


## Teaching of sociology of communication and formative perceptions

Ensino de sociologia da comunicação e percepções formativas  
enseñanza de sociología de la comunicación y percepciones formativas


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Received: 01.11.2019.  
Accepted: 12.12.2019.  
Published: 03.01.2020.

### ABSTRACT:

We are experiencing an avalanche of false news about the reality of the facts. Real news can be the difference between living or dying for millions of people across the globe although access to real news may be the privilege of a few. This text will present aspects of the sociology of communication, its relevance in journalistic training and the resilience of the journalist - why teaching sociology in the journalism course. It is observed that the carelessness is globalized. Careless behavior is observed in developed and peripheral countries, in both hemispheres, so there is a deficiency in the sociology of communication. The large nonchalant contingents continue to need analysts to present news to them without intentional filters, a role that lies with serious journalism that works tirelessly in search of true information even under the clash of politicians and businessmen, acting as "guardian of society."

**KEYWORDS:** Sociology of Communication; formation; Communication; fake news.

### Introduction

Astonished people around the world scrutinize news programs for reliable information about the terrible Covid19 pandemic in an avalanche of false news about the reality of the facts. Real news can be the difference between living or dying for millions of people across the globe although access to real news may be the privilege of a few. News varies on the lethality of the disease, preventive measures and medications that can have an effect on the treatment of the condition, but it is also in this aspect that the peripheral citizens of peripheral countries are the most affected when it comes to reliable information.

The loss of these populations in densely populated countries such as Brazil, whose population is over 211 million people, can be seen in the ignorance of class C and D

regarding social isolation. Recurring news of the unconsciousness of these populations and the consequent exposure, sometimes unnecessary to contagion, has been associated with the attitude of some political and religious leaders. In the five continents leaders of countries were observed with “inconsequential” speeches and omission of information (BBC, 2020; IBGE, 2020; DATAFOLHA, 2020).

“A little cold” is already responsible for more than one hundred thousand deaths and two million infected people across the globe, figures that are tragically updated every minute, such as the severity of the pandemic”.<sup>1</sup>Part of this scenario results from the noise of the misinformation described by Wardle (2017) as: “[...] information that is false and deliberately created to harm a person, social group, organization or country.” (p. 20).

Indications associate deliberate disinformation in this pandemic scenario with economic interests. Possibly countries that face high levels of contamination and victims have recklessly delayed their actions “fearing” the current predictions of the International Monetary Fund - IMF, that the world economy will face a recession along the lines of 1929. (PUBLIC, 2020). The world press that has been working exhaustively to neutralize and hopefully undo the effects of disinformation, despite attacks from governments and companies, resists stoically, resistance that may be based on the mission of the journalist presented by Melo (2000, p.16):

The essential commitment of the journalist is in the sphere of the common good, of collective aspirations. It is a non-partisan, dispassionate, neutral, straightforward and elegant person, able to understand all the facts, even though they may seem vulgar, interpreting them from the perspective of the public interest.

This text will present aspects of the sociology of communication, its relevance in journalistic training and the resilience of the journalist - the reason for teaching sociology in the journalism course.

### **Sociology of communication - for what?**

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<sup>1</sup> On March 11, 2020, the World Health Organization declared the outbreak to be a pandemic. [9] [10] As of April 15, 2020, at least 2 006 513 [3] cases of the disease have been confirmed in more than 210 countries and territories, with major outbreaks in the United States (more than 611 000 cases), Spain (more than 174 000 cases) , in Italy (more than 162,000 cases), Germany (more than 132,000 cases), France (more than 103,000 cases), Iran (more than 75,000 cases) and mainland China (more than 82,000 cases). [11] At least 128 886 people died (more than 25,000 in the United States, at least 21,000 in Italy, around 18,000 in Spain, around 15,700 in France, more than 12,000 in the United Kingdom and at least 3,300 in China) and 501 758 have been cured” Available at <[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pandemia\\_de\\_COVID-19](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pandemia_de_COVID-19)>. Accessed April 15, 2020.

