

RESEARCH

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PUBLIC OPINION AND INFOXICATION IN THE NETWORKS: FUNDAMENTALS OF POST-TRUTH

Opinión pública e infoxicación en las redes: los fundamentos de la post-verdad

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ABSTRACT

“Post-Truth” is the 2016 year’s Word of Oxford dictionary. Thanks to the new communication technologies and the way in which political propaganda - and politics itself - have been making use of them. It’s a word with a sense of conscious or unconscious falseness, of manipulation and revisionism of reality. In some way, it is an evolution of what advertising and propaganda have become historically, but creating with its existence the essential debate about to what extent freedom of speech protects the liberty to give false testimony, and in doing so, the good or interested intentions that may exists behind all of it.

KEY WORDS

Post truth - Social networks -Trump - subjective concepts - over information - infoxication - ICTs

RESUMEN

“Post-verdad” es la palabra del año para el 2016 del diccionario Oxford, gracias a las nuevas tecnologías, y a la forma en la que la propaganda política -y la política misma- se ha estado sirviendo de ellas. Es una palabra que tiene connotación de falsedad consciente e inconsciente, de manipulación y de revisionismo de la realidad

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misma. En cierto modo, una evolución de lo que ha sido y es la publicidad y la propaganda históricamente, pero abriendo con su existencia el esencial debate de hasta qué punto la libertad de expresión protege la libertad para faltar a la verdad, y a las intenciones benignas o interesadas que puedan existir detrás de todo ello.

PALABRAS CLAVE

Post-Verdad - redes sociales - Trump -conceptos subjetivos -sobreinformación - infoxicación - TIC

INTELIGÊNCIA EMOCIONAL E EDUCAÇÃO UNIVERSAL: UMA APROXIMAÇÃO

RESUMO

Se busca estabelecer a importância e a atenção que se presta atualmente na educação emocional nas instituições superiores: seu valor para a vida e formação dos alunos e para seu êxito pessoal e profissional, assim como o esforço que estiveram fazendo nas instituições educativas para potenciar este conjunto de habilidades. Igualmente nos interessa a percepção das habilidades sociais de estes por parte dos agentes acadêmicos e laborais. Antes de tudo, determinaremos a origem da inteligência emocional como conceito e a evolução da percepção acadêmica de inteligência.

PALAVRAS CHAVE:

Inteligência emocional - Universidade - Modelos de comunicação - gestão de emoções - MEIS

1. INTRODUCTION

Post-truth politics is a political culture in which the discourse offered to the public is structured primarily by appealing to emotions, without any reference to the concrete details of the policies (Jeffery, 2016), and by repetition of slogans or mottos that ignore the opposition's refutations of facts (Davis, 2010). Although it has been described as a contemporary problem, it is possible that its life span is greater, but it has been boosted by the spread of ICTs.

The term was first used by the Serbian-American writer Steve Tesich who, in the newspaper *The Nation*, claimed in 1992 (Kreitner, 2016) that after the last great political scandals of the American nation (referring, in this order, to the Watergate, Oliver North's conviction and Gulf War coverage) demonstrated that "We, as a free people, have freely decided that we want to live in some kind of Post-Truth world" (Flood, 2016).

2. - OBJECTIVES

Our hypothesis is based on determining the relationship between the previous or intermediate phenomena of infoxication and the communication in Social networks,

and the controversial current reality of the Post-truth.

Ethical and deontological concepts about the new mode of electronic communication, in which truth and facts seem to have lost all their importance, are shown in communications both from the political world and from the academic world, since the latter has tried to explain it.

The post-truth theorists will guide us to understand this phenomenon, increasingly implanted in the world of communication since our goal is to show the pillars on which these types of discourse are based.

3.- METHODOLOGY

The inductive-deductive process will serve as a tool of analysis for this type of message that reaches us as receivers. The heuristic or source-analysis methodology will be complemented with the concrete case studies that focus on communication in Networks and on current policy. The dual reality of the post-truth is analyzed as content (textual analysis) within the ethical-deontological field as a socio-communicative phenomenon and as a vehicle of messages of any sign and intentionality.

The fundamentals that justify this piece of research are based on the importance and novelty of the subject, since there is an interest in the phenomenon of post-truth as an object of academic study and as a need to understand the changing mechanisms of a world tending to decision making.

It is a subject related to the didactics of the media and teaching in their analysis. There is a need to expand content and tools in this area of study in relation to research based on the analysis of new political messages at the international level.

