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## **The communication of communication: the primacy of participants in the communicative process**

**Abstract:** In the book *A comunicação da comunicação. As pessoas são a mensagem*, Portuguese professor and researcher Gustavo Cardoso analyzes and debates the occurrence of a new communication paradigm, based on the dialectic established between people and the message and in which the communicative act unfolds mainly through the communication of what has previously been communicated. In addition to interpreting and decoding this phenomenon, the author also addresses its implications and dimension in social, institutional, and power terms, as well as in everyday experience. This reflection thus proves to be timely in the current communication context, marked by screen and algorithmic mediation and network communication, contributing to a better perception of the communicative process, the contemporary communication crisis and the cultural appreciation of mediation, promoter of a mediatized culture.

**Keywords:** *network communication; mediated communication; mediatized culture; communication crisis; sociology of algorithmic mediation.*

## **A comunicação da comunicação: a primazia dos participantes no processo comunicativo**

**Resumo:** No livro *A comunicação da comunicação. As pessoas são a mensagem*, o professor e investigador português Gustavo Cardoso analisa e debate a ocorrência de um novo paradigma comunicacional, assente na dialética estabelecida entre as pessoas e a mensagem, no qual o ato comunicativo se desenvolve maioritariamente pela comunicação do que previamente já se comunicou. Além de interpretar e descodificar este fenómeno, o autor aborda ainda as suas implicações e dimensão em termos sociais, institucionais e de poder, bem como na experiência quotidiana. Esta reflexão revela-se, assim, oportuna no contexto atual de comunicação, marcado pela mediação através dos algoritmos e dos ecrãs e pela comunicação em rede, contribuindo para uma melhor perceção do processo comunicativo, da crise comunicacional contemporânea e de uma valorização cultural da mediação, geradora de uma cultura mediatizada.

**Palavras-chave:** *comunicação em rede; comunicação mediada; cultura mediatizada; crise comunicacional; sociologia da mediação algorítmica.*

*A comunicação da comunicação. As pessoas são a mensagem* is a book by Gustavo Cardoso, Portuguese full professor at Iscte-IUL and researcher at CIES-Iscte, whose research trajectory is especially linked with the study of communication, journalism and the impacts of the Internet on communication models and society. The book, published in 2023 by *Mundos Sociais*, distinctively characterizes the contemporary communicational model by the act of communicating what has previously been communicated, highlighting the role of participants in the development and reconstruction of the communication process.

The profound economic, labor, spatial-organizational, cultural, and technological innovations that have occurred over the last decades marked the transition from an industrial society to a network society, impacting the communicative phenomenon and the respective evolution of the sociological investigation of communication, leading to a new way of communicating. Based on the new communicational context, marked by mediation and the recurrent use of new information technologies, Cardoso (2023) addresses the changes in the spheres of production, distribution, storage, reception, and interactivity of messages, which led to the shift from a mass communication model towards a network communication one and, consequently, to the move away from McLuhan's idea about the subordination of the message to the transmitting channel, through the classic statement that "the medium is the message".

According to Cardoso (2023), the new media have expanded mediation features, such as the interruption of everyday life, spatial transcendence, exposure to difference, and the overload of information, making evident the need to adopt a sociosemiotic approach to communication, and to study the communicative acts based on a sociology of algorithmic mediation. These approaches allow the understanding of how the algorithmic mediated communicative processes, developed on a multitude of screens, act on the message, and produce new social and cultural representations and new meanings about what it is to communicate in a network society.

In the context of the network society, individuals become eminently participant in the face of mediating platforms, not only by adapting the technology to their own objectives, often giving it different uses than initially expected, but also by communicating mostly on these platforms by commenting, editing, remixing, and/or sharing previous communications, often changing the meaning or form of original messages. This practice – called by Cardoso as “communication of communication” – is carried out in all spheres

of communication, promoted both among mediated individuals, who have incorporated mediation and network communication as a social practice, as well as by the news media, organizations, or politicians. This is in line with Thompson's (2020) idea regarding the dialogical character of mediated interaction, in which the messages or communicative outputs from each participant (e.g., individuals, media organizations, etc.) are available to a plurality of others, who can also contribute to the message by commenting or joining the interaction in some other way.

Cardoso (2023) does not dismiss the important role of the channel on the message, highlighted by McLuhan, for example by arguing that the algorithmic rules of social media and messaging platforms, as well as the gatekeeping of mass media, can shape messages. However, the author analyzes the impact of the channel only in modeling the nature of the message, and not its content. Thus, although messages may have to be communicated in different ways, depending on the mediation platform, their content or meaning would not be altered by the channel's action, but by the participants' interpretation.

