
Cross-Cultural Communication, Public Diplomacy and Soft Regulation in Global Society

Comunicació intercultural, diplomàcia pública i regulació suau a la societat global

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This article attempts, firstly, to present a comprehensive look at the great changes driven by communication in the framework of an increasingly global society. What kind of society do we find ourselves in? What does it mean to say that today we live in a global, multipolar society dominated by electronic networks and technological and scientific changes? Why is the role of communication so important and, most particularly, the role of mass self-communication? Can we talk about the existence of a new communication paradigm?

Secondly, the article gives a brief presentation on the implications of these profound changes in our lives: in our conception of space, time, identity and relationships, our ideas, values and religions, as well as power. It also presents a summary of the major impacts of this new communication paradigm.

Thirdly, a proposal is presented on how “cross-cultural communication”, “public diplomacy” and “soft regulation” may favor the new communication

En aquest article es pretén, en primer lloc, oferir una visió exhaustiva dels grans canvis impulsats per la comunicació en el marc d’una societat cada vegada més global. Quin tipus de societat ens trobem? Què vol dir que vivim en una societat global i multipolar dominada per xarxes electròniques i canvis tecnològics i científics? Per què el paper de la comunicació és tan important i, sobretot, el paper de l’autocomunicació massiva? Podem parlar de l’existència d’un nou paradigma de comunicació?

En segon lloc, l’article mostra, de manera breu, què impliquen aquests canvis profunds en les nostres vides: en la nostra concepció de l’espai, el temps, la identitat i les relacions, les nostres idees, valors i religions, com també el poder. I presenta un resum dels principals impactes d’aquest nou paradigma de comunicació.

En tercer lloc, es fa una proposta de com “la comunicació intercultural”, la “diplomàcia pública” i la “regulació suau” poden afavorir el nou paradigma de co-

paradigm of “global communication”. Cross-cultural communication cannot occur without a real inter-cultural experience to help bring us closer to the different and fascinating cultures that now make up this global world in which we live. Cross-cultural communication can be an instrument of peace, cooperation and collaboration that empowers citizens, enhancing transparency and accountability. In short, communication as a public and moral good helps to strengthen a society that is more fair, diverse, pluralistic, and free.

Key words: *public diplomacy, globalization, ethics, soft power, civic engagement.*

municació de la “comunicació global”. La comunicació transcultural no es pot produir sense una experiència intercultural real que ens ajudi a acostar-nos a les diferents cultures fascinants que actualment formen aquest món global en què vivim. La comunicació intercultural pot ser un instrument de pau, cooperació i col·laboració que faculta els ciutadans, i millora la transparència i la rendició de comptes. En resum, la comunicació com a bé públic i moral ajuda a enfortir una societat més justa, diversa, pluralista i lliure.

Paraules clau: *diplomàcia pública, globalització, ètica, poder suau, compromís cívic.*

WHAT SOCIETY DO WE FIND OURSELVES IN?

Forty years ago, at an international meeting of students, a keynote speaker, the director of *Le Monde Diplomatique* at that time, introduced the concept of the “global world”. An Anglo-Saxon sector of the conference looked towards the moderator of the meeting because they did not understand the concept: a student from San Francisco was surprised and asked: “Does this mean the world is in a balloon?” In the seventies, when attempting to analyze the world as a whole, the concept of the First World and Third World, the center and the periphery was used, but the concept of the global world derived from a more general idea. Globalization began in the late eighties and became hegemonic in the late nineties.

A global world is a world where physical, ideological, material and temporal distances get shorter, get closer (Giddens, 1990; Stiglitz, 2003; Rodrik, 2011). Where all types of flows circulate at great speed: in the 70s, there was a movement of global migration consisting of 70 million people; in this decade, that number is 200 million. In the 70s, the first satellite television appeared, and now we have more than 7,000 million phone users with the possibility of real intercommunication (Statista, 2010). We lived in a world in which we were subject to two great powers who wanted to divide the world, and we were also impacted by what we called the Third World, which existed in a situation of great poverty. Now we live in a multipolar world and are called on to get along

with each other—and in this regard, cross-cultural communication is essential to survive in a world that is more free and just than before, but which lives permanently on the edge of what is called the “risk society” (Beck, 1992, McGarvie, 2009). The so-called Third World countries are recognized today as the emerging countries of the planet and are already key players in this so-called global society (Cooper, 2016).

These dramatic changes are the result of several processes. The first is the result of what is usually called the “Information Society”. This is the result of the technological revolution of the sixties, the “technotronic” paradigm in the words of Brzezinski, in which electronic technology and the digitization of information will progressively assume an extraordinarily high profile (Brzezinski, 1970). With the development of electronic networks, the Internet, the digitization of information, and social networking, global society has been made possible thanks to the application of this technological revolution to communications of all kinds, to economy and finance, production and financial management, to the audiovisual and to information; and this could continue to be applied to many other areas (Castells, 1996).