4.- DISCUSSION

It is not a discovery that the media have ideological biases: selection of news and images, writing headlines, editing declarations and selective professionalism regarding interviews. On the Internet, Pos-truth has become a reality on a variable scale: on a small scale in forums and webs of interrelationship, to win small debates on a variety of topics. The so-called "Troll" phenomenon of the Internet is an example, and already here the conflict between the obvious and interested lie and the verification of facts is present. In the network area, a troll is a user who is dedicated to posting offensive or intentionally false messages, aiming to damage a virtual community or simply to distort reality. The concept applies equally to false online profiles that are created in order to disseminate erroneous information under the cloak of anonymity.

Commonly associated with internet forums, they can be given in online encyclopedias, blogs, newsgroups, comment sections and even online games of all kinds. It is usually thought that these users act driven by the pursuit of attention, although a more thorough study by Griffiths (2014) suggests that, psychologically, it is about people with sadistic, psychopathic and Machiavellian profiles: "a manifestation of the most everyday sadism" (Buckels, Trapnell & Paulhus, 2014).

Separated from the psychological aspect, a political party or an interest group can artificially create trolls (in its meaning of false profiles) to publish adulterated or false information on a rival, in an attempt that, with little investment of Internet resources, magnifies the fallacious message to its benefit.

The phenomenon has, of course, a striking resemblance: in the case of both post-modern and digital politicians, the consistent presentation of evidence and refutation does not seem to have the effect it should have. Rather, on the contrary, it brings about a reaction comparable to that of throwing water into a hot pan: the troll / post-realist re-focuses on his lie, extending it at best, or combining it with an ad hominem attack against the one who has presented the compromising documentation. The most important difference is that the troll begins and ends its communication in solitude: with little or no support within the community it attacks. The practitioner of Post-truth plays with a more dangerous scheme: mixing the manipulation of facts and the exploitation of Nietzschean relativity with the natural tendency of the audience to blindly support messages that are related to their beliefs. The success of the politics of the post-truth results, to a large extent, from the collective and social refusal to be guided in function of the facts rather than in terms of the emotions: the generalization of this type of news content makes, more than ever, that in the current creative process the formation of the recipient is decisive, not only for a specific way of structuring and ordering reality, but also, and especially, for the selection criteria of the sources according to their truthfulness (Caldevilla, 2013): a qualitative improvement of the way in which the citizen participates in the communication, now that he has quantitatively the capacity to act and react on it at a global level. According to Mut Camacho:

[...] in the 21st century, public opinion has crystallized into a supranational body with its own life. Public opinion has materialized in a social movement on a planetary scale, where humanity and its opinion have never been so present. Thousands, millions of people in all countries, in recent years, go out to demonstrate against war, against governments, against legislative measures, against the economy, etc. These actions are the concretization of latent public opinion. A concretization that remains in a continuous way, showing the world that there are unanimous attitudes to a social or political or economic issue. On the other hand, thanks to the new technologies, the public is now able to organize better and faster, in addition to announcing itself, and this whole situation means the advent of the world population to the political power of their countries (and of the other countries), and announces a reduction of state powers by directly influencing public affairs on the free discussion of individuals worldwide. (Mut Camacho, 2012, pp. 3 and 4)

Joyanes (2000) speaks directly of the post-information era, and of the need for not only technological but also cultural preparation to confront the consequences of collectively moving into McLuhan's global village.

Expanding on the concept, Caldevilla speaks of collective intelligence and how it has been strengthened by this new reality:

The true historical revolution entailed by TT.II.CC. for the subsequent collective development of humanity lies in collective contributions, in common efforts and, ultimately, in the unification of advances in a predetermined direction. "Collective intelligence is a form of intelligence that comes from the collaboration and competition of many individuals." This definition emerges from the works of Peter Russell (1983), Tom Atlee (1993), Pierre Lévy (1997), Howard Bloom (1995), Francis Heylighen (1995), Douglas Engelbart, Cliff Joslyn, Ron Dembo & Gottfried Mayer-Kress 2003) (Caldevilla, 2008, p.139)

But like any intelligence, collective intelligence is susceptible to emotions and requires information to draw its own conclusions. If the information provided is adulterated, or if collective intelligence is "infiltrated" with contradictory and / or overabundant data, it is unreasonable to expect it to make decisions in accordance with its interest or cultural background. A recent example of post-truth and infoxication of reality is the controversy arisen around the number of attendees to the inauguration of Donald Trump as president of the United States:

Sean Spicer, the White House's new chief of staff, said on being asked by the number of attendees at President Trump's inauguration that he had convened "the largest public at any opening, period, both in person and around the world." However, footage from different media showed a significantly lower audience than at Obama's assumption, which contrasted with the mass demonstrations against the president-elect in several US cities. Spicer argued in front of White House reporters that 420,000 people took the subway from the city that day as compared to 317,000 at the inauguration of Barack Obama, but the figures of the transport network quoted by *The Washington Post* speak of 570,557 trips of last Friday compared to 1.1 million with Obama in 2009 and 782,000 on the day of the inauguration of his second term in 2013.