As a result of the characteristics of network communication, there was what Cardoso (2023) calls a communicative erosion, from the weakening of three basic pillars of the media system. On the one hand, the proliferation of communicative authorities related to the gatekeeping of content gave rise to the erosion of classification mechanisms, whereby it is no longer just journalists and the mass media that classify the reputation and credibility of the experience, but a multiplicity of media and active participants. Likewise, the abundance of communication channels, the greater accessibility in communication, and the increase of content circulating in mediated environments, led to the erosion of democratic consensus by eroding the importance of journalism, one of its pillars, fragmenting and polarizing consumption, and creating circles of disinformation and personalization of exposed content. On the other hand, the datafication of communication promoted by algorithmic platforms indorses the erosion of social reserve and the naturalization of individual exposure through the sharing of data, seen as a bargaining chip for the performance of everyday tasks and access to personalized content.

Another of the key ideas developed by Cardoso (2023) is the existence of a current communication crisis, understood as a product of the change in the communication model and characterized by the systematic manifestation of communication disorders. The author offers a critical analysis of the current communicational panorama and some of

the main issues that characterize the communicational crisis, such as the widespread proliferation of fake news, the occurrence of an “augmented experience” (through which lived and mediated experiences participate in the construction of everyday life), the monetization of content, the expansion of media models based on opinion/commentary, the novelization of news in order to maximize audiences and promote virality, the breakdown of trust in traditional news sources and the search for information on multiple sources, the mediatization of politics focused on the political performance, the communicational populism to secure media visibility, the filter bubbles associated to social networks, the clickbait phenomenon, or the algorithmic radicalization. According to Fuchs (2020), these issues are directly associated with the establishment of a network communication model and the commodification of the communication system, mainly as a media reaction to the facilitated production, distribution, and consumption of content.

For Cardoso (2023), network communication is also related to these matters, demonstrating the existence of a permanent interaction between media and society, through a reflective process of interdependence in which mediation and social practices influence each other. Network communication, according to a sociosemiotic approach to communication, is thus a product of the social appropriation of technology, in which social actors try to achieve their goals by combining various communication practices and resorting to various forms of algorithmic and non-algorithmic mediation. In this way, Cardoso's argument is that network communication, and the current communicational crisis, is not a mere result of technological evolutions, but also of their social appropriation and the choices made by those who use mediation technologies.

Finally, Cardoso (2023) also addresses the crucial role of individuals, as participants, in network communication and in the production of a mediatized culture. In network communication, mediation is shaped by the communicative practices of both organizations and individuals, in terms of sharing, producing, and classifying information and experience. In fact, the participatory and collaborative environments of current mediation platforms enable participants to be not only receivers but also producers and users of information, knowledge, and culture, adopting co-creation and feedback practices. This constitute a new stage of communication, in which participants assume the role of *Producers*, that is, active participants that create, use, and change content in a continuous and multi-participatory process (Bruns, 2009).

This change in communication dynamics has thus significant impacts on culture and social representations, since the prioritization of mediation as a tool for organizing participants and the transformation of communicative practices can shape individual and collective perceptions in spheres that go beyond the digital, such as values, culture, social organization, or power. Network communication provided, for example, the individual interpretation of the concept of authenticity regarding the message and its sender; the generalization of a culture of openness, based on open source and open access, and extended to everyday contexts such as in valuing the free circulation of cultural goods; and the expansion of a cloud culture, which favors dematerialization and is translated into a greater appreciation of goods and services, to the detriment of their ownership. The network society is thus characterized by a mediatized culture, resulting from the impact of mediated communication in everyday life, in which occurs what Cardoso (2023) calls “communicative autonomy” that, despite varying according to individual communicative literacies, gives participants a greater ability to interfere in the communicative process, being materialized in the practices of communication of communication.

In conclusion, the characteristic communicational paradigm of network communication – communication of communication – is distinguished by the predominance of participants over the medium/channel, synthesized in the idea that “people are the message”. This idea, discoursed in Cardoso's book, contributes to the analysis of the communicative phenomenon by discussing the distinctive characteristics of current communication practices and their effects not only on shaping the media system but also everyday life, paving the way for a greater debate on how communication and the mediated individual determine the (re)construction of culture.

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