Secondly, this process has been made possible by the progressive introduction of an economic model embraced by most countries which is none other than transnational informational capitalism (Castells, 1998; Fuchs, 2008) and which is at the base of the global economic model, where transnational companies reign and seek to escape from national regulations by means of a very significant investment in research and innovation. Moreover, the weight of the companies in the information and communication technology sector, and biotechnology companies becomes even greater in the context of a deregulated and open market under financial speculation.

Thirdly, this transformation has been made possible by the hegemony of what I call the “global homogeneous ideology” of the world which has meant the end of the strong ideologies. This “global ideology” is a diffuse ideology—“light”, “soft”—seated in the most individualistic and utilitarian liberalism, in the mirage of consumption and growth, in ideological scientism, in speculative multiculturalism. For Peter Berger, there are four motors of globalization, which form some of this ideology of “homogeneous ideology of the world”. The four factors driving globalization in the world are: firstly, *The Davos Culture*, i.e. the culture of triumphant big capitalism and major TNC’s with great media coverage, which influences networks of young professionals throughout the world, a sort of international yuppies; secondly, *The Faculty Club Culture*, networks of teachers, NGOs, international officials, foundations, specialized in intercultural issues, gender, human rights, environment, and the information society among other topics; thirdly, *The McDonalds Culture*, as synonymous with popular culture that is spread throughout the world through the US entertainment *majors*; and finally, other types of popular movements like the *Evangelical Protestantism* movement of Pentecostal origin. If these four vectors have something in common, it is this: “individuation: all sectors of the emerging global culture embrace individual independence as opposed to tradition and collectivity” (Berger and Huntington, 2002).

But this process of globalization encounters very strong resistance in certain sectors of all those societies in the world who do not accept this model of society that seeks to be implemented everywhere. In Europe, we are witnessing the emergence of movements of the extreme left and the extreme right which take advantage of the unrest of large sections of the population; in most developing countries, this model is accompanied by the shocking increase in inequality and the appearance of a *soft* authoritarianism, and jihadist terrorism finds part of its support in the sectors of the population abandoned to poverty and despair (Mudde, 2000). In the United States, the middle class is declining, increasing the gap between rich and poor. Many countries are reluctant to lose their independence and identity. And thus we could continue to describe aspects of an increasingly global world which nevertheless refuses to be homogeneous, uniform or subject to the logic of the market and finance.

Throughout this process, we all know the crucial role of media in shaping public opinion. Walter Lippmann argued that, “in modern states, the decisions are not made by the interaction of the legislature and the executive, but of those and public opinion”. And he added, enthusiastic about the possibility of using the media as instruments of propaganda, that, “a revolution is taking place in the art of democracy (...) and you have to use the media for ‘the manufacture of consent’ to control ‘the bewildered herd (Lippmann, 1922). The role of the press in the formation of the public sphere has been replaced by the media, first on radio and, after World War II, on television.

Now, with the emergence of Internet and electronic networks in general, there is an in-depth transformation taking place in the media. A complex and contradictory transformation: on the one hand, the possibilities of creating windows of communication and cultural production are multiplying; but, on the other, the process of concentration of large media groups is being consolidated at the national, regional and international level (Bagdikian, 2000; Noam, 2009). With the appearance of the New Media, a new type of communication is emerging, proposed by Manuel Castells, mass self-communication (Castells, 2009). Mass self-communication means that users have become both senders and recipients of messages. With the exponential multiplication of network users and the possibilities of transporting their messages, the mass self-communication model will become increasingly important. Castells added, “with the spread of the Internet has emerged a new form of interactive communication (...) which is a form of mass communication because it can potentially reach a global audience (...) because you yourself generate a message, define potential recipients and select the specific messages or the contents of the web and electronic communication networks that you want to recover”. He concludes: “The three forms of communication (interpersonal, mass communication and mass self-communication) co-exist, interact, and rather than replace each other, they complement each other” (Castells, 2009).

Mass self-communication is based on the exponential multiplication of social networks that have profoundly changed the way people communicate. Data from 2015 shows that the penetration of electronic communications is impressive: in January 2015, there were almost as many mobile subscriptions as inha-

bitants of the planet, reaching 98% of the world population, with 39% having broadband. Internet use already covers 42% of the global population, and the use of a social network also already represents 29% of the inhabitants of the planet (Statista). While there are significant differences in terms of regions, with the US and Europe in the lead, and Africa at the bottom of the table, the active interconnection of the world's citizens is increasingly a reality, and this is a major factor to consider. Today we can speak of "global communication" in an increasingly global world.

