

Globalization and power: The consolidation of international communication as a discipline. Review article

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Abstract

This study presents an overview of the theoretical development and main lines of research regarding international communication. To this end, the emergence of communication in the structuring of power has been analysed with regard to four areas (hard, soft, sharp power, and the strategic narrative). The critical perspective has been reviewed as well as Anglo-Saxon dominance of the subject using evidence from France, Germany, and Latin America. Five main lines of future research have been forecast, the first of which involves strengthening the theoretical and methodological bases with interdisciplinary methods; the nature and characteristics of the international journalist (journalist versus fake news); the handling of populist communication when confronting political globalisation with leaders who challenge the conventional journalistic ethos; the analysis of structures and global information systems in the face of a multifaceted scenario with less "CNN effect" than expected, along with a dynamic situation of constant propagandistic innovation.

Keywords

International communication; Power; Hard power; Soft power; Sharp power; Strategic narrative; Public diplomacy; Propaganda; Leadership; Social movements; Activism; Mediated diplomacy; The CNN effect; Review article.

1. Introduction

Writing a review article on international communication on behalf of the journal's board of directors has been an intellectual challenge.

I wanted to address the academic literature and its referring authors, analyse the research agenda, and review the successive organisations and multitudinous congresses that have dotted the landscape in order to understand the dynamics and scope of international communication.

Before starting, I reviewed the writings that had appeared in the sources of interest in order to undertake a systemised review of the state of the art (Vanc; Fitzpatrick, 2016), examine the methodologies in use, and propose new paths of

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research for the discipline. The aim of this paper is to identify the sources and main authors involved in the issue in order to gain knowledge regarding the epistemological and theoretical approaches that exist for the purpose of reaching a reasonable level of agreement regarding definitions and concepts; to organise the theories and interrelationships between the doctrine and disciplines that are part of international communication; to point out how knowledge based on cumulative science is structured and organised; and finally, to identify unresolved problems (Codina, 2018).

As such, the present work fulfils the task entrusted therein, although it poses certain limitations due to the very nature of the research subject. This is not a standard discipline, but rather a multidisciplinary object of study, which derives theory from practice. International communication draws on diverse sources. The discipline includes several factors, among which are the following: the structure and policy of communication (the role played by the State in the information system involved, the law or professional culture, and European information policies); history (relationships with events and important milestones in the shaping of a global society); sociology (cultural consumption, audiences, professional routines, environmental values and culture, as well as social behaviour when faced with news, muckraking, and disinformation); economics (business models, market globalization, press subsidies, global media moguls); international relations (borders, nation states, nationalism, idealism or realism); finally, the hybridisation of the media and political systems (the role of the professional journalist, the rise and fall of correspondents, treatment of sources, and institutional publicity). All of these aspects are part of the review, although each of them could be the subject of an independent monograph. Furthermore, this research trend is continuing to grow. For these reasons, there is no short answer to the question of what international communication is, or how it is defined in an environment of globalisation that has multiplied the sources and promoters of information, as well as transversal agendas of international political action.

During the last decade, the number of actors and issues has multiplied, and the consequence has been an expansion in the use of communication as a tool to influence the agenda, evaluate causes (Pamment, 2016b), attract the interest of the public, and exercise power. At the normative level, this manifests itself in the tension between secrecy (diplomatic, military) and information (journalistic, public) as well as between freedom of expression (censorship, humour, satire) and hate speech (harassment, denialism). Sociological analysis investigates the way in which journalistic and audio-visual products are produced and consumed. Moreover, the audiences of these products share the instruments of distribution and acquisition, but not the same cultural or informational patterns. Thus, we are witnessing either the structuring of a global audience or the sum of local audiences who consume global products with more content that is similar, but with less distribution channels, as well as the perception of global problems and foreign culture (Noya, 2012). This issue of the sociological aspect of information and audio-visual consumption could lead either to standardised messages or to new national information structures that are isolated from the globalisation process (Cheng; Golan; Kioussis, 2016). From a comparative perspective, international communication facilitates a myriad of theoretical approaches that combine local as well as global features, whether in the study of gaps between North and South, informational and audio-visual plurality (Valcke; Sukosd; Picard, 2015), the rise of digital diasporas, or the redefinition of the journalistic profession (Hanitzsch et al., 2019).

Analysis of the divisions of the *International Communication Association (ICA)* confirms the difficulty in approaching this object of study:

https://www.icahdq.org/page/div_igs

Following the tenets of the *ICA*, study of the production, distribution and reception of content with an agenda to transform reality are grouped under the heading of social and global change. Intercultural communication is the field that offers an intuitive approach to internationalisation. Political economy studies power relations, business ownership, the impact of corporations, the working conditions of journalists, and other common aspects of the information structure. The environmental section addresses issues of health, risk and science, which are global and transversal matters.

“International communication is the process of creating, producing, distributing and receiving messages in the international arena”

It should be noted that a specialised interest group appears, focusing on public diplomacy, which is an emerging discipline halfway between international relations and strategic communication. The semantic umbrella never ends, as each of the sections offers possibilities for comparative study.

Given this inter-disciplinary and increasingly complex panorama, international communication in this paper refers to the process of creating, producing, distributing and receiving messages in the international arena. Interest in this area has grown exponentially in importance during the process of globalisation, which has imposed social values, a political system, and a dominant economic order on the communication industry. Thussu (2000) analysed the great changes in the information and entertainment model with relevant case studies, such as those of *MTV*, Rupert Murdoch's empire, *TV Globo*, and *ESPN*. The “*CNN effect*” has also been addressed. This is defined as the impact of global television on international policy decisions, which have effects that are uneven and dependent on the national political context, public opinion, and the causes of military or humanitarian intervention. The researcher Gilboa (2005) concludes that there is no unanimous agreement.