Understanding the effect of communication between the sender and the receiver is one of the paths that the sociology of communication can take since journalistic communications produce reactions and consequent decision making, exemplified by the imposition of quarantine for citizens infected with the Corona virus and the lockdown which emptied cities on five continents, as if the media “mystically” controlled the course of events. (RODRIGUES, 2018, p. 35).

Mystical implications aside, the sociology of communication has investigated agenda-setting theory, thematization theory, newsmaking studies, cognitive differential theory and critical media theory and its effects in order to understand the behavior of journalism before an audience that can choose the format of the information it will consume. There are more than thirty ways to offer digital content, in addition to traditional formats such as newspapers, radio and television.

The agenda-setting of the last five months is focused on the pandemic, fulfilling its function: “The media define an essential cognitive orientation of individuals (in terms of how to direct their attention to certain themes or subjects)”, however, bordering other agendas of national interest such as dengue, zika and Chikungunya, of microcephaly children refused by schools, of Brumadinho, and of record deforestation in the Amazon. (RODRIGUES, 2018, p. 37).

Being the agenda-setting focused on the pandemic is related to the thematization theory which, according to Rodrigues (2018), is “a hierarchy of issues at the level of the public agenda in accordance with the importance attributed to them by the media agenda.” (p. 36). This theory confirms the strength of journalism in what Thompson (2011) identifies as the “fourth power”, which has been used most often in defense of society's interests, unfortunately in some countries, at the expense of journalists' lives.

The sociology of communication seeks to understand the vehicles of communication in the investigations and disclosures they make, when and why they decide the lead hierarchy (who, what, where, why, when and how) and in the case of the pandemic as noted above, vehicles are perceived to be aligned or not with the health policies adopted in some countries. The renowned English magazine The Lancet criticizes President Jair Bolsonaro's conduct in the face of the pandemic and the slowness of the United Kingdom, the United States and Sweden in face of the seriousness of the pandemic: “Brazil's President Jair Bolsonaro has been strongly criticized by health experts and faces an intensifying public backlash for what is seen as his weak response.” In this specific article, it is observed that the lead highlights what, despite the actors involved being internationally prominent figures, such as American

President Donald Trump and British Prime Minister Boris Johnson: "Covid19: learning from experience." (THE LANCET, 2020). (Bold from us).

Thus, it is understood that the fact to be reported will decide which question will be answered by the news (communication). Returning to the question: sociology of communication - for what, it can be said that it is to understand how news (communication) is constructed and how the media act during its construction. The sociology of communication analyzes the message, investigates what the message wants to communicate. (RODRIGUES, 2018). This act makes it an important discipline in the teaching of journalism, according to the discussion that follows.

### **In defense of the teaching of sociology in journalism courses**

The introduction of this text minimally describes the reality of events related to the Covid19, however it evokes the agglutination that Marques de Melo (2011) made of the post-internet society - glocalized society, global and local, where local events can gain global proportions such as the pandemic that afflicts the world population.

The 21st century journalist investigates to inform a glocalized society and, in this context, the teaching of sociology can broaden his worldview, helping him to interpret the various events that present themselves under a scientific perspective appropriate to that fact. Under what aspect or aspects can a fact be analyzed?

Take as an example the various reports on the Coronavirus. It is said that the ground zero of the Covid Pandemic19 was the city Wuhan where, at open markets, the slaughter and trade of domestic and wild animals was allowed, favoring viral contamination (WESTCOTT, 2020). Facts of this nature can be analyzed in the light of cultural sociology and anthropology.

The academy can provide theoretical subsidies to the student of journalism so that he understands: "[...] to what extent culture expresses man's innate mental structures, to what extent it is acquired and what are the neuropsychic processes of that acquisition" (LÉVI -STRAUSS 2012, p.136). This understanding will enable the future journalist to analyze a fact under different facets. In a news story about Wuhan, the lead (which, why - cultural reasons) could avoid mistaken and xenophobic judgments as it has been observed on social media.

