Chapter 4

The Social Construction of New Cultural Models through Information and Communication Technologies

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ABSTRACT

This chapter presents an approach to sociological and anthropological theories as to the meaning of the new cultural formats resulting from the application of today's communications technologies. This introductory theoretical chapter aims to contextualize social networking and community behaviour within an analytical framework, which allows us to understand the significance of these new realities. Thus, this chapter analyzes the cultural significance of the new concept of cyberculture and the new socio-cultural constructs such as authority, identity, and socialization that arise from the use of new technologies as a basic source of knowledge and information. In summary, this chapter contains a theoretical reflection on the meaning of the new forms of social relations in this ICT-based culture, as well as on the need to define new analytical tools to enable an adequate interpretation of this new cultural context within the framework of globalization and digitalization.

INTRODUCTION

In this chapter technology is conceptualized as a tool for the creation of a new cultural space, a hyperreal, symbolic space emerging as a consequence of the technological implosion of the human world, a space that is free from the power of formal organizations, a space that lies outside normalization, a pioneering space, in a word cyberspace. The term used in the scientific literature, which best describes these new styles of life and culture[1] is "cyberculture"[2].

The work presented in this chapter examines the concept of *cyberculture* in order to theoretically analyze how far the explosion of new information technologies has transformed social relations, and thus the traditional meaning of cultural concepts such as socialization, identity and authority.

The traditional model of *socialization* and learning based on the intergenerational reproduction of knowledge based on the principles of authority and *identity* (Durkheim, 1984) has led to a new interpretive paradigm (e-learning) in which knowledge is transmitted vertically has led to a new culture in which knowledge is also obtained horizontally from the ICTs[3] due to the weakening of the authority structures from which knowledge has traditionally been obtained, such as the family and school. It means that young people socially construct their *identity* on a parameter of authority based on new technologies. This means that they attach more importance and authority to the information they get from the Internet that the information provided in the traditional agencies of *socialization* such as family, school, university or the labour market. This is revolutionizing not only the cultural models of social relations but also the basis of *socialization* leading to a new cultural model based on horizontal transmission of knowledge and a new meaning of authority, *socialization* and *identity*, all traditional concepts integrated in the definition of socio-cultural formation[4] (Castells, 2003; Wessels, 2010; Terranova, 2004).

This chapter is intended to provide a general introduction to key issues surrounding the significance of information technology and the new models of culture in the context of globalization and digitalization. In the classical conception, the term Globalization is restricted to the trade deregulation and proliferation of new information technology, which have transformed the world into a global village. According to this definition I consider that the Internet makes it technologically possible to have access to global knowledge and has strengthened the ability to communicate more effectively across the world.

The work presented here involves an exclusively theoretical approach, and is in no way an attempt to contribute empirical data on the significance of the new framework of social relations resulting from cyberculture. The ultimate aim of this research is to present a theoretical reflection from a sociological and anthropological standpoint which enables us to adequately contextualise the analysis of social networking and community behaviour.

The first half of the chapter concentrates on review of sociological theories of the information society and postmodernism, the increasing significance of information and communication technology in contemporary capitalism, and the emerging disparities and conflicts which result. The second half of the chapter examines 'digital culture' and the model of "*cyberculture*" through themes of *identity*, community, sociality, authority and virtuality[5]. This last part also contains a reflection on the significance of the online communities that coexist with regular communities as an example of the cultural duality which affects today's citizens all over the world as a result of the globalization of technology.

In synthesis, the main contribution of this theoretical research is to reflect, in the light of sociological and anthropological theories, on the meaning of the social relations emerging around the concept of *cyberculture*, which requires re-

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