This approach is essential in understanding international communication during the first wave of globalisation (Baylis; Smith; Owens, 2014). However, the great recession of 2008 initiated a new period referred to as “political globalisation”, which consists of the rise of emerging countries on the international scene (Mishra, 2017) and their isolationist discourse, as well as other issues including management of the economic crisis, the rise of conflicts involving new-style warfare, the popularity and spread of social networks, acceptance of the discourse of nation and borders (Trump, Boris Johnson, Marine Le Pen, Viktor Orban...), populist movements (Müller, 2016), disinvestment, artificial trade barriers, corporate deglobalisation (*The economist*, 2017; 2019; Tanveer, 2019), and other new features in the scenario that have been subjecting globalisation to discernment (*La vanguardia*, 2017). For this reason, it seems necessary to review the state of communication and international studies in relation to these new elements.

“The “*CNN effect*” has been described as the impact of global television on international policy decisions”

2. Communication and international studies: the strategic dimension

The growth of international communication is linked to the process of economic interdependence, as well as to the heterogeneity and complexity of the sources of influence that challenge the traditional concept of power and sovereignty (Price, 2002). In international studies, essential elements are subject to change: Intermediate powers gain influence in the power structure (Paris, 2019; Fernández-de-Losada, 2019; Rachman, 2018; Fels, 2012), hybrid wars combine military tradition with the intensive use of new technologies such as robots and drones in conflicts within an environment of climate change that affects the design of such operations (Freedman, 2019), and global commerce is increasing as a result of improvements in transportation, technology and communications (Baldwin, 2016). Since 1989, there has been an expansion of multilateralism, free trade agreements, the free flow of ideas, audio-visual content and messages through international communication channels, as well as actors capable of influencing global public opinion. Given this phenomenon, often ignored in the manuals of international relations, it becomes necessary to create a global ethos through international information, whether through television and global media, or through social networks (Gilboa, 2005).

The globalisation of communication affects the values and norms that establish institutionalised procedures and routines for the production of paradigms related to normative standards and knowledge (Sobrinho, 2004; Bauman, 1998). It affects the production, distribution and study of audiences to the extent that the construction of what is “international” is linked to delimited journalistic and academic sources. Anglo-Saxon leadership in international epistemology is evident, which is in line with the very construction of the discipline of international relations in the tradition of American social science (Hoffman, 1977), and naturally, of Western social science as well (Van-der-Pijl, 2014). To see an example of this situation, one only has to review the list of references that accompanies this paper. Even with the commitment to expand sources and languages, the authors cited have preferred to write their findings in English in order for their ideas and research to have global reach, whether or not they are Anglo-Saxon. Wiedemann and Meyen (2016), who warn of the confusion between internationalisation and “Americanisation” in academic institutions, and in the development of communication theories, have studied this situation. Agbobli (2015) points out that methodological innovation in international communication requires a rupture with the paradigm of “Americanisation” in order to address the complexity of other regions of the planet.

“The global market creates value by standardising products and consumer goods, whether they are journals, news information, or audio-visual products”

In the French language, there are several influential authors in international communication, such as Mattelart (1992), Neveu (2001), Benhamou (1996), and Cabedoche (2016). Cultural diversity is one of the recurring issues in the non-Anglo-Saxon academic literature. Rasse (2013) compiles a set of essays to defend the need for public policy on international communication in order to defend diversity and identity, a clear response to the trend toward Americanisation of the language, as well as its cultural and linguistic uses (Jean, 2016). In addition, French-speaking authors have helped to introduce trends and analyses of sub-Saharan Africa (Agbobli, 2014). These approaches, like those in Latin America, are under-represented in the major journals. Enghel and Becerra (2018) reproach the fact that the development of theory has taken too much from Anglo-Saxon sources and has added a scant amount of innovative and significant ideas to the general corpus of communication coming from Latin American countries. This question is somewhat surprising with regard to the German language, in which case the main authors prefer to conduct their research in English, as shown in the bibliography. The scarce number of authors found during the intense bibliographic review has led me to select fewer works than expected. Hartig (2019) publishes a didactic handbook, while Berghofer (2017) links international communication to theoretical and analytical aspects of communication policy.

At the journalistic level, factors such as the ownership of news agencies, which even today convey messages and agendas, as well as the predominance of audio-visual information through the major channels, and the predominance of the English language in social networks, all point to a specific model of the communication industry (Chalaby, 2016). Thus, the global market creates value through the standardisation of products and objects of consumption, whether they are

journals, news information, or audio-visual products (Chalaby; Esser, 2017; Surm, 2019). Information and audio-visual globalization are based on standardization, which is limited in a universe of oligopolistic producers and distributors. The reader or viewer chooses from an extensive catalogue, though it is not infinite.

In the journalistic field, the ethos of this paradigm is based on the idea of objectivity and precision (Dahlgren, 2009), as well as on its contribution to the construction of democratic societies (Schudson, 2018). Esser and Neuberger (2019) reflect on the democratic function of the press in a context of increasing digitisation. They identify an agenda of challenges for the profession, such as the arrival of new actors in the surveillance of political activity (e.g. *WikiLeaks*), the communicative use of social movements, or the general acceptance of mass surveillance through the use of social networks and mobile devices. This change may alter the journalistic ethos.