Questioned about the attendance figures, the expert in surveys and public opinion Kellyane Conway -now invested with the position of presidential adviser- answered to a reporter that saying that the White House had given false information about attendance at the event was "exaggerated" and that these data presented by Spicer were "alternative facts to that" (Bryan Smith for AFP, 2017).

Society has access to information, but collectively it lacks the will to dedicate itself to its verification. At the same time, it distrusts chronic, incremental and even justifiably professionals and media whose job is to ensure the truthfulness of information and uncover fraud. Bulk errors such as the artificial magnification of the so-called "pandemic" of Influenza A have undoubtedly contributed to this, as Costa-Sánchez (2011) states in his conclusions:

The headlines used in the texts on the new flu cannot be considered mainly informative. First, there is a large percentage of headlines (32.7%), the main mission of which is to attract the attention of readers. Secondly and although the presence of headlines of an informative type is a majority, their purpose is far from dissemination since they correspond with texts that announce the spread of the virus and its consequences in terms of deaths and affected. At the qualitative

level, it reinforces the thesis of a sensational style of writing, in which the virus or the flu become a protagonist that travels across the world affecting different countries and causing many victims. This gives rise to what the headers collect as a kind of world war against influenza A, in which we must arm ourselves to fight against its spread. The press, therefore, does not stop exploiting the sensational [...] in the titration groups. (Costa-Sánchez, 2011, 40)

A reality that leads directly to the cultural preparation of which Joyanes (2000) spoke. Conway herself was shortly after the protagonist of another case in which we could speak either of conscious manipulation of the information or of simple and plain lack of attention at the time not to verify it but to read it in its entirety: in an interview with MSNBC, she justified the decrees of immigration veto that President Trump was trying to impose against various Muslim countries, claiming that "Obama imposed a six-month veto on the Iraqi refugee program after two Iraqis came to the country, became radical and were ideologues of the Massacre of Bowling Green," adding that the massacre "was never covered by the press" (AFP, 2017, p.1). The documented history, however, relates that these two Iraqi citizens were effectively detained on charges of attempting to send arms and money to Iraq and for having used FDI (Improvised Explosive Devices or Improvised Artifacts) against US forces before leaving the Arab country. But not on any charges of the massacre in the city where they were detained (Bowling Green, Kentucky). As a result, Obama did not suspend the Iraqi refugee program, as Conway claimed, but simply hardened the background checks that were already underway.

We are talking about one of the main information strategists who have facilitated the triumph of Trump, and whom the press has already dubbed "Minister of propaganda." White (2017) summarizes the situation in which global public communication is as follows: The free circulation of malicious lies, the ineffectiveness of fact-finding, the resistance demonstrated by populist propaganda, racism and sexism, and the emergency of the so-called post-truth seems to challenge a cornerstone of ethical journalism -that facts matter for democracy and that people want to be well-informed when called upon to make important decisions. It also challenges, with regard to new technologies, the ideas of Villar (2004) subscribed by Fombona and Pascual-Sevillano (2011) regarding the fact that "the Internet represents a scale towards high autonomy and certification of the multiculturalism of difference."

As Sánchez Leyva points out:

The new capitalism demands and creates networks of interdependence for which it commands us to exercise our emotional abilities to identify ourselves with the point of view of others canceling the social conflict, it asks us to construct a personality to the measure of the socio-economic requirements in a re-reading of self-interest in terms of adaptive coaching as emotional health. Forging solidarity links between solitaries of whom justice is left out.

