

# The Use of Facebook in the Construction of Social Cohesion in Côte d'Ivoire: The Case of the "Tournoi des natifs" forum

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**Abstract:** *This case study focuses on the use of Facebook in the construction of social cohesion in Côte d'Ivoire. It aims to analyse how, based on a singular and significant criterion based on the month of birth, the Facebook group called "Tournoi Des Natifs" (Tournament of the Natives) contributes to the construction of social cohesion and togetherness in a Côte d'Ivoire in crisis. In line with the theory of public space, the data collection techniques used are documentary study and interview. The work focuses on the logic of actions developed by this platform in the construction of sociability.*

**Keywords:** Facebook, social cohesion, Tournoi Des Natifs, Côte d'Ivoire

## 1. Introduction

Facebook has become the most widespread social network in the world over the last few years. This social network promotes interaction and the production of information of all kinds and has become the medium of "social life", according to D. Cardon (2013). Thanks to its numerous functionalities, namely the sharing of texts, comments or recommendations, broadcasting of photos and videos (S. Proulx, M. Milette, L. Heaton, 2012) and the "mosaic of uses" (I. Bastard, D. Cardon and R. Charbeyet, 2017) that it offers, it is used for various purposes (political, economic, social, cultural), which gives rise to the constitution of "public microspheres" allowing citizen users to take part in debates (S. Proulx, 2013).

In Côte d'Ivoire, as in most other countries, Facebook is experiencing a massive popularity among the population compared to traditional media. Ivorian Internet users are increasingly using this platform to communicate, interact and, above all, publicise their activities, or in other words, to make them visible. This is the example of the virtual space called "Tournoi Des Natifs" (TDN) which, from its page, encourages social cohesion and living together in Côte d'Ivoire.

Côte d'Ivoire, like other countries in the sub-region, has experienced numerous crises (coup d'état in 1999, armed rebellion in 2002, post-election crisis and civil war in 2011). These various conflicts led to violence, destruction of property, intolerance, hatred and loss of life. At the end of the 2011 civil war and after the establishment of the third republic, one observation remains: the process of national reconciliation has not really moved forward and political conflicts have still not been overcome. In other words, reconciliation, which should lead to social cohesion and living together, is encountering obstacles. Actions to reconcile Ivorians have been initiated and carried out to this end in the various localities of the country in order to encourage the population to live together peacefully.

However, despite the Ivorian government's insistence on the need to build peace between citizens, social cohesion, an essential factor in resilience, remains problematic and crises persist. For example, the presidential election of October 30, 2020 was marked by a tense socio-political climate and violence before, during and after the election. Therefore, preserving the country from another war becomes a challenge to be taken up by the government, politicians, civil society and the population as a whole. This implies the construction of an Ivorian society that transcends ethnic, religious and other divisions. Subsequently, this need to build the country made up of a prosaic of ethnicities, various political, religious, cultural opinions, is of interest to non-governmental organisations and citizens. They promote living together and social cohesion through traditional media and digital social networks, especially Facebook. This is the case of the platform called Tournoi Des Natifs (TDN), the subject of this study.

This group has built a fame on Facebook by encouraging the rapprochement of populations based on a unique and significant criterion: the month of birth. As a virtual public space, the TDN multiplies collective meetings in the material public space. The appropriation of Facebook by the initiator of the TDN deserves to be examined in order to analyse how it contributes to the construction of sociability and creates a new civic action. In other words, how does the Tournoi Des Natifs build social cohesion in order to bring together Ivorians of all backgrounds? How are social links that transcend political, ethnic, religious and cultural barriers built? How does the TDN convey human values? What is its impact on Internet users? To what extent does this form of expression participate in social transformation?

These questions justify the working hypothesis according to which the contribution of the TDN platform in the promotion of peace and social cohesion is determined by the recurrent socio-political and community crises faced by the citizens of this country. Thus, this research, which is a case study, seeks to describe and analyse the contribution of the TDN platform in the construction of ethical, social and

cultural values that should contribute to relational dynamics in Côte d'Ivoire.