The epistemological dimension of this ethos supports the legal basis of freedom of information and expression, which seems to be well adapted to the multilateral system. This appears in the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights*, the *Community Acquis*, *Unesco's* extensive documentation, the texts of the *Inter-American Court of Human Rights*, media literacy policies, the campaigns of *Reporters without Borders*, and in many other international institutions. This is where the ideal of the international journalist, correspondent and special envoy is established, one who is open to the world and explains to local audiences the cause and effect of events. This mental image in the collective imagination depicts a professional traveller and good chronicle writer. Some recurrent names in this journalistic Olympus include the following: Manuel Chaves Nogales, Sofía Casanova, Gerda Taro, Ilya Ehrenburg, George Orwell, Martha Philby, Indro Montanelli, Manuel Leguineche, Ryszard Kapucinski, Marie Colvin, James Nachtwey, Seymour Hersh, James W. Foley, Anna Politkovskaya, Christiane Amanpour, and Svetlana Aleksievich.

In the field of entertainment and advertising, economies of scale in the international trade of audio-visual goods and services promote barrier-free circulation of film releases, musical hits, advertising formats, and sports stars. Audio-visual culture is a vehicle for the envisioned global

Communication is not present in the doctrine and conventional study of international relations

community, which now has a universal nature as a result of platforms, new media, and other technological devices. Supply and demand have converged thanks to recommendations, popular content, advertising campaigns, meme culture, and a certain filter bubble of preferences on how quality audio-visual production is defined. The massive increase in the consumption of TV series is in line with this phenomenon of global consumption and popular culture (Carpenter, 2019).

Despite these milestones, communication is not present in the doctrine and conventional study of international relations. This discipline examines the conduct of affairs and relations among actors in the international scenario. Studies are based on the analysis of theory and external action, and on the set of behaviours, contacts and interactions that the actors have with each other.

When decisions are organized and prioritized, one can speak of a foreign policy based on the capabilities, desires, needs and motivations of the actors involved. The institutionalisation of foreign policy goes hand in hand with the consolidation of the State as a rational unitary actor that deploys a catalogue of instruments to achieve its objectives. Specifically, these include military force, economic relations, international cooperation, and multilateralism, just to mention the most common. Each of these actions requires the use of international communication to achieve its objectives. Therefore, this is not a minor element in the implementation of external action, although its study has not been one of the main areas of research in communication or political science. The first references are from the 1960s and 1970s, when international communication was institutionalized as a sub-field of international relations (*The American University*, 1989).

In theory, the State is the legitimate institution of foreign action, although in practice the number of actors involved in the design, production and implementation of international decisions has multiplied (Melissen, 2005). Thus, ministries of foreign affairs have conveyed messages with a certain undisputed authority. However, the crisis (Cassidy; Manor, 2016) and uncertainty (Boulton; Allen; Bowman, 2015) have transformed the public communication sphere.

Cities, corporations, sub-state entities, international organizations, civic associations and social movements regularly participate in the global arena with or without specific powers, and they do so according to international law. A brief analysis of the international activities on this list shows that they use communication to achieve their objectives given the scarcity of legal instruments to enable other types of action. Public diplomacy, conferences and digital activism are examples of this affirmation.

The communicative perspective of international studies changes when the concept of power is broadened and its strategic aspect is understood. According to Hirschman (1945; 2006), communication contributes to the creation of power and influence as part of a strategy to protect national interests, which is equally as important as foreign trade or defence. The strategic aspect is achieved when governments decide how resources will be used (time, money and personnel), how mechanisms and working procedures will be created and arranged (tribunals, plans, trade agreements), and most importantly, how political values will be promoted (participation in international organizations such as *NATO* or projects like the *Silk Road*), economics (country bran-

The crisis and uncertainty have transformed the public communication sphere

ding), and internal aspects (actions directed at the internal public carried out by State-less leaders of nations in order to internationalize their causes). Thus, communication guides politics and international trade, underpins identity, promotes national interests, and aligns itself with the objectives of power. For **Krugman** (1986), the strategic condition means gaining a competitive advantage in the global sphere that generates benefits in political or economic terms.

Outside of this framework, a systematic review of the bibliography reveals that communication seems to be digressive or linked to particular phenomena, more as an anecdote (see Schabowski's error² in **Großman**, 2013) than as a central concept through which messages are conveyed to shape public opinion. Few authors have assessed the impact of the media transformation in shaping the international scene. There are notable exceptions: **Nicholson** (1935) began studying the effects of the emerging public opinion on British diplomacy. **Carr** (1939) pointed out that international power has military, economic and public opinion features. **Deutsch** (1953; 1978) was the first to systematically integrate communication into his analyses of the structuring of nationalism and the political community, and the international reality. For **Strange** (1988), communication is the mechanism for exercising relational power and the cornerstone of structural power. For **Krasner** (1991), international public communication serves the interests of those who can determine the rules and actors, or in other words, it provides a legitimizing interpretation of external action. Krasner explains four aspects of communicative power:

“Sets of implicit or explicit principles, norms, rules and decision-making procedures around which the expectations of the actors involved converge in a given area of international relations. Principles are long-held beliefs, causality and rectitude. Norms are standards of behaviour defined in terms of rights and obligations. Rules are specific prescriptions or proscriptions for action. Decision-making procedures are prevailing practices for making and implementing collective choice (**Krasner**, 1983, p. 185).

This approach is similar to the one developed by Keohane and Nye, who define political regimes as follows:

“Networks of rules, norms, and procedures that standardize behaviour and control its effects” (**Keohane; Nye**, 1977, p. 19).

Political ideas shape different regimens of knowledge and expression, which facilitate the way foreign policy is organized, the relations between journalists and diplomats, and the capability of influence by other actors (**Campbell; Pedersen**, 2014).