### **What professors from Brazil and Portugal say?**

Professors researched in communication and journalism courses at Brazilian and Portuguese universities revealed, according to the research, that: "because they

understand the responsibility of the media as a feeder of the masses, they are sensitive to the need for students to become aware of issues relevant to society, and the importance of the balance between theory and practice” (RODRIGUES, 2018, p. 96). This means that, from the perspective of the interviewed professors, despite the shortening of the curricula, it is still essential that the journalism student has enough theoretical basis to dialogue with society and about society.

Interview work for the research began at the Federal University of Bahia - UFBA, a university that does not include sociology in the curriculum, different of the Federal University of Tocantins - UFT and Portuguese universities. The Federal University of Bahia - UFBA was chosen as a counterpoint to the Federal University of Tocantins - UFT and the Portuguese Universities of Beira Interior, Católica Portuguesa, Lisbon, Minho and Nova de Lisboa, and therefore the preamble of the interviews was different used in the others<sup>2</sup>; however, on an ongoing basis, the interviews followed a single script. At first, the questions were centered on possible criticisms of the theoretical content, in order to know the professors' experiences with the teaching of sociology, followed by the professors' perception about the relationship between a good theoretical basis and the impact of this type of training, with the objective to verify if the criticisms pointed out by Teixeira (2012<sup>3</sup>), were consistent with the reality of the classroom.

The first interviewee, professor of SI technique, Dr. Salvador I at UFBA, recognizes that roughly speaking for the students, the theoretical contents are dispensable: “I think unfortunately they still arrive thinking that theory is an abstraction of the gods or the Bible, from Olympus, almost an abstraction that doesn't seem to make sense and that they would really like to develop something practical. [...] So when they are in the classroom and say they do not want to do a monograph because they think they monograph requires more readings, more reflection and think about making a product. I say that I have nothing against it; I prepare them for both ends, but they must think about the following: the product is rough work. You will make the product, but then at

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<sup>2</sup> Would the teaching of sociology of communication, if initiated by general sociology, help students when professionals develop better interpretations of reality (for the journalist) and carry out more in-depth studies and research (for the cultural producer) in the area of communication and culture?

<sup>3</sup> Another aspect that stands out from an individual analysis of each of the study plans is the presence of a high workload of theoretical disciplines in the field of Social and Human Sciences. What reason could be behind this? Just allow students to have a better knowledge of the world? A need to maintain tradition? Enable the use of existing human resources, namely teachers, who are already “from home”, even if from other areas (social sciences, humanities, languages, literature, areas without students), but which should be maintained (TEIXEIRA, 2012, p. 418).

the memorial you will speak, you will reflect on its realization, so you have no way of escaping this supposed, wrong polarization that you bring”.

Questioning polarizations between theory and technique is a healthy practice in teaching. The university, as a space for the production of knowledge, is expected to provide professional training, not only technical and utilitarian, but of the polymorph type, which is essential to the theoretical framework (LARANJEIRA, QUADROS E CAETANO, 2011), as defended by the professor of P II technique, Dr. Palmas II, from UFT: “I teach the P II technique discipline. If we think about it, it would be a technical discipline of P II, but I work with a very large theoretical load in the discipline because I think that it is not just about producing x, but we have to rescue this idea of, from the social role of sociology, of the anthropological, political role, over time. How x came about, is the story of x, there is no way not to link it in the discipline of P II. So, I do try to bring this theoretical load into my P II discipline.”

The exercise of sensitizing the look carried out by Professor Dr. Palmas II agrees with Dib, Aguiar and Barreto apud Teixeira (2011), who advocate teaching practice as an activity of reflection, observation, and questioning; due to the complexity of social processes, which P II cannot handle without contextualization. It is an incredibly happy effort to interdisciplinary the subjects offered in undergraduate communication, both in Brazil and in Portugal, especially in virtue of,

“[...] the impacts of information and communication technologies, producing and maintaining scientific and technical knowledge, as well as transforming it into economic and social innovations, are more important than ever for the dynamism, sovereignty and prosperity of societies.” (JAMBEIRO e PALÁCIOS, 2010, p. 7).

