COMMUNICATION CHALLENGES
IN THE POST-TRUTH ERA

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Communication, possibly one of people's most favourite activity, is present everywhere, every moment and therefore, connected to the basic social and managerial functions like: planning, organizing, motivating, controlling aiming at a "(...) continuous and dynamic shaping, modification or change of knowledge, stances and behaviours towards the directions being in conjunction with the values and interests of the subjects being in mutual relations". It aims at producing effects at three different levels: idea, emotion and behaviour level. The idea level is the easiest to impact, new ideas can develop or can be taken into consideration without much analysis; the second level is not as easy to influence however, emotions can be stirred through communication. The third level, the most important one is the hardest to affect because a change in behaviour is difficult to attain due to the complexity and the lengthiness of the process. A lasting change in behavior usually requires a considerable dedication of time, effort, and emotion.

Key words: communication, ideas, emotions, behaviour, truth, change.

1. INTRODUCTION

During the second half of the twentieth century, the world has gone through quick and frequent changes and developments in the political, social, technological and economic environment and since communication is not a static concept that remains unchanged like a theorem while society and technology evolve it changed and evolved as well.

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subjects being in mutual relations" (Filipiak, 2004, p. 18).

How do we know that the communication process has attained its goal? Well, what happens these days, the past decade especially, polarization of information and popular truth is shallow pool of knowledge, of opinion shaping built only on the trustworthiness of the people who are involved in the communication process and not on real evidence and real facts. Consequently, even if apparently communication works the effects it triggers are vitiated.

2. EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION

It is worth mentioning that effective communication never occurs as singlesided based on the grounds activity, effective communication takes place when feedback happens, when the addressee comprehends the message and the addresser has proof that those processes took place indeed. And the process does not end here, receiving and understanding a message does not equate with the idea that the message will produce the envisaged effects.

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the second level is not as easy to influence however, emotions can be stirred through communication. The third level, the most important one is the hardest to affect because a change in behaviour is difficult to attain due to the complexity and the lengthiness of the process. A lasting change in behavior usually requires a considerable dedication of time, effort, and emotion.

Nevertheless, in order to be able to evaluate the impact as accurately as possible, a baseline should be taken before communication happens and the effect measured afterwards.

3. COMMUNICATION CHALLENGES

What is the biggest challenge for communication?

It seems that we live in the post truth era, post truth is a term which became popular in the year 2016 and also gained the reputation of word of the year in 2016 according to Oxford Dictionaries [1], which seems to be a very prolific year for highlighting communication concepts like *fake news* and *alternative facts* which transformed from an illustration of a social media phenomenon into a stereotype. A catchword that has gone viral so quickly fake news, empty words, rumors and political lying. "Polarization and unethical politicians or unregulated social

media; shoddy journalism; or simply the inevitable chaos ushered in by digital media technologies" are among the sources of this post-truth era communication briefly, we could say that, in general, human nature is the reason.

What makes the current trend of fake news different, said Harari (Harari, 2019), is technology, which enables us to tailor propaganda on an individual basis, and match the lies to the individual prejudices.

The first person to use the term "post-truth" in its contemporary context was the Serbian American playwright Steve Tesich. In his 1992 article "A Government of Lies" [2], Tesich criticized the American public for accepting the lies of the Bush (Sr.) administration without having any reaction thus accepting a life in the post-truth world, i.e., in a world in which the truth is no longer important or relevant. The term resurfaced in 2004, in the title of a book by Ralph Keyes, The Post-Truth Era [3].

Post truth refers to the this situation the "circumstances in which objective facts are less influential in shaping public opinion than appeals to emotion and personal belief." (OUP, 2016). Therefore, whoever wishes to influence public opinion should concentrate on the creation of a discourse that is easy to accept and which places an emphasis on what satisfies the emotions and beliefs of the large public, instead of the real

facts. The issue is that people have a tendency to hope in spite of all reason and what they hope for may or may not be realistic and may or may not be based on truth and facts. So, the attempt to preserve hope will always be more important to people than some abstract quest for truth.

"Post-truth" is not simply the contrary of truth, it is not necessarily a lie, it is a good smoke screen for or from other things. Speakers tell listeners what they want to hear in order to keep them satisfied and to avoid unrest and curiosity. It is a term comprising an agglomeration of elements, hot air talk, empty words, emotional topics, lies, catchy phrases, it is the perfect product of the consumerism era when we buy what looks shinier even if it is useless.