International communication is important for cultural relations, (**Ardnt**, 2006; **Rivera**, 2015), the transformation of global values and norms of “cosmopolitan democracy” (**Norris; Inglehart**, 2009), the structuring of international information (**Jarren; Künzler; Puppis**, 2019), freedom of expression and censorship (**Molnar**, 2015), activities of non-governmental organizations (**Powers**, 2016), the audio visualization of events (**Dayan; Katz**, 1994), major sporting contests (**Xifra**, 2009; **Samuel-Azran**, 2013), and the globalization of political publicity (**Strömbäck; Kioussis**, 2011), brands and consumption patterns (**Manfredi**, 2019). Thus, international communication is not just *CNN* or Hollywood, even though these two brands established the principles of journalistic information and audio-visual entertainment in the 20th century.

International communication is the cornerstone of power building and influence management when faced with an international audience. The seduction or attraction toward a country's interests combines true facts (trade flows, policies with neighbouring countries, diplomatic relations) with the desires or aspirations of the audience (a better life, a country with freedom, more security on the streets, fewer foreigners in social services, and so on). The emotional or pre-political aspect of this attraction influences the audience's interpretation of the foreign policy of a country. This power of ideas is clearly set out by Alleyne as follows:

“It is the power of certain types of information, and is distinct from the power of communication which refers to the media through which these ideas and other information are disseminated” (**Alleyne**, 1995, p. 15).

In summary, academic and professional interest in international communication is reflected in a broad analysis of power structures, or in other words, the relational capability to influence the knowledge, judgment and behaviour of individuals and institutions. Communication policies, the design and legal framework of institutions, promotion of the free exchange of ideas and opinions, use of force, the very definition of propaganda, interference in electoral communications, or the future of a neutral network, are aspects that now appear on the horizon.

3. International communication and the shaping of power

Power is a polysemous concept, defined as the ability to influence and modify the environment through actions or decisions. In the field of politics, it relates to the thematic agenda, framing and priming, or to the spiral of silence. Entman summarizes the key aspects in his authoritative definition:

“Communication contributes to the creation of power and influence as part of a strategy to protect national interests, which is equally as important as foreign trade or defence”

“*CNN* and Hollywood established the principles of journalistic information and audiovisual entertainment in the 20th century”

“The organized attempts by a president and his foreign policy apparatus to exert as much control as possible over the framing of U.S. policy in the foreign media” (Entman, 2008, p. 89).

In companies, different names are used: institutional relations, public affairs, political capital, social responsibility, social marketing, and corporate diplomacy, just to mention the most commonly known. Communication at the international level is justified by the political nature of the management of global companies- reputation and legitimacy are sources of competitive advantage (Scherer; Palazzo, 2011; Den-Hond *et al.*, 2014). Thus, each discipline tries to delimit the way in which influence is exercised, how the legitimacy of power is created, how counter-force acts, and what role is played by public and private authorities. Today, these decisions have an international scale.

Communication is the cornerstone, as its goal is to have an impact on the receiver. It encompasses symbolic, formal or graphic expression, so it transforms abstract information into specific expressions adjusted to common cultural criteria. By action or omission, this only happens when there is an “other” who is affected by the circulation of informative messages. It organizes the dissemination of messages, establishes a type of relationship between public and private actors, limits or extends individual rights related to information, and promotes propagandistic models, among other features.

In this situation, propaganda is defined as the process that aims to change and influence political behaviour. Outside the journalistic field, fiction promotes entertainment, experience and participation. Cinema, literature (Salman Rushdie or Houellebecq), theatre, video games (Wills, 2019), television programmes, or content for mobile devices are reliable instruments for international action. “Geopolitical television” creates fiction linked to international issues and scenarios, constructs plausible political worlds, and raises the question of the identity of “them” against “us” (Saunders, 2019). This framework of analysis is relevant because popular audio-visual culture has become one of the defining instruments of reality. Nowadays with programmes like Homeland, Narcos, Okkupert, Years and Years, or Marseille, and even earlier with the political cinema of Polanski, Pilar Miró or Costa-Gavras, the audience has been consuming ideas and political proposals that explain through fiction the relations of power and the tensions between national and individual interests. Such fiction is true to life, even though it may be set in the territory where the idea was invented, so the audience ends up affirming their assumptions as interpretations that are close to what happens in the real world.

Communication accomplishes organized coexistence, norms of conduct and institutions, with different models according to tradition and political geography (Hallin; Mancini, 2004). It builds the political, legal and administrative system by defining the scope of individual rights (e.g. freedom of expression) and international order (e.g. agreements for the protection of rights). Messages are disseminated through structured and established channels (official bulletins, interviews, press releases, and institutional websites) as well as those that are unstructured (unofficial statements, propaganda, social networks, and conferences), both of which influence the development of international affairs. In particular, diplomacy is an area that has institutionalized the intensive use of information to achieve its objectives as a result of *pacta sunt servanda* (agreements must be kept). The value of the written word lies in establishing points of agreement or disagreement. The instruments are diverse: treaties, agreements, international signatures, but also declarations, systems for making consultations, non-regulatory agreements, and more recently, tweets or videos for the digital universe. Whatever the media, the importance of establishing the foundations of commitments in documents that are transmitted and shared has been recognized.

However, discord among today’s realities (globalization, digitization, sovereignty crises, other key situations) and the course of international public law points to the need to examine these communication strategies, as well as information activity and relations between states and the media as part of the very process of redefining the sovereignty and capability of action by international actors, the social production of knowledge, and the management of conflicts- in other words, the very essence of power. Thus, four interpretations of the relationship between communication and power have been presented, and have allowed this review article to explain the epistemological foundations of the discipline and organize the main theories therein. As such, we propose the four following central concepts of analysis: hard, soft, sharp power, and the strategic narrative. We would now like to examine each of them one by one.