The kingdom of the "myself" has been established, which entails, among other things, that we think that our emotions are valid by the simple fact that we express them, that our opinions (which we consider proper) are valid because

they are "ours" and come not from knowing but from an "own" experience (power and willing versus knowing and doing). And that expressivization is fruit of spontaneity. It imposes a falsified horizontality without authority or recognized criteria that equates and separates us. Contemporary complacent "narcissism" that is paradoxically? mass narcissism, produced and promoted by devices of masses (molecular, in Deleuzian terms) is accompanied by expressivization that in reality precludes dialogue or social confrontation: embedded in a sentimental language already recorded, as well as "in what we feel ", we give way to a "sincerity" that only reveals a suspicion of its interlocutor. The "spontaneity" required by this process calls for dramatization as a discursive genre. (Sánchez Leyva, 2015, p.254)

Which brings us to the emotional component of the post-truth phenomenon: commercial and political advertisers base their proposals on the presentation of common and universal symbols and values, rather than content and proposals, which are always debatable. Not only in relation to the entirely subjective meaning that can be given to concepts such as "God", "Freedom", "Homeland" or "Prosperity", but in terms of examples of the other ideological border, such as the misunderstood concept of globalization (Díez Medrano). In his study "Media consumption and attitudes towards the press by university students" Parrat Fernández (2010) argues that only 4% (of those surveyed by her) uses it (the newspaper) as a complement of other media, contrary to the widespread idea that the function of this medium will increasingly be to expand the information offered beforehand by others. In this respect, one might think that even in the case of university students interested in keeping abreast of the latest news, this interest is not enough for them to keep informed through several different media. In fact, there are almost as many who see the newspaper as a playful and didactic instrument (44% between both) as those who conceive it as an information medium (47%).

Finally, we would like to recall, as a colophon, a desiderandum already expressed by Caldevilla in 2010: "We must recognize the need for ethics in the configuration of society and the company itself, and propose to encourage its study and implementation" (Caldevilla, 2010, p.109)

5.- CONCLUSIONS

Publics have become active participants in the communicative process. For practical purposes, each person is potentially the publisher and editor of their own information, thanks to the facilities created by new technologies and customized content filters.

However, this freedom does not translate into a more precise treatment of information, but a narrower approach to the way of thinking of each recipient. Blocking in destination any influence that critical information with certain points of view may have on the final public. In other cases, the demands of digital life and the immediacy involved mean that it is not a natural attitude on the part of these new audiences to check the information: it takes too much time, too much effort and too much attention in times in which even the time for the hour of eating is scarce.

The fact that, in addition, the general public can produce its own information content with the same deficiencies of objectivity with which it consumes it leads to the generalization of information: both in its aspect of excessive information, as in the totally or severely, voluntarily or unintentionally adulterated information. The public is the editor of its own information, and of its own misinformation: it becomes a tool of its own manipulation by interest groups to echo specific news and information, in an even more efficient way and with less margin of error than what would mean sending it to traditional media.

Such information, distributed through social networks and applications of intelligent devices (for example: WhatsApp) with SEO techniques and clickbait (cyber-hook), are amplified and voiced by people related to the content, who do not bother to check some data that, from their point of view, are credible. Subsequently, these contents cause comments and additional distribution on the part of users of opposite sign that express their disagreement. Also by traditional media in search of digital audiences and sensational information. Even its denunciation as bullies or toxic information becomes positive dissemination, because in the end it has reached those audiences that combine lack of faith in the media and the tendency to believe the adulterated news in the first instance. Even if that means reaching those who, for various reasons -ethical, ethical, pragmatic, personal- reject the message.

Digital media also makes it possible to reach specialized audiences with customized messages: "Micro-targeting" (hyper-segmentation of consumers). This makes it easier for segments of the population that do not communicate with a particular message to join in on the basis of interest, taking into account the parts of the population that directly affect them and which could benefit them. The way in which economic needs have shaped and continue to shape the individual and collective mentality apparently leads to a circumstance in which empathy towards the neighbor - understood as the unknown - begins to be less and less relevant in the decision of the vote and in the assumption of social messages. According to Leyva, our points of view are valid because they are ours, and sincerity has been reduced to the naked, even hurtful expression of sensations and perceptions.

We are, therefore, facing a worrying scenario at best: the one in which the public is manipulated through the public itself, and of strictly anonymous media: the users. In their hands is increasingly the final selection of information, but everything seems to indicate that we remain far from the cultural moment in which the public is able to exercise this function critically. A reality only made worse by the intrinsic difficulty of processing the increasing amount of contradictory information we receive, and the arduous and thankless task of confronting individual prejudices. The necessary action scenario for the next years has expanded from the field of communication to citizen education. It is possible that, in the near future, we have to pose an impossible dilemma between the kind of social man required by markets and the one required by free society.

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