be within a “think” category, three from a “feel” category, and three from a “know” category. A parallel pre-assessment will be given with the same question/statements, only this assessment will be answered by the participants relating how each participant believes his/her community views each statement. This design is intended to account for Bou Zeineddine and Leach’s work in *Feeling and thought in collective action on social issues: Toward as Systems perspective* which draws attention to “systems meta-theory…to view our key concepts not as static, discrete, unitary variables, but as situated and synchronized assemblies of a host of lower-order components.” (Bou Zeineddine & Leach, 2021).

The “think, feel, know” pre and post-test assessment will be used as an indicator of a participant’s thought architecture based on the communication tools of think, feel, know, developed by Shirlaws Group. This project will make specific use of the framework to measure a participant’s movement within each category following community group facilitated discussions on the background, history, and pertinent facts relative to the cultural issue raised on the pre/post assessment. Each of these factors; how a person thinks about an issue, feels about an issue, and facts known about an issue, is understood to be initially formed by multivarious inputs from interpersonal conversations and/or observations, and likely, heavily influenced by the digital and continuous news and social media cycles. The “think, feel, know” markers will be relied upon to assist the detection of current truth markers within the participants and, subsequently, the communities, in which they live.

Carter and Nicolaides (2023) explored the process of moving a participant through certain phases of reflection to arrive at critical reflection, which is the most non-biased of each phase. The authors specifically enhance the knowledge of “edge-emotions” toward a “comfort zone”, whereby new stages of reflection come more easily. This project will be an attempt to measure this type of critical reflection movement, resulting in a personal and community movement towards truth. The post assessment, using the same frame and question/comments will be given following group exposure and facilitated reflection. Each participant’s Likert scores will be assessed to consolidate any trends of movement.

 Assuming that truth markers can be improved through facilitated small group discussions of relevant facts, histories, and background of particular issues, further development of this process would need to be done to more precisely measure truthful critical reflection. Ron Dreher issues a sobering reminder in the fight to keep truth an ever-flowing fountain:

How did people keep hold of reality under communist conditions? How do they know not only what to remember but how to remember it? The answer was to create distinct small communities—especially families and religious fellowships—in which it was possible both to speak truthfully and to embody truth.” (Dreher, 2020)

In this way, truth can be architected to ensure freedom for present and future communities.

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