THE INFLUENCE OF DIGITAL STORYTELLING IN NARRATIVE ACTIVISM

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Rezumat: Comunicarea digitală, mediatică sau personală, produce din ce în ce mai des efecte în societate. Decantarea mesajelor comunicatorilor din mediul virtual a provocat, în timp, o exacerbare a dorinţei de exprimare a oamenilor şi o creştere evidentă a sentimentului de revoltă a maselor. Internetul, mesajele jurnaliştilor din mediul on-line şi cele ale utilizatorilor deveniţi lideri informaţionali au dinamizat societatea contemporană şi au favorizat crearea unor grupuri unite de aceleaşi idei, a unor mini-comunităţi care, adesea, au trecut dincolo de limitele reţelelor digitale şi au protestat în stradă. Chiar dacă majoritatea ideilor mari care au înflăcărat noii activişti a fost construită pe baza marilor teme clasice, schimbarea paradigmelor spaţio-temporale a influenţat puternic mişcările actuale.

Abstract.: Digital communication, be it personal or through media, started producing more and more often effects in the present society. The assimilation of messages produced by communicators from the virtual domain has, in time, provoked people to want to express themselves. The aforementioned fact has also led to an obvious increase of frustration feelings expressed by the masses. The internet, the messages of journalists from the online media and the ones from users who became informational leaders have animated the contemporary society and favoured the creation of groups united by the same ideas, mini – communities whom, often, have transcended the barriers of the digital network and decided to protest in the streets. Despite the fact that the majority of the ideas that have influenced today's movements are based on classical principles, the change of space and temporal paradigms has influenced today's movements strongly.

Key words: narrative activism, internet, mass–media, digital storytelling, technology

In today's society, profoundly affected by vicious criticism against political systems, the means of communication through which ideas are transmitted become as important as the ideas themselves. Receptors can attract and understand those means of communication based on the space and time in which they are assimilated and based on social norms that are being accepted and respected.

Manuel Castells has the theory that in the current context,space and time are redefined by new social structures as much as they are by the battle over the power of form and programs of said structures. To him, time and space express the power relations of the network – society.[1] The way that these manifests varies from one case to another, from one society to another, from one communication device to another.

As Dahlgren & Sparks say in their joined book discourses manage less and less to characterise the media communication per se[2], however it can make concrete and coherent references for each individual form. Even more, new technologies favour expression and the free spread of messages. That goes hand in hand with the context of the initial internet spread as an alternative to those who wanted to express their ideas freely because in the virtual media censoring is obtained harder[3] (Iliescu, 2016). The internet also offers a good place for the transmission of ideas and narratives for media and opinion leader from the civil society.

With that being said, it can be deducted that media is not only a recipient but, as Hosein, said "a process that changes content"[4] (Hosein, 2012) and contributes to the acceptance and understanding of the information and *thus each content requires its own construction of systems and narratives starting from common elements tied by space, time, characters and action.*

To be more precise: stories, now, become universal and accessible to everyone because of the diversity of mass communication means by which they are spread and because of the large, global, coverage of those. The internet has no geographical borders, the universal language is mainly English, but the metalanguage is the binary code, of the programming world, which makes the process of communication global, easy to understand to different receptors, who are often million kilometres away.

If in the past stories were kept by "leaders and powerful books"[5] (Hosein, 2012), now strong ideas are emanating from accessible means of communication so that it can reach those interested fast with the message and form chosen by the public. Lillman says that today it is quite easy to

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[1]Manuel Castells, *Communication Power*, Oxford University Press, 2009, pag. 36.
[2]Peter Dahlgren, Colin Sparks (coord), *Jurnalismul şi cultura populară*, traducere Ruxandra Drăgan Editura Polirom, Bucureşti, 2004, pag. 21.
[3]Iliescu, Alice, *The Comic Strip - A Weapon for Social Criticism*, Irregular, vol.I, ISSUE, 1, 2016, pag.3.
[4] Hanson, R. Hosein, *Storyteller Uprising: Trust and Persuasion in the Digital Age*, HRHMedia Group LLC, Boston, 2012, pag.23.
[5]*Ibidem,*pag. 24

see that technology has solved the challenge that is storytelling since never before there were so many ways to attract the consumer or even such a numerous public.[6]

In fact, according to some theorists like David Herman, narratives come to talk about subjects that are essential to the human evolution. Obvious or more subtle, these raise major questions to humanity. Based on approach, David Herman classifies big narratives in five categories[7] (Herman, 2007):

a) Narratives about conflict solving
b) Narratives about conflict
c) Narratives about interpersonal relationships
d) Narratives about human experiences
e) Narratives about the transience of existence

Despite the progress and big revolutions that marked mass-media, and the media narrative included, major themes and role-model characters of big stories reappear constantly in press subjects. In other words, as Herman put it, if we ignore technology and consider stories and themes as a non-ending cycle, revolving around the same line, we might meet again and again the same characters and the same stories.[8] (Herman, 2007)

If the *pure story* is the common point from which all these start in all media channels, the major differences appear in the way these stories are told in each way of communication and in the relationship with the public, or the openness to feedback.

As an effect of the interest for stories the notion of "narrative activism"[9] (Jenkins, 2006) has appeared. It has been defined as an effort of the public to give events a shape, an active response to important stories.

An example of this case has appeared in November 2015, when press-reader Romanians active on social media decided to protest against a government that has not managed to deal with the crisis started by the Colectiv Club fire, which has ended with over 60 deaths. They managed, finally, to convince the prime-minister in office at the time, Victor Ponta, to resign. In that way protesters managed to turn from a passive public to an

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6 Jonathan Lillman, Narrative Design. The Power of Storytelling. Snowball Narrative, Mill Valey, 2011, pag 9.

7 David Herman, *Narrative*, University Press, New York, 2007, pag 9.

8*Ibidem,* pag 24.

9Henry Jenkinsm,*Transmedia Storytelling 101*, http://henryjenkins.org/2006/12/how_ transmedia_storytelling_be.html, accessed on 29 of September 2015, pag. 53.

active one, they involved themselves so that they can modify the story, so they can build the narrative, first by feedback and then by street movements.

The biggest cases of *narrative activism*appear in the case of electronic press public, a public more aware of the force and victory of online campaigns, like those that took place in 2009 made to prepare the "Twitter revolutions" of the Middle East, or in Romania's case the presidential elections of 2014 when through social media, Romanians decided to go out in the streets and support one of the candidates running in the competition for Cotroceni Palace. More pale examples of narrative activism are to be seen in written press that proves less capable of moving the masses, on one side, and on the other side that have a reduced grade of interactivity with the public, imposed by the periodicity of the written press and the lost interest in written word.

Conclusions

We can conclude by saying that narrative activism, born from the transition of opinions from the virtual domain to the real domain is making its presence felt and is operating based on new systems of communication, which have their origin in big stories that have moved humanity.

The capacity of the online media to keep and spread ideas is used by mass-media to form public-groups, receptive to individual narrative system, but it is also used by people outside the media system, which find their supporters online.

In these conditions it is of utmost importance to observe the trends of communication and the narrative subtext of those so we can analyse profoundly the evolution of society, and more important, to keep social security in the context of the increasing frustration on virtual platforms.

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