Criticisms such as the presence of theoretical subjects in the communication course, perhaps reflect the format that the media has printed for communications. The communicologist trained in the academy, inserted in the job market, can see that he wastes his potentialities when producing information without communicational content, according to the current fast news model, however, he needs to do it, since the vehicles depend on the audience, if want the loyalty of advertisers, and the journalist, of employment. Professor of theoretical L III, Dr. Lisboa III, from Nova de Lisboa University, professor of theoretical chair L III for over 30 years, notes: “[...] it is a problem that has much more to do with the conditions institutional or media functioning than properly with the necessary academic training conditions, although I also think that because of that there is a contamination of this model for the training itself and we go to what I

talked about a little while ago, it is not, how in the academic world, a discourse is already being generalized, that what is needed is practice, practice, practice. We entered into an emulation with the media, there is no longer a difference between what it means to work professionally and what it means to do academic and scientific training."

Note that for professors it is totally feasible the presence of theory and technique in the communication course, however, as Prof. Lisbon III presented, the academy cannot deviate from its scientific mission. The professor of theoretical BI, Dr. Beira Interior, from UBI, understands that: "A person who works with communication must know how to understand the world, try to understand the world [...]", an understanding exercised by the human sciences, as x: "And I always have the illusion that x serves a little to understand the social." At UBI, the professor was never asked about the teaching of x, which seems negative to her, because she understands that questions are healthy: "No, no, not yet, because they could do it perfectly, but no, no ... [...] this is a complaint from the professors, we would like to have more active, more critical students, more ..., we would like, here and everywhere, I think, but we don't have these students, they are not like that so, so...".

Understanding the world to work with communication may require strenuous efforts for those who are trained only on a technical basis, believing that the technique can handle subjective issues. Obviously, the TICS forced changes in the format of the communications and it is commendable that the institutions have adapted or are adapting to them, however, the training spaces should be alert to what seems to be a benefit of convergence, but that can be a form of interference too much of the market in the academic space, therefore, balance can be an invaluable argument against the concentration of disciplines. According to the technique professor S II, Dr. Salvador II, from FACOM / UFBA: "[...] the design of the courses is not very good in general, [...] because if the courses have a more technical dimension than do not talk to the theoretical perspective that is put, it is a problem of the course design, [...], you must prepare technically for these professionals to be able to develop their trades well, right? The problem is that when you offer more abstract or theoretical knowledge, it is not thought of, in the training process, so that those who are dealing with it understand what it may or may not mean, [...] a formation that will not see a direct relationship with the practice - it does not need to see, but if he understands why he will know that, or why those authors exist, or the relationship of those authors with what he will need today in some way, what has changed or not during the process, I think it is a course design, which lost the way to relate the two things. "

This linking the two things or interdisciplinarity is the goal of ten out of ten educational institutions, but it is difficult to achieve, yet it is shown as the closest way for students to learn how to use theory to develop the technique. Fidalgo (2001), attuned to digital technologies, understands that even in the face of new communication technologies, students still need a theoretical foundation. Daily contact with digital technologies “teaches” students two important truths: 1st. The new ICTs require the same theoretical preparation as the old means of communication required and 2nd, still require the intellectual and creative component, which for the author, is more difficult than the technical component.

The freshman student gradually develops critical ability, and the vast majority when questioning the curriculum matrix, do so in the final semesters of the course, but, it seems appropriate that the student be reminded that “one only learns the technique, knowing the theory”, according the professor of theoretical PI<sup>4</sup>, Dr. Palmas I, from UFT. Reflecting well, Teixeira's criticism (2012), is made in a post-graduate work, confirming the observation that Prof. Palmas I says: “[...] maybe the course will produce this, [...] when I gave the final discipline that was Brazilian politics, the end of the course already, it is there at the end of the course, that there comes that false dichotomy, yeah, let's talk about something more practical? Let's be practical and such [...] so it was the course that produced and the course can produce that, there is something that you can explore well maybe because it is part of, in my view it is part of it the position of journalism in society and in the world of, let's say, knowledge of science [...]”. There is then a suspicion that the technician discourse is culturally produced, as Lisbon III suggested in a previous paragraph.