3.1. Hard power: communicative realism

Realism is the dominant doctrine in international relations. It affirms that the State is the only institution that can guarantee stability and order in an environment of anarchy. Therefore, sovereignty is an unyielding value, the result of an independent political community acting as the sole authority over its territory. The viewpoint of power, force or domination justifies the decisions taken within the State, which competes in a rational way with other States to stabilize the system. It corresponds to a static vision of international reality based on political geography that rejects the real capabilities for action by other actors or through institutional cooperation.

This type of international system is based on the management and use of hard power, which is the expression of communicative realism. It consists of using military force and economic assets with the intention of affecting the behaviour of a given actor on the international stage. This is in line with the realist doctrine and the defence of national interests in an environment of structural anarchy. Thus, communication is the continuation of other tools of power, such as trade, sanctions or coercion. It is used to impose frameworks for understanding reality and its meaning (Qin, 2015; Drezner, 2017), to legitimize causes through the organisation of information and propaganda campaigns (Audinet, 2017), and to

attract segments of the population through the use of celebrities and entertainment (**Quessard-Salvaing**, 2018). Other post-1945 nomenclatures such as psychological operations or manufactured consent (**Herman; Chomsky**, 1988) have been left behind, but not their objectives (**Chesney; Citron**, 2019).

The rhetoric of war has employed communication as an instrument of influence in line with the hard interpretation of power. The idea of the “weaponization of everything” (**Mousavizadeh**, 2015) and “political warfare” has taken root in literature and political action. A report by the *Rand Corporation* (**Robinson et al.**, 2018) has revived the expressions of diplomat George F. Kennan when he referred to broadening the range of activities involving the use of power and influence that occur in international intervention. Diplomacy, economic relations and military strategy are based on information, propaganda, support for resistance movements, and public diplomacy. International communication is part of the control structure with specific initiatives to change behaviour and states of public opinion. Therefore, communication is no longer an instrument, but instead becomes a strategic, differentiating element in international operations in times of peace (e.g. Russian interference in the US elections), as well as those of a warlike nature (*Islamic State, Al Qaeda, Boko Haram*).

Secondly, political power influences the structure and organization of technology, with regulatory production adapted to the distinctive features of each country or system. It is exercised for State defence against external attacks, real or simulated, which justify control over forms of expression and information. The weakening of borders also makes it difficult to address the problem with guarantees:

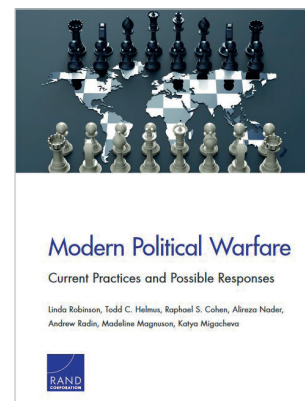
“Disinformation is not a threat that comes from outside. It has now become an internal reality. It is not the cause, but rather the consequence of the transformation of the European public sphere; of increasingly blurred borders between fact and opinion; between the disruptive capacity of the outside and the increasing power of internal actors” (**Colomina**, 2019, p. 44).

Non-liberal systems put pressure on Internet freedom and persecute digital dissent (**Mackinnon**, 2013). On the other hand, in open societies pressure is exerted through regulation, limits on business pluralism, blocking the right of access to public information, or defending an idea as “good taste” or “blasphemy” for the purpose of interfering with professional activity. The study by **Bennett and Naim** (2015) identifies numerous censorship practices present in both dictatorial and democratic countries (**Garton-Ash**, 2016; **Parcu**, 2019).

What remains to be seen is how hard power practices will shape the digital information system, as well as platforms, artificial intelligence or database control, among other elements of public communication policy (**Picard; Pickard**, 2017). Faced with an historical model of data collection for public ownership issues, the number and range of private actors who capture, organize and market data to third parties has skyrocketed. This issue affects the protection of free expression, because highly sensitive aspects such as privacy, censorship or hate speech are subject to private interests (**Toscano-Méndez**, 2017). On another level, hard power can use this information to influence behaviour, preferences, sexual orientation and practices, or the expression of political emotions (**Arias-Maldonado**, 2016). The use of data for political publicity to promote a cause or undermine the legitimacy of opposing ideas is the order of the day (**Pasquale**, 2015). The very act of capturing and systemizing the collection process is a response to a predefined political pattern specified in the definition of what is public and what is private, as well as what can be marketed or exploited in business practice. The political nature of data is a reaction to social practices, political decisions, and resource allocation in accordance with political priorities (**Green**, 2018). With public or private ownership, monopoly or duopoly, the institutionalization of big data shows an unavoidable relationship, so we can speak of a type of “data politics” (**Ruppert; Isin; Bigo**, 2017). Policy, data, privacy and communication represent a continuum in the use of power.

Ultimately, it will be interesting to see how hard power utilizes platforms and intermediaries in the process of controlling communication to the extent to which it restructures the environment (**Nielsen; Ganter**, 2018). The European system stands for extensive protection of individual rights and a model of incumbent operators in the form of local giants, or ‘European champions’, so to speak. The American proposal is based on market logic and the strength of ideas. Rights are protected *a posteriori*, should an infringement occur. The Chinese ideal uses public exposure of data to control public behaviour and attitudes, drives innovation from the state, and places international communication within the framework of security and the promotion of social welfare (**Kostka**, 2019). At this point, two questions arise: As a superpower, will a country be able to lead in the protection of fundamental rights on the Internet in a scenario of growing multipolarity? Moreover, will a country be able to lead the information and audio-visual industry, as in the golden age of Hollywood and news agencies, in an environment of fragmented audiences and disaggregated distribution channels?