## 2. Materials and method

This study draws on J. Habermas' (1962) theory of public space. According to P. N'da (2017, p.135), public space refers to "the place accessible to all citizens, the place where a public assembles to formulate a public opinion, the place where the discursive exchange of reasonable positions on problems of interest allows for the emergence of a public opinion." In other words, public space is a place, physical or symbolic of free expression where a "group of private persons gathered to discuss issues of common interest" as M. Lits (2014, p.77) points out. This theory aims to demonstrate in this research, what is done by the TDN digital platform in the public space. It is about describing the construction of sociability, that is to say the way in which links are created or the way in which members establish and maintain relationships with each other and the gain they get from it.

Let us recall with M. Forsé and M. Parodi (2009, p.9) that social cohesion "designates, among other things, forms of citizen and social participation as well as shared values, the absence of exclusion, the reduction of inequalities, etc., and even social policies. [. . .] With the idea of social cohesion, we strive to hold together freedom, equality and fraternity."

From a methodological point of view, the research was based on two data collection tools: a documentary study and an interview. The documentary study focused on a set of publications dealing with the activities and actions of the TDN. It consists of a corpus of 20 publications (videos, photos, sounds and texts) available mainly on the Internet<sup>1</sup>. This work also uses data from semi-directive interviews conducted during the "TDN en fête", on Saturday, May 15, 2021 at the Agora space in Koumassi<sup>2</sup>. These semi-directive interviews help bring out the feelings of belonging experienced within the group on the one hand, and reveal the values encouraged and conveyed by the TDN on the other hand. The survey covered 25 people, including the founder of the TDN concept and 24 "natives", with two people per year of birth. There are as many men as women from various socio-professional, cultural, political and religious backgrounds.

The data collected was submitted to a lexico-thematic and semiological content analysis. The data from the interviews were organised in order to identify the elements of meaning contained in the various statements made by translating the points of view expressed, identifying the themes addressed and categorizing them in order to determine their overall meaning and scope. All the analyses led to the results below.

<sup>1</sup><https://www.facebook.com/watch/?v=275873413927591>, <https://www.fratmat.info-edition-du-tournoi-des-natifs--les-natifs-de-septembre-celebres-au-stade-de-luniversite-fhb>, <https://www.rti.ci/rti1/series/player/c7852780-af30-11ea-ae3f-933be9bfa544/5dd4c7a0-6a3b-11eb-886b-4fb37a8db6a3>.

<sup>2</sup>Koumassi is one of the ten municipalities of Abidjan, the economic capital city of Côte d'Ivoire.

## 3. Results

### 3.1 Presentation of the "Tournoi des Natifs" (TDN) platform

The "Tournoi Des Natifs" (Tournament of Natives) as its name suggests, is a platform bringing together people born in the same month. It was created by Rakeem Traoré on February 16, 2019. The objective is to provide the Ivorian youth with sound entertainment around values such as solidarity, tolerance, respect for the other that found social cohesion and living together. This group is based on a single criterion, which is the month of birth, as explained by its founder: "I wanted a natural selection criterion that is not influenced by man directly (. . .) so I asked myself: why not group together people who have the same month of birth? That could create other types of links! Hence the Tournoi Des Natifs". By doing so, the Ivorian society would transcend crises, ethnic, political and other divisions. With approximately 168, 400 members to date, the particularity of this forum, explains its promoter, "is that it is made up of sub-groups called teams. They are composed of people born in the same month." Thus, the new member of the platform joins the members of his month of birth and becomes their "jujus" that is to say their twins. From there, sports, charity, social and cultural activities are carried out together. Thousands of subscribers exchange daily via the Facebook page and WhatsApp.

The TDN is managed by a board of directors composed of five members. As for the Facebook page, it is administered by ten people while the different teams are managed by leaders appointed by the board of directors. "In the TDN, each of us is asked to lead the group. There are people in charge of the teams who are often replaced" explains its promoter. Through this mode of operation, the initiator of the group wants to bring each native to experience responsibility by developing his leadership. In addition to the central organisation of the large TDN group, each team has its own internal organisation. The October team, for example, is experimenting with what Rakeem Traoré calls the senate (committee of wise men): "We give them this power to act, especially on the social aspect and to manage any conflicts that may arise." Moreover, given the large number of members in the teams (9, 000 members for those born in May), bubbles, that is to say, groupings of members by date of birth, are created within the month of birth in order to create more proximity.