The perception and conduct of the professors are similar even though they are spatially dispersed. Faced with questions like the ones presented above - criticism of the theoretical content, the professor of technique III, Dr. Palmas III, from UFT, reacts as follows: “[...] even though I teach a practical discipline, I try to tell them in each content I show that, that it can be better. You can have a better performance in a certain procedure, in a certain method of journalism if you have this humanistic orientation, this sociological look, this understanding of communities, social groups, [...], which is not only technical. In my discipline, I tell them: look, the technique, [...] a month of writing, writing teaches a lot, but, this look committed to society, this ethical look, this

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<sup>4</sup> Information available at <<http://docs.uft.edu.br/share/s/jBzULuM8S5meaOLhLEr3XA>>. Access on Jan. 25, 2018.



constructive look, this look that sees a peripheral community, a social group in another way, different - this look, it is only with study, with the disciplines of humanities, social sciences, the disciplines that work more the content of sociology, and anthropology, history, political science, philosophy. "

Writing techniques, the use of technologies and digital language are at least universal in the Western world, with perhaps minimal variations. The means of communication have minimal variation in objectives, but in the sense of communication, this weaves the web of meanings, which is culture. The subjective meanings of communication with the difficulties of understanding what is said, appears to Wolton (2004, p. 30-31), as "one of the great revelations and contradictions of the 20th century", and the technique for not envisioning solutions, "returns" the problem to theories anchored in anthropology, political science, philosophy, history, sociology and psychology; which, according to Professor Palmas III are able to educate the journalist's eyes.

Roughly speaking, what the theoretical professor LI, Dr. Lisboa I, from the Portuguese Catholic University realizes, is that the student arrives at the degree with pre-notions about theoretical studies acquired in secondary education: "I think it goes one way what secondary education is, which is not secondary education oriented to knowledge or thinking. When students arrive at universities, they also do not have this experience and, therefore, they also resist this, on the other hand, the relationship they have with the media, with communication, with technology, in short, it involves all dimensions of life and this is a very practical relationship [...]. So, they also have a resistance to thinking about communication differently, I think."

Professor Dr. Lisboa I's finding that students resist thinking about communication from other points of view, once again supports Wolton (2004, p. 37) when she says that communication of the type facilitated by TICS, which "should bring men, it serves to reveal everything that separates them", [...]. There seems to be an intentional political effort to block youth criticism, especially when eliminating from the curricular matrices of the 2nd and 3rd degrees, subjects such as sociology. The professor of theoretical theory MI, Dr. Minho of the University of Minho, "suspects" that the actions of the hegemonic classes to systematically depoliticize the student population serve purposes of domination: "It is not by chance that the current political power is trying to do disappearing x from school curricula, it is not by chance, nor is it by chance that in Portugal there is no x in secondary school, nor is it by chance, because they prefer to keep people, I do not say ignorant, but depoliticized and not aware or knowledgeable

about the reality, the real, social situation; our young people, some of them are depoliticized, because of time, I know that the spirit of time is difficult, but above all because they do not have access to basic knowledge, citizenship, knowledge of what society is, what a party is, a political organization, [...]. "

Seven years ago, Machado (2011) talking about "the teaching of journalism in the era of convergence" said that journalism had undergone profound changes since the 1980s as a result of the "economic, political, social, cultural and educational restructuring experienced by societies contemporary", which caused paradigm breaks in journalism (MACHADO, 2011, p. 7). It happens that, changes in the teaching model, models of intellectual simplification, cause the strangeness pointed out by professor Dr. Minho, if the objective of teaching fulfills its mission, which is "to produce learning".

The great fear is that there is what the professor of theoretical L II of the Institute of Social Sciences of the University of Lisbon, Dr. Lisboa II calls "knowledge economy of our time, because knowledge is at the service of economics. If it is salable it is used and valued ... if sociology, philosophy have any products to sell, yes, if not, they are considered unimportant, obsolete. Obsolete is what doesn't make a profit." It is the logic of the market.