In the audio-visual world, the proliferation of messages, tools, communication industries, and audiences are contributing to the contemporary problem of national identity. Nationalist and populist governments are attempting to gain ground in the audio-visual industry, both in fiction and in news services. The passive attitude of receiving content at a low cost defines markets, channels and audience consumption. The domestic market of each State has been weakened



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due to the fact that regulations and the consumers themselves have been organised on another level, either that of the European Union or that of American influence, which seeks to be the global standard and finances its international production (**Murschetz; Teichmann; Karmassin**, 2018). China is committed to the globalisation of its audio-visual products through the intense promotion of films, authors and directors, both in cinemas and on platforms. This explains the commitment by *Amazon Prime* to bring to Liu Cixin's eponymous novel, "The three-body problem", to the screen. It will be the most expensive production in history. With a budget of \$1 billion, it doubles that of its immediate predecessor, the "Lord of the rings" TV series. "The wandering earth", by the same author, is available on *Netflix*. This is a science fiction film that explains China's role in the threatened future of humanity. Hollywood or European films are no longer alone in the race for the audio-visual industry, which has a value chain that can be described as follows:

"Since the 1990s, the industry has been characterised by the rapid, synchronised growth of networks and television formats, and audio-visual entertainment concepts that are licensed or adapted for local audiences" (**Chalaby**, 2016, p. 35).

The rest of the emerging countries have copied this second strategy, and consequently, the new borders are not established based on political geography, but on ideologically oriented information blocks with their own controls, barriers and rules. The most obvious example is the *Organic law of personal data protection and guarantee of digital rights (LO-PD-GDD)*, which implements the *General data protection regulations (RGPD)* against the technological giants financed by US capital. Debate on the impact of *Facebook* and other corporations on the Brexit referendum, the campaigns for the *European Parliament* in 2019, and other political activities have helped raise awareness among European citizens regarding the phenomenon of control and surveillance by social networks.

Fiction and entertainment are also used to consolidate new audio-visual markets in order to fight against an understanding of the world. Thus, "our truth" is raised to the category of audio-visual information against fake news coming from international journalistic actors (Yablokov, 2015). This separation promotes the expansion of audio-visual products in markets that are large, yet short of Anglo-Saxon information production, such as the *Commonwealth of Independent States* in Russia's sphere of influence. In other cases, populism feeds a kind of "informational authoritarianism" (Guriev; Triesman, 2018) that controls messages, company owners and professional quality standards. The economic bias of information reduces interest in political issues as well as matters of openness and democracy, and consequently, this authoritarianism reflects strong leadership that delivers economic results (growth, exports, employment) without other shades of political liberalism.

In short, communicative realism aims to control messages and channels in such a way as to reward an interpretation of globalization in accordance with the interests of the promoting State. This reality is related to communicative intervention in line with other national interests, so the usual tools (content, television stations, audio-visual markets, journalistic information, subscriptions) are all used to achieve the declared strategic objective.

3.2. Soft power: attraction, seduction and legitimacy

The story of the global society, of Westphalian origin, which organizes the international system and favours the creation of long periods of stability, works within a framework of stable borders and internal control. However, this myth (**Osiander**, 2001) has encountered successive impediments that have led to its collapse (**Ikenberry**, 2011; **Duncombe; Dunne**, 2018) or mass failure (**Strange**, 1999). Communication has contributed to the blurring of borders through the expansion of content that standardizes the consumption of information and entertainment, so that biographies are globalized and values are shared on a worldwide scale. Steensen and Ahva explain the dismantling of borders, not only geographically, but also with regard to the information structures themselves:

"Between nation states; national markets; local and global; public and private; mass communication and interactive communication; professionals and amateurs; production and consumption; and professions –just to name a few" (**Steensen; Ahva**, 2015, p. 4).

For Aznar-Fernández-Montesinos, the current international context is complex:

"It is a grey area between war and peace, between internal and external, business and politics, civil and military, or national and multinational. Furthermore, borders are conveniently moved between what is public and private, privacy and surveillance, freedom and control, national and transnational, and so on, with all of the instability and insecurity that it brings" (**Aznar-Fernández-Montesinos**, 2019, p. 132).

From a theoretical perspective, the thesis of complex interdependence has been consolidated (**Orsini et al.**, 2019). A country is simultaneously an energy supplier, a weapons buyer, a defender of practices contrary to human rights, a trade adversary, and a partner in the fight against global terrorism. This contradiction generates dysfunctional management of walls and borders. In international communication, it contains many elements: telecommunications, networks and platforms; the protection of intellectual property, and now intangibles such as algorithms and brands; the demarcation of markets; the audio-visual and culture industry; the media system and journalistic profession; and the regulation of data protection and advertising. For this reason, new theoretical reasoning has been sought that will allow power and influence to be exercised without the use of coercive instruments. Hence, the emergence of the theory developed by **Nye** (1990; 2004), who points out that the capacity to build alliances, attract the interest of international audiences,

share agendas and promote mutual understanding is a successful strategy for the exercise of power. Exchanges occur in the areas of media, education and culture, as well as trade and business relations. Haass points out that the aim of this instrument is global leadership through ideas and culture:

“US influence would reflect the appeal of American culture, the strength of the American economy, and the attractiveness of the norms being promoted. Coercion and the use of force would normally be a secondary option” (Haass, 1999, p. 41).

Soft power emerges within this context. It consists of the ability to organize the political agenda according to political preferences in a way that influences individuals, civil society, various levels of government, and international organizations. This interpretation of power is based on values, culture and intangibles that strengthen a position and foster the implementation of international projects.