Moreover, beyond the large TDN group and the twelve teams that refer to the month of birth, this concept has been deployed in the major regions of Côte d'Ivoire. Thus, there are the TDN Korhogo, Bouaké, San Pedro, Yamoussoukro, Gagnoa and Man. According to Rakeem Traoré, the installation of the platform in these localities of the country is meant to "bring the populations together, create social cohesion and why not launch TDN companies all over Côte d'Ivoire".

As an innovative concept, this private initiative originally intended for young people has now become essential in bringing people together. This apolitical forum is made up of people who come from various backgrounds, working in

various fields of activity and belonging to different social classes. There are young people, adults, men, women, political personalities, international stars of Ivorian football, civil administrators, artists, media men, merchants, etc. It is a real network of relationships in which the members perceive themselves as a large community, that is to say a large family that has taken root both in virtual and material space. They intensify their relationships through the materialisation of activities initiated in public spaces.

### 3.2 Sport as a factor of social cohesion

One of the characteristics developed by the TDN is the practice of sports. The founder of the "Tournoi Des Natifs" has made sport the privileged framework for "building social cohesion" as he reveals. The logo of his forum expresses it clearly (see image 1)

Image 1: Logo of the « Tournoi des Natifs »



Source: Facebook page of the TDN group

Image 1 is a photograph of the TDN logo. This logo presents some components that reveal for the most part the intentions of this platform. It is composed of a football in blue and white colours. The edge of the logotype is green, and blue is the dominant colour of its background. The name of the group "Tournoi Des Natifs" is written in white characters inside the blue background and it is crossed by a green band in which are inscribed the initials "TDN" in white characters too. The green and white colours are reminders of the Ivorian flag. According to Pastoureau and Simonnet (2007), white colour denotes purity, delicacy, unity and peace. Green, which recalls the abundance of green forests in the south of the country, is the colour of appeasement and also symbolizes hope. Synonymous with escape, blue evokes confidence, security and transparency. It is used to reassure. The use of these three colours conveys the vision of the initiator of the "Tournoi des Natifs" to contribute to social cohesion by promoting peace, unity, peaceful cohabitation, respect for others, and many other virtues.

In order to build this link and encourage the living together in Côte d'Ivoire, the initiator of the platform then organises quarterly sports tournaments in several disciplines such as

Maracaña<sup>3</sup>, handball, basketball, bocce, virtual boxing and fitness sessions. The different teams from the birth months present male and female teams in each discipline. The teams compete throughout the day. At the end of the tournament, the winners are rewarded. The implementation of this activity ensures the TDN a rapid expansion, especially on Facebook but also during physical meetings. As proof, between 20, 000 and 25, 000 participants of all generations and sharing the same birthday months take part in these gatherings. Moreover, this group finds support from corporate citizens who help it in the promotion of values such as brotherhood, union, harmony and thus contributes to the social development of the population.

Sport is also perceived by TDN members as a structuring mechanism of social ties, as evidenced by the words of this member of the May team: "*behind these competitions, human relationships are created because the practice of sport breaks down religious, ethnic and political barriers*". Another member of the December team, for his part, maintains "*there is no discrimination. You can heckle a teammate or a team member regardless of their titles. That's what sports brings to us natives.*" This opinion is shared by another member of May's team who says: "*When you come to play with your team, we don't ask about your ethnicity, your political party, your nationality, your skin colour or what you do (. . .) there are no barriers. I feel like a family.*" The members interviewed all testify that the sports activities organised by the TDN contribute to social cohesion by pushing back the distinction between social classes (P. Bourdieu, 1979) and by going beyond socio-political, ethnic, cultural and religious divisions. This is the point of view of the person in charge of the September natives: "*the TDN is a pool of cohesion. Cohesion extends to all social strata. We all know each other when we meet, whether for football tournaments or for giant eateries.*"

### 3.3 Building social links through socio-cultural actions

A second characteristic of the TDN is the construction of social cohesion through socio-cultural actions. The social link refers to the relationships that people have with each other. To achieve this, the founder of the TDN strongly encourages mutual aid, altruism and solidarity: "*once a month, the teams are obliged to carry out at least two social actions.*" Thus, in each team, there is a committee in charge of social actions and mutual aid. This committee organises its members to help people in difficulty or in need, both for those in their teams and those who are not. Generally, the actions are directed towards orphanages, maternity wards, the disabled and other social centres. Social actions are very popular among the teams. The leader of the November team shares the experience of his group: "*We did blood donation campaigns. We organise several non-profit activities; for example, for each birthday in November, we make donations in health centres.*" "*We try to give a little of ourselves to others,*" adds another leader. The leader of the December team agrees: "*The TDN is a social organisation. It is a real school of self-giving.*" Still in the same tone, a native of

<sup>3</sup>Maracaña or « petits poteaux » (small goalposts) is a sport originated from Brazil. It is a football match played on a reduced pitch with small goalposts.



