Chapter I
Digital Media and Socialization

Mario Morcellini
University "La Sapienza", Rome, Italy

ABSTRACT

The chapter reflects about the idea of crisis making evident that, in the case of communication, it doesn't mean a reduction of importance, but on the contrary increasing and growth. The actual communication fortune is in fact built on what seems a lack in our societies that is the vaporization and loss of social capital. In front of the modern individualism, the social system moves people to search other functions able to balance it: communication is certainly one of the functions. It doesn't help only individuals to get through the crisis, but it also promotes the increase of relations in the social system. The communication covers up the decline of traditional institutions (school, family, and religion) configuring a chance. Digital media, more than any other medium, becomes an expression of new social and cultural conditions.

INTRODUCTION

In order to understand the action of communication on individuals and on society, both as an industrial force and as a narrative and poetic force, it is important to look beyond the syntax of communication and to start from a reflection on the sociocultural framework of the passage to "late-modernity," which is often identified as a "crisis" from which to interpret the new meaning of communication with regard to the process of the construction of the self.

In the modern condition, the passage to modernity hinges on three elements of modification: the social actors, the institutions, and the liquid substitute of the media.

With regard to the first, the change solicited by communication relates to three dimensions:

1. **To the sphere of the self** and to the construction and redefinition, therefore, of the subjective identity of the social actors by means of the stimulation of an *interior revolution*: self-reflection. It is as though communication helps the individual to prepare for new visions of the world and for different styles of life which, in the long term, reflect on social relations and on the narration of the scenarios of life.
2. **To relationships,** whereby with a double key of interpretation communication is both

a *symbolic gesture* to measure and improve oneself with regard to others, and also *passion*, in that modern man, overwhelmed by contextual crises, looks for a sense to life and for orientation in dealings with others.

3. **To action,** since communication helps both to multiply the exchanges between individuals and to react to states of crisis.

As far as the institutions are concerned, we intend to emphasize the semantic and sociocultural transformations undergone by the school, the family, and at work in the passage to the modern; that is to say, everything which in the past was defined as a source of stability, equilibrium, and social and personal certainty.

Many sociologists use the term *crisis* to describe this transformation, a term which is today a part of the history of any society (starting from the premodern world). However, the present state of sociocultural transition presents different characteristics in that rather than a crisis of sector or of a social subsystem, it regards all those institutions which, in past societies, organised time in society (religion, school, the family, work). In this scenario the crisis regards socialization in particular; that is, those processes which allow for the reproduction of values, of collective orientation and, therefore, of that cultural orientation which is the basis of subjective action.

A world in search of itself could be a suitable metaphor to describe the image of a time which is characterized by the triumph of uncertainties, the great accumulation of sources of insecurity, of fear, and of lack of trust, counterpoised to the idea of a society founded principally on certainty, on trust, and on the possibility of recognition (Bauman, 2000; Beck, 2000; Giddens, 1991).

It is as though there had been a change in the relationship between rights and obligations compared with the past, and the unravelling of the sense of obligation corresponded to an exponential increase in the expectations of the individual (the rights) with regard to social organization.

This liquid dimension (Bauman, 1998) of modern society gives substance to the subject and to the individualistic matrix of communication, removing sense from social prescriptions. In this respect, communication, and digital communication in particular, becomes the liquid substitute of the late-modern crisis.

From here we arrive at the third key concept: the media. The fortunes of communication are constructed literally on the vaporization and the loss of the weight of society on the individual. The scant involvement and sense of orientation of the social system often causes the subject to look for other repairing functions. One of these is certainly communication, which is viewed as a low cost resource with which to react to the crisis of the emptying of social relationships (the liquid substitute of the media). Communication reacts powerfully to change, reacting to the weakening of the system, to the devaluation of the values, to the growth of disvalues, that is, those individual values which are not recognized by others.

Communication, in fact, does not only help to get through the crisis, to fill the "black holes" in our interactions (Morcellini, 1997, 2004), but it also fills these gaps with relationships with the social system. That is to say, it literally carries out a function of substitution for socialization. This means that communication, in fact, covers the decline in all the institutions which in the past organized and prescribed individual behaviour (the school, the family, and religion).

Starting from this viewpoint, the "crisis" takes on another meaning: in connection with the sense of change in communication, it is no longer seen as "diminishing in importance," but rather as "multiplication and growth." *The theatre of communication* is useful not only to stimulate exchanges and interrelations between individuals, but also to stimulate the individuals themselves to change. Communication does not simply gratify the need for relationships, it multiplies them.

Specifically, the media stimulate the three dimensions of the social actors: that of the self,

15 more pages are available in the full version of this document, which may be purchased using the "Add to Cart" button on the publisher's webpage: www.igi-global.com/chapter/digital-media-socialization/28739

Related Content

Does Using Social Network Sites Reduce Depression and Promote Happiness?: An Example of Facebook-Based Positive Interventions
Sen-Chi Yu (2020). *International Journal of Technology and Human Interaction (pp. 56-69).*
www.irma-international.org/article/does-using-social-network-sites-reduce-depression-and-promote-happiness/251820

Focus on Text Messages: A Review of Studies in French
Olga Volckaert-Legrier, Antonine Goumi, Alain Bert-Erbouland Josie Bernicot (2015). *Encyclopedia of Mobile Phone Behavior (pp. 1037-1050).*
www.irma-international.org/chapter/focus-on-text-messages-a-review-of-studies-in-french/130215

Diversification and Nuanced Inequities in Digital Media Use in the United States
Eliane Rubinstein-Avilaand Aurora Sartori (2016). *Handbook of Research on the Societal Impact of Digital Media (pp. 560-580).*
www.irma-international.org/chapter/diversification-and-nuanced-inequities-in-digital-media-use-in-the-united-states/136688

Is Information Ethics Culture-Relative?
Philip Brey (2007). *International Journal of Technology and Human Interaction (pp. 12-24).*
www.irma-international.org/article/information-ethics-culture-relative/2904

Smart Phone Keyboard Layout Usability
Michael S. Gearyand Mary Lind (2018). *International Journal of Technology and Human Interaction (pp. 110-135).*
www.irma-international.org/article/smart-phone-keyboard-layout-usability/209751