This new approach to power occurred after the fall of the Berlin Wall and the gradual reduction of armed conflicts. Without the need to impose (nuclear) force, the United States revised its foreign policy and intervention strategy with an emphasis on the creation of capabilities adapted to a world in which it remained the hegemonic force (Cull, 2012). Culture, values and public policy have been used for external action intended to persuade, influence, shape behaviour, or put pressure on foreign governments. The inventory of instruments is large: the intensification of cultural relations, student exchange agreements, international broadcasting of audio-visual content, cultural events, global sports contests, development cooperation, tourism, and the human rights doctrine itself (Rieff, 2003; Ignatieff, 2001), all of which offer new ways of carrying out external influence without the need to violate the political order. It is based on the classic theory of Keohane and Nye (1977) regarding interdependence in the exercise of power. Such theses are a further development of the ideas of Putnam (1988) and his work on the logic of the two-level game theory between national and international events, revised by Bjola and Manor (2018) in order to study the case of the nuclear agreement with Iran. The orientation toward audiences rather than governments runs parallel to the widespread adoption of Internet as a source of global information (Servaes, 2013).

The utilization of soft power occurs through public diplomacy. It can be defined as the management of international political communication in accordance with certain interests related to foreign policy activities. Its objective is the exercise of influence by an entity over a foreign public by developing communication strategies that include educational, informative and entertainment programs (Manfredi, 2011). The original notion focuses on State activity (Gilboa, 2016), yet reality has shown it to be a common practice among all actors in the global sphere (Melissen, 2005).

This broad definition makes it possible to analyse the management of the external image, the use of intangibles, and the use of communication and cultural instruments to promote a political project on an international scale. Cull (2019) divides the repertory of actions into five categories: active listening, promotion of interests, cultural diplomacy, educational exchanges and programmes, and international audio-visual broadcasts. There are many examples in the academic literature (Grincheva, 2019) and in the press. Saudi Arabia has established “Jeddah Season”, an international music and theatre festival. Qatar has promoted its National Museum, designed by architect Jean Nouvel, as an architectonic endeavour that houses first class works. Abu Dhabi has opened a satellite museum linked to the Louvre in Paris. The City of Malaga has created an attractive hub surrounded by exhibitions and museums, thereby allowing it to diversify its tourist offering. The *Hermitage* collection of the Russian State has opened exhibition halls in Amsterdam, and plans to do so in Barcelona in 2022. Catalonia is striving to strengthen the international character of its culture as well (De-San-Eugenio-Vela; Xifra, 2014). In recent years, leadership by politicians regarding public issues has recaptured the interest of the academic community (Aznar-Fernández-Montesinos, 2018). President Barack Obama’s rhetoric, Michel Barnier’s speeches to the *European Parliament*, Angela Merkel’s gestures, and the charisma of Cristina Fernández de Kichner and Pepe Múgica, are all used to persuade, move or lead causes. The use of *Twitter* has boosted this trend of public diplomacy and international power in real time (Seib, 2012b). The example has spread, and other political leaders have used the same techniques to achieve their goals, with Donald Trump being the epitome of populism in this period of globalisation (Bødker; Anderson, 2019).

However, the very development of public diplomatic activity generates a certain degree of theoretical, conceptual and methodological uncertainty (Ingenhoff *et al.*, 2018; Labarca, 2017). This lack of order has led to management of the country brand as a succession of empty slogans (Pamment, 2016a). This obsessive management model can lead to the following:

“The focus on a country’s reputation is an obstacle to other instruments of diplomacy” (Cull, 2019, p. 139).

Public diplomacy as an expression of soft power is characterized by conveying the interests of different actors through public-private partnerships, international non-profit organisations, Diasporas, educational programmes, and other instruments open to third parties. Cull concludes that these global communication operations identify common objectives, such as Agenda 2030, or the fight against climate change, and consequently, this “obsession with national brands” (Cull, 2019, p. 161) distorts many of the current publicity management models of the external image of countries. This understanding of the common good is dynamic and characteristic of international challenges that involve the participation of sub-state governments, companies or cities with instruments involving journalists, publicists and politicians (Barber,

2017; **McNamara**, 2014; **La-Porte**, 2012; **Zeraoui**; **Castillo-Villar**, 2016). This explains why other initiatives are shared: the *Hay Festival*, offices to promote filming (film commissions), the *Camino de Santiago*, *Municipal Alliance for Peace in the Middle East*, *United Cities and Local Governments*, and many other projects and actions.

The theoretical structuring of soft power does not mean an end to the use of military force or economic pressure, but instead signifies the development of other instruments, among which communication stands out as a motor for change in the perception, judgement and behaviour of international audiences.

This combination is called smart power:

“Smart power means developing an integrated strategy, resource base, and tool kit to achieve American objectives, drawing on both hard and soft power” (**Armitage**; **Nye**, 2007, p. 7),

Because

“soft power is rarely enough on its own” (**Nye**, 2018).

Nye concludes the following:

“Smart power combines the hard power of coercion and payment with the soft power of persuasion and attraction” (**Nye**, 2011, p. xiii).

The interest in this inclusive trend is aligned with the crisis of the State as a priority unit of analysis in international relations (**Jordan**, 2018). **Curtis** and **Acuto** (2018), **Bjola** and **Holmes** (2015), **Manor** (2019), and above all **Slaughter** (2004; 2017), theorise about the redistribution of power and its epistemological consequences. Owen emphasizes the role of the digital transformation in the State crisis:

“The State as the primary unit of the international system is being challenged, both for power as well as legitimacy, by a wide range of new individuals, groups, and ad hoc networks, all empowered by digital technology” (**Owen**, 2015, pp. 209-210).

In the words of Slaughter, the new order can be described as follows:

“It is not a map of separation, of marking off boundaries of sovereign power, but of connection, of density and intensity of ties across boundaries” (**Slaughter**, 2017, p. 7).