January reveals: "Social actions are the essence of the TDN. We have been taught the values of solidarity and mutual aid. With the members of our team, we made donations to orphanages. " "The TDN allowed me to understand that we can make someone happy with the little we have" defends a native of May. Photos and videos of the different social actions carried out are shared in the group as shown in the images below.



**Image 2:** Donation of the May team on May 21 in a medical centre of the municipality of Adjamé  
Source: Facebook



**Image 3:** Blood donation of the May team on May 23 at the National Centre of Blood Transfusion  
Source: Facebook

These images are illustrations of the social activities of the team in May. The natives organised a blood donation activity at the Centre National de Transfusion Sanguine (National Centre of Blood Transfusion). They also donated a batch of medical equipment to a health centre in Adjamé. In addition to these humanitarian actions for the population, the TDN develops mutual aid within the teams. This is what the communication manager of the May team underlines: "We help members to find a job (. . .) We have a member of the May 14 team who had an accident. In fact, we needed a sum of 300, 000 CFA francs, about 450 euros, to operate on him. The president was informed. In less than an hour, we collected the money and helped the family to treat him. This is an act of social significance that can strengthen ties and contribute to social cohesion. When there are deaths, the bubbles contribute to support the family".

All these initiatives contribute to convey human and social values because "all the natives get together for the same cause. There are no directors. There are no employees. All are the same and equal" says a native of the February team.

In addition, the TDN also develops a festive aspect, which constitutes its third characteristic. Indeed, along with the

practice of sport, grouped within their months of birth, the natives celebrate fraternity in joy and conviviality, communion and peace around the giant eateries organised during football tournaments. These cultural activities are punctuated with the performance of famous Ivorian artists invited for the occasion. These artistic, gastronomic and exchange meetings are very important for the natives. They see it as an opportunity to interact face to face with the members of their team. Behind this festive dimension of the TDN, links are created between the teams as the vice-president of the April team says so well: "there is a networking that is created. Through these gastronomic festivities, I met people from my day, my month and my year of birth. This created very strong links. Through these connections, I got some business. "For my part, I found jujus of the same day of birth with whom I formed a family. I have created bonds of friendship and fraternity," says the president of the April team. The person in charge of the November team adds: "Human relationships are created within the teams. That's the added value". For the leaders of the "Tournoi Des Natifs", these meetings provide good occasions to create sociability and fraternity on the one hand, and to create professional and social opportunities on the other. Indeed, these reunions, full of popular fervour and carnival atmosphere and friendliness, ultimately, aim to raise awareness among young people on social cohesion and beyond, on the evils that plague the youth such as illegal immigration, socio-political violence, hatred, banditry and drugs.

All in all, these meetings generate networks of individuals. As the person in charge of the natives of the month of March says: "TDN is simply magical. We gain human relationships. It allows us to occupy the youth. It is our contribution to the evolution of society.

#### 4. Discussion

Social cohesion is a notion that is topical on this platform as elsewhere. Supported by international institutions, the Ivorian government and civil society organisations, social cohesion appears here as sociability, the creation of social ties, the establishment of common values and objectives. It also brings to mind living together. As P. N'da explains (op. cit., p.284), "living together implies a bond of brotherhood and, consequently, bonds of solidarity involving social capital and trust."

The emergence of digital social networks has fostered changes in sociability, mobilisations and online movements (O. Dagiral, O. Martin, 2017). After their use in protest movements, they have become essential tools as F. Granjon (2017, p.1) states "for a growing number of social movements that are developing various uses of them, in order to open new modes of participation in collective action. . . ". A new and original space is thus created that stimulates social interaction through virtual communities. Facebook has become one of these platforms, an extremely effective instrument for sociability. It favours interactions "between individuals who know each other or belong to circles of proximity" as D. Cardon (2013, p.3) reveals.