Echo chambers are another element that distorts and impedes communication. People thrive in echo chambers because they offer them the comfort of opinion confirmation. According to Oxford Learners Dictionaries they are „an environment in which somebody encounters only opinions and beliefs similar to their own, and does not have to consider alternatives" [5]. Echo chambers influence and cocoon their members, not by interdicting communication with the world, but by changing what and who they trust. The only accepted opinions are those aligned to the members', the ones confirming the biasis. These

chambers can be the modern form of Plato's Allegory of the Cave.

Those people who lived ever since their childhood, not birth, in a cave and saw only some shadows on the walls of the cave believed that reality was the shadows they saw and nothing else existed. Similarly, those who hear only one side of the story will never know, therefore accept, that reality is more complex.

Going further there can be mentioned other challenges like: the fame some people acquire thus becoming larger than life figures and whose opinions are taken for granted by most of their admirers or the fact that people do not discuss ideas, they discuss other people. Our views on other people's arguments, ideas are strongly influenced by how much we like them.

Communication also fails because the targeted audience is not enough analyzed and understood and the messages are not tailored. There is no such thing like one size fits all messages if we are interested in obtaining results. When communicating we should identify and take into consideration the pus hand pull factors specific to the target audience. Simply put, push and pull factors are those factors which either push people from where they stand (beliefs, attitudes) into a specific direction or attract and make them stand by their beliefs even stronger.

4. CONCLUSIONS

How to react? How to fight back? How to make sure that we are not inadvertently caught in such a trap?

It is not a simple endeavor because most of the influences mentioned before are too strong due to the feeling of mental comfort they provide. However, the repetition of true facts does eventually have an effect, the information sticks to the memory and in time it provoke critical analysis.

James Kuklinski and colleagues discovered in research [8] that although misinformed or unfounded beliefs can be very resilient, people's minds can be changed "when one hits them between the eyes" (Kuklinski et al. p. 806) recurrently with the accurate, unbiased information or the pure truth. It is not easy, especially since the accurate information is inconvenient for those who support a specific idea, but it can be done. Unfortunately, the percentage of success varies and it is never 100. Eventually, when it matters to us we are capable of "resolving our cognitive dissonance by rejecting our ideological beliefs rather than the facts" (McIntyre, 2018).

Researchers propose new terms such as "counterknowledge" and "reinformation" [10] considering that they are more appropriate and define better the new era of communication

and information dissemination characterized by actions in which the source of the message/ information aims to influence the public through emotions and not through facts and logical arguments.

However, we cannot focus only on facts or use a black and white, true or false analysis or measurement scale because communication, human relationships are based on emotions and relatedness. Audiences identify themselves in the stories they hear. Emotions are a significant feature in rhetoric. Ever since Aristotle's time we have the Rhetorical triangle which presents the three fundamental rhetorical elements, Ethos, Logos and Pathos (emotions). Good communicators must appear involved in their speeches not distant and rigid.
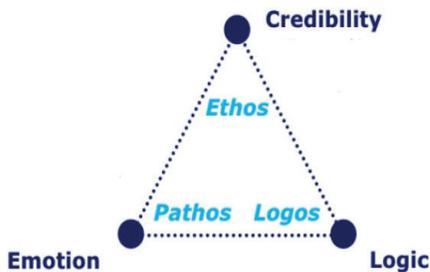

Fig. no.1. Rhetorical triangle

Ethos or credibility refers to the trustworthiness of the speaker, the tone, the style. Logos or logic refers to the reasoning and argumentation, all the elements that the speech is based on, facts and

figures. Pathos or emotion is what mostly stirs people, the emotional impact of the stories.

Fake news, lies are not the biggest problem because many a time what stirs the audience is not the information, the facts presented (may them be real or not), but the way the story is delivered pushing emotion buttons, making people feel part of it. Reporting is most of the time based on actual facts. The problem is that they launder and reorganize the story making it more appealing for a specific cause and, as Davis says in his book *empty assertions*, *obfuscation* (by irrelevant facts) and *gibberish* replace information (Davis 2017).

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