THE MAJOR IMPACTS ON OUR LIVES

The implications of these profound changes in our lives are very significant: in our conception of space, time, identity and relationships, our ideas, values and religions as well as our relationship to and experience of power.

a) In Relation to Space and Time: Flows and Timelessness

This global society, as a part of the Information Society, redefines two of the foundations of our existence, space and time. As a result, we need to understand the new dimensions of these two pillars: a new concept of space—flowing space—and a concept of time—timeless time—which inevitably will coexist with the previous structure. Time and space are transformed: a new perception of time, the current time (real-time) that brings new perceptions regarding everyday life events. Space is understood as space of flows (Castells, 1996). Our concept of space is no longer permanent; our conception of territoriality fades—changes which affect our identity and our concept of time—. Immediacy leads to timelessness, and the vast, permanent and fast information that comes through networks leads to a liquid society (Bauman, 2006). Borders are dissolved in the Information Society; spaces are no longer national; public space is no longer a mediated space, but a vast space of stories that, through the flows and nodes, reach us immediately. Time is subordinated to this new hegemonic space: the space of flows.

b) Identity and Relationships

The basic questions of Ernst Bloch about our identity are: Who are we? Where do we come from? Where are we going? What are we hoping for? What awaits us? (Bloch, 1986) These questions remain the same, but to answer them, the fundamental conditions have changed profoundly: the accumulation of information without being able to discern, the invasion of stories from outside of our cultural, social and religious fields, the breaking down of the transmission of memory by means of families and churches (Macintery, 1981; Bauman, 2006).

Our identity becomes more fragile and changeable. It is a soft, mutable, open, individualistic, less rational and more emotional, multicultural identity and, above all, precarious. And without hope; in the timeless flow of information society, there is no place for hope. What's important is "the now".

c) *Ideas, Values and Religion*

Ideas, values and religion are also subject to the logic of the timeless flows promoted by the Information Society. Ideas are not timeless, but emerge out of memory; they are conditioned by the technological and empiricist paradigm, under the prevailing narrative of ideological scientism. The rest is unimportant ideological products. Values are built and fade, are modulated in accordance with fashions. The best, the softest. The more “multi”, the better. And better without ideology and religion: strong ideologies and religion are the counterweights or balances, the resistance to globalization.

Religion, the more individual and private, the better. Religion without mediations and institutions is more acceptable. In the opinion of Jonathan Sacks, “the contemporary West is the most individualistic era of all time. Its central values are in ethics, autonomy; in politics, individual rights; in culture, post-modernism; and in religion, “spirituality”. Its idol is the self, its icon the “selfie”, and its operating systems the free market and the post-ideological, managerial liberal democratic state. In place of national identities we have global cosmopolitanism. In place of communities we have flash-mobs. We are no longer pilgrims but tourists. We no longer know who we are or why” (Sacks, 2015).

d) *Power*

Power is the new *cobweb* that envelops our societies and hides the true centers of power. Political power kneels in front of these nodes of invisible power, which have become crucial in our interconnected societies (Castells, 1996). The access to networks has become a key asset; controlling the flows is indispensable (Rifkin, 2000). Technocratic power tends to replace political power and citizens’ power, and takes refuge in the difficult traceability of networks.

Power has lost face and responsibility, and is losing proximity and legitimacy (Chomsky, 2002). It is a power that acts soft but thinks hard. There are those who preach that the Information Society empowers the citizens, but the fact is that politics, especially democratic politics, tends to lose strength and, conversely, undemocratic powers tend to reinforce their role in society.

CROSS-CULTURAL COMMUNICATION, PUBLIC DIPLOMACY AND SOFT REGULATION IN GLOBAL SOCIETY

Cross-cultural communication, public diplomacy and soft regulation may favor the new communication paradigm that represents global communication as an instrument of peace, cooperation, collaboration that empowers citizens, enhancing transparency and accountability; in short, that communication as a public and moral good helps to strengthen a more just, diverse, pluralistic, free and fair society.

This digital environment affects all human activity in its many social, economic, political and cultural dimensions. In global communication derived from the digital environment, the borders between these activities are blurred, and convergence and confluence of all these areas occurs.

Indeed, global communication involves a “media policy”, a policy which is indispensable. There’s a three aspects that are part of the basic lines of the media policy: cross-cultural communication, public diplomacy and soft regulation. There are other areas which I will not deal with such as, for example, infrastructure policies, research and innovation, hard regulation, the policies of management of markets and competition, among others.

CROSS-CULTURAL COMMUNICATION

We are in an increasingly global world that is running a great risk: the standardization and cultural uniformity of a world that is plural and diverse. Globalization will fail if it does not respect one of the greatest assets of our heritage, which is the diversity and plurality of cultures, stories, religions and people.