The "Tournoi Des Natifs" is a multifaceted platform with various features. From a typical and significant criterion based on the month of birth, it encourages the construction of links following the example of most digital networks. It is presented as the fabric of relationships between each individual that constitutes the foundation of society (R. Bigot, 2001). Sociability thus becomes "the purest form of reciprocal action" (P. Mercklé, 2011, p.37). Another aspect is that the TDN appears as a network of contacts. Teams maintain relationships with each other and create networks of friends that actually take shape in the real world.

J. Attali (2004) says in this respect that one of the greatest riches of man is his relational heritage. Finally, the "Tournoi Des Natifs" forum integrates socially useful activities in order to reach a large number of people.

The first activity is sport. Collective imagination has always perceived the practice of sport as a human activity that is not "discriminatory and carries within itself moral values of justice and equality", as R. Compte (2010, p.14) states. It also creates bonds and brings people together. By practising sport together, members break down barriers and cultivate fraternity, unity and team spirit. It also creates a sense of belonging and develops social capital. Sport has values and also a playful component, which makes M. Forsé (1991) say that sociability has a playful form. It is like an unconstrained game 'in which one acts as if we were all were equal' (Simmel, 2013, p.129). This is the objective of the TDN: to overcome divisions in order to favour equality among members, and build the '*society of equals*' referred to by P. Rosanvallon (2011), which is essential for social cohesion and living together in this country in crisis.

The "Tournoi Des Natifs" platform also envisions the construction of social links through socio-cultural actions. J. Donath and D. Boyd (2004) state that social networks in general and Facebook in particular increase the social action of individuals because personal satisfaction and greater confidence in others stimulate greater commitment to social and collective actions. In this environment marked by an increasing breakdown of the social fabric, the promotion of social cohesion cannot be achieved without solidarity, mutual aid, self-giving and altruism. In doing so, charitable actions with a social scope necessarily create links.

When analysed, the TDN appears in this respect as an organised virtual community, seeking to articulate its particularity with a collective social life marked by proximity relationships in order to foster social cohesion and living together. This truly constitutes social capital in the sense of F. Dubet (2014). He writes in this regard: "Social capital defines the social resources, networks, cultural and symbolic resources available to individuals. (. . .) Social capital is what keeps the door open, what makes that someone can count on you as much as you can count on him" (p.76).

Ultimately, social capital is the characteristic of a civil society that is sufficiently virtuous to make social relations fluid and harmonious so that society mobilises and succeeds on the strength of links and networks. The TDN seems to be resolutely committed to the construction of a society driven

by fraternity, solidarity, unity and peaceful cohabitation, in a word, a society built on sociability, a sine qua non condition for social cohesion and resilience.

## 5. Conclusion

This study focused on the use of Facebook, in this case the "Tournoi Des Natifs" platform, in building social cohesion in Côte d'Ivoire. It showed how, from a specific and significant criterion based on the month of birth, this forum was able to unite its members around the ethical, moral and civic values (solidarity, mutual aid, altruism, respect for others) that underpin life in society. The results show that the members have the feeling of belonging to a large family, to a community "which seeks to articulate its singularities with a collective social life marked by relations of proximity and by the search for commonality" note N. D'Almeida, I. Oliveira, and A. S. Marques (2017, p.5). This set develops sociability, creates social ties and structures human behaviour in a society. These are, indeed, determining factors of social cohesion and living together.

In addition, the obvious interest of the TDN in organising regular sports activities, involving competition between groups from the twelve months of birth, also contributes to the construction of sociability. Moreover, the regularity of their meeting and their intense collective participation in socio-cultural actions ultimately contribute to breaking down the barriers that hinder sociability, social cohesion and living together. Better still, they create new friendships and strengthen the bonds of brotherhood. This belonging to social ties is the first condition for tending towards social pacification by fighting against contempt (A. Honneth, 2006), fighting for recognition (A. Honneth, 1992), for equality or even "the society of equals" (P. Rosanvallon, op. cit.)

Finally, in the light of these results, digital social networks can be used to encourage the citizen to be an active social actor who can participate in the construction of society through actions that favour inclusion over exclusion, peace over violence, fraternity over discord. In short, through the example of the "Tournoi Des Natifs", individuals can contribute to a social ideal in Côte d'Ivoire by investing in the construction of human activities that create moral and civic values. Digital platforms today offer these opportunities for commitment, participation and the creation of a new social order.

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