## Conclusions

The usefulness of the sociology of communication is present in daily communications. Although most of the analyzes that are made of the various messages transmitted are not technical, the receiver still analyzes the information, accepts it, or discards it.

Recalling that the introductory arguments of this text have drawn attention to the damage that disinformation is causing to millions of people around the world, it is evident that knowing how to analyze communication can be related to healthiness or morbidity considering that large contingents of the world population act carelessly allowing others to discourage health.

The carelessness is also globalized. Careless conduct is observed in developed and peripheral countries, in both hemispheres, so there is a deficiency in the sociology of communication. The large nonchalant contingents continue to need analysts to present news to them without intentional filters, a role that belongs to serious journalism that works tirelessly in search of true information even under the clash of politicians and businessmen, acting as "guardian of society."

Crises like the one that has been established demonstrate the importance of teaching sociology in journalism courses due to the need for the future journalist to have enough preparation to support the analysis of events in the light of science. The plasticity of sociology (there are more than thirty applications) offers the journalist theoretical subsidies that can validate or refute information to be offered to the public.

Professors of sociology and other subjects in the journalism course both in Brazil and in Portugal recognize that universities are pressured by the market and students, a pressure that “forced” them to wipe curricula, excluding subjects in the humanities such as sociology. Fortunately, despite these circumstances, these zealous professors and others insert the theory of the social and human sciences in the syllabuses of their courses, as was said by a professor, to “sensitize the eyes”.

The outlook is not promising because the theoretical lack of students makes interdisciplinarity difficult in a characteristically interdisciplinary course. The theoretical basis offers the student a dialogue with theorists from the social sciences and other human sciences, which facilitate the interpretation of reality. Technical disciplines advance with the evolution of ICTs, “speak” the language of machines, most of which do not require interpretation.

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**RESUMO:**

Vivenciamos uma avalanche de notícias falsas sobre a realidade dos fatos. Notícias verdadeiras podem ser a diferença entre viver ou morrer para milhões de pessoas em todo o globo embora o acesso a notícias verdadeiras possa ser privilégio de poucos. Este texto apresentará aspectos da sociologia da comunicação, sua relevância na formação jornalística e resiliência do jornalista – o porquê do ensino de sociologia no curso de jornalismo. Observa-se que a displicência é *glocalizada*. Observam-se condutas displicentes em países desenvolvidos e periféricos, nos dois hemisférios, portanto há deficiência da e de sociologia da comunicação. Os grandes contingentes displicentes continuam precisando de analistas que lhes apresentem notícias sem filtros intencionais, papel que cabe ao jornalismo sério que atua incansavelmente na busca de informações verdadeiras mesmo sob o achincalhe de políticos e empresários, atuando como “guardião da sociedade.”

**PALAVRAS-CHAVES:** Sociologia da Comunicação; formação; comunicação; notícias falsas.

**RESUMEN:**

Estamos experimentando una avalancha de noticias falsas sobre la realidad de los hechos. Las noticias reales pueden ser la diferencia entre vivir o morir para millones de personas en todo el mundo, aunque el acceso a noticias reales puede ser el privilegio de unos pocos. Este texto presentará aspectos de la sociología de la comunicación, su relevancia en la formación periodística y la resistencia del periodista: por qué enseñar sociología en el curso de periodismo. Se observa que el descuido está glocalizado. Hay comportamientos negligentes en los países desarrollados y periféricos, en ambos hemisferios, por lo que hay una deficiencia en la comunicación y la sociología. Los grandes contingentes indiferentes continúan necesitando analistas para presentarles noticias sin filtros intencionales, un papel que recae en el periodismo serio que trabaja incansablemente en busca de información verdadera incluso bajo el choque de políticos y empresarios, actuando como "guardianes de la sociedad".

**PALABRAS CLAVE:** Sociología del periodismo; formación; Comunicación; noticias falsas.