The first objective of “cross-cultural communication” is to ensure the respect and promotion of this fundamental asset of human. Consequently, cross-cultural communication is a discipline designed to provide the skills and basic tools for the managing and bringing together of people and communities on our plural and diverse planet. Cross-cultural communication is based on certain fundamental premises:

- It shuns “Ethnocentrism”; all cultures have the same dignity. There is no culture that is superior in dignity although it may be in influence and power.
- It promotes the encounter between people and cultures from an attitude favorable to dialogue (Ricoeur, 2004), deliberation in the “public sphere” (Habermas, 1984) and the recognition of the other, the “otherness” (Levinas, 1999).
- It is an interdisciplinary discipline that requires studies of its own in order to acquire certain competencies: linguistics and language studies, anthropology and cultural studies, communication studies and international relations, sociology and psychology, economics and management, history and regional studies.

PUBLIC DIPLOMACY

The global world we live in is marked by four principal factors: speed, uncertainty, complexity and insecurity as a risk that can take us beyond the precipice (Beck, 1992). In this context, public diplomacy is a part of media policy and plays a very important role.

The decision-making processes that affect social processes in the 21st century, and particularly in the relations between countries, necessarily avoid “hard power” and hidden powers. We must make progress in the area of the transparency of the decisions of public and private powers which affect the public sphere. The use of “hard power” in the world today could lead to the disappearance of the human species. In contrast to “hard power”, Nye defines soft power “as the ability to get what you want through attraction rather than coercion or payments” (Nye, 2004). Soft power is the basis for public diplomacy, the mana-

gement of conflicts which includes different areas in which coexistence is key in our complex societies.

Public diplomacy promotes civic society, so that it becomes an actor of social change, so that there is a true “civic engagement”, participation of the “grass-roots” in the processes of social change in relations between countries and cultures (Atkinson, 2012).

In this context, global communication and the digital environment become a central instrument of public diplomacy, an essential one. One that will strengthen the presence of social actors because it has empowered citizens, because it has permitted the renewal of the classical structures of political participation, because it has promoted freedom of expression and transparency (Garton Ash, 2016). Mass self-communication derived from social networks is an essential tool for a new cooperative and collaborative type of public diplomacy.

INTERNATIONAL SOFT REGULATION

But this new environment also requires certain rules of the game, rules that go beyond national or even regional regulations. In a global world, there must also exist certain rules or regulations that must be respected in order for coexistence, freedom and justice to be possible.

One of the biggest challenges we are facing is, in fact, the government of this globalized world. Accustomed to having regulations of a national or regional character, we find it difficult to legislate beyond our borders, to agree among different governments, to reach agreements that are always subject to some compromises. Without global regulations agreed by legitimate national governments or by multilateral cooperation agencies, this global world is going towards the verge of chaos. It is heading for widespread lawlessness; it is heading for submission. It will be a world ruled by a constellation of large multinational companies in the service of power and influence and not serving the common good.

The digital environment and global communication must be governed by legitimate governments, which are those that represent citizens, or by multilateral cooperation institutions representing legitimate governments. What should the criteria for soft regulation of global communication be?

- First, accessibility and neutrality of the electronic communications network (Wu, 2003). We need an international agreement within the framework of the International Union of Telecommunications and ICANN to ensure, on the one hand, accessibility to networks for all citizens all over the world —today Africa, for example remains a black spot in this regard— and neutrality, a network of electronic communications that does not discriminate regarding contents and operators. The free movement of operators and content is essential. I would remind you that without accessibility and neutrality, citizens are increasingly losing a basic right (Noam, 2009).
- Secondly, guarantee freedom of expression. Freedom of expression remains a minority good in certain regions of the world. Freedom of expression has found in electronic communication networks a privileged medium for com-

munication between citizens and for promoting a more equitable environment. Today there are too many walls that prevent the free circulation of content. Soft international regulation should ensure the free flow of networks, with previous censorship being an activity prohibited in national laws (Garton Ash, 2016).

- Thirdly, prevent electronic communications networks from becoming instruments for insults, threats to individuals, terrorism and hate speech. Too often we are seeing that certain contents on these networks are used to denigrate people, to threaten, to further jihadist terrorist and promote hate speech against certain groups and individuals.

These three criteria should be the basis of soft international regulation that would ensure global communication at the service of the people, at the service of a freer and fairer world.

To conclude: we're just at the beginning of a change of era. We can only be sure that we are going to experience some even more dramatic changes, but do not know where we are going. The acceleration of this runaway world can make us lose the path of our shared destiny. We also know that this global world, where we all have a place, is only possible if we replace permanent competition with cooperation (Fuchs, 2008), if we agree on sustainable and ecological governance (Westra, 2016), if we find communicative frameworks of encounter and dialogue. Global communication and the digital environment are a fundamental good for our planet does not fall into the abyss but rather, on the contrary, lays the groundwork for a freer and fairer world.

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