Der-Derian proclaimed the radical transformation that lies behind it:

“Unlike previous developments in transport, communication and information, virtual innovation is driven more by software than by hardware. It is carried out through networks before it is handled by agents, which translates into adaptation (and mutation) that is easier and faster” (**Der-Derian**, 2000, p. 772).

To the extent to which networks make it difficult for hegemonic actors to become consolidated, smart power requires innovation in international governance. In diplomatic affairs, **Cornago** (2013) considers that the plurality of actors and interests requires open instruments and agreements resulting from soft and hard mechanisms.

In summary, the role of public communication in the implementation of soft power strategies has become one of the most dynamic elements of the external action of international actors and academic studies. Its flexibility, speed and prestige converge in an attractive activity for the exercise of communicative power.

3.3. Sharp power: the dishonest influence

The third central concept is sharp power, which **Nye** (2018) defines as the use of dishonest information for hostile purposes by a State or one of its agents. The semantic umbrella of the term ‘sharp power’ refers to the influence exerted by authoritarian states through the use of three types of activities:

“Intention (to destabilize or undermine the morality of the adversary instead of informing or showing one’s own culture), use of the media (through lies or distortion), and the absence of publicity (a surreptitious or hidden character)” (**López-Aranda**, 2019, p. 24).

The ability to trace the information is one of the keys to distinguishing sharp power, which uses short-term tactics (an election or propaganda campaign, political action) less than long-term stratagems (reputation or country brand). It obtains preliminary support from anti-diplomacy (**Der-Derian**, 1987), the behaviour of which explains the attitude of some international actors. These are professional practices that challenge authority, develop a new language, and promote new values that are diametrically opposed to the liberal Wilsonian order. The digital society provides new opportunities for diplomatic innovation and the emergence of actors working on the side-lines of states and the international organizations created by them (**Der-Derian**, 2009).

This activity is associated with the intervention of Russia and China in the international arena through techniques that seek to attack the values and principles of open societies, as well as their electoral systems and procedures (**Walker**; **Ludwig**, 2017; **Tworek**, 2019). **Cardinal**, **Kucharczyk**, **Mesežnikov** and **Pleschová** (2017) have presented four specific cases of intervention in Peru, Argentina, Slovakia and Poland with a wide variety of actions to influence and interfere in electoral processes and the shaping of public opinion.

In Russia, the precedent can be found in the USSR's own international communication. The so-called "active measures" were

"propaganda, provocation, manipulation of the foreign media, infiltration by operatives, covert paramilitary operations, or a *kombinatiya*" (Aznar-Fernández-Montesinos, 2019, p. 140).

An updated version of this idea has become vaguely popular under the label of the "Gerasimov doctrine" as an add-on to cyberwar, cyber intelligence, disinformation and propaganda, a sort of "grey area" of information, military operations and low-intensity actions (Baqués, 2017).

The academic literature has been more critical of the Chinese strategy, often identified as the "charm offensive" (Kurlantzick, 2007), which hides the country's intentions and puts international branches of the *Confucius Institute* in the spotlight. Sahlins (2015) calls them "academic malware", and McCord (2014) considers them a threat to academic freedom. A report prepared by the *National Endowment for Democracy* (2017) details Chinese practices in several countries, especially in Latin America and Eastern Europe: newspapers, media, scholarships, think tanks, and technological support are used to increase the presence and reputation of the Asian giant.

Sharp power utilizes a weakness inherent in democracies and open societies, which is openness to the free flow of ideas and direct contact with authoritarian states, yet without mediation through blocks or multilateral institutions. To this end, imprecise content is disseminated through mobile devices to take advantage of "cognitive vulnerabilities" (Fernández-Dols, 2019, p. 52) which are errors of perception, the feeling of being right, or the desire to be right. Echo chambers and information bubbles affect political and electoral behaviour less than the erosion of social trust in democratic institutions and processes. Aznar-Fernández-Montesinos explains that sharp power acts in the following way:

"It tries to present itself as just one more expression of information plurality, a type of alternative" (Aznar-Fernández-Montesinos, 2019, p. 146).

To the extent that its leadership style is different and has shaped new concepts such as "peaceful growth", or the "new style of great power relations", its appearance generates concern (Hinck *et al.*, 2016).

However, this theoretical structure is reminiscent of alternative facts or "politically incorrect" content. Under the label, "you won't see this in the traditional media", supremacist, racist and misogynist content is spread (Marwick; Lewis, 2017). The intellectual ambiguity of "alternative facts" makes it easy for the Russian and Chinese media to position themselves as information options far removed from the Western journalistic paradigm. Audiences become disoriented, low-quality audiences are legitimized, and the blame for false information is placed on the adversary. Therefore, all of this 'noise' makes it difficult to comprehend international news. Moreover, the consumption of such information and cultural services promotes a non-Western identity that opens up other avenues of influence that are not necessarily pernicious. This epistemological breach in the international community affects the legal criteria that support freedom of information and expression against hate speech, or the protection of national interests over individual freedom. This is no small matter.

The intensive use of digital technologies has increased the capability of conveying opinions and comments that erode open institutions, either through bots and troll farms, memes, data surveillance and spying (*Huawei, Xiaomi*), or the automation of inaccurate content. This characteristic makes it difficult to respond in an environment of ephemeral communication. Hamid-Akin Ünver explains:

"The cost of defending against such attacks requires a large amount of resources and better coordination. Even when the defender is successful, the psychological process is consuming and persistent" (Ünver, 2017, p. 7).

The logic of digital reproduction generates economies of scale that take advantage of the free nature of social networks in order to share and distribute information, knowing or not knowing whether it is imprecise, or even blatantly false.

The European Union's response to this phenomenon is part of its global foreign policy strategy. It should be emphasised that China is now a systemic rival and not just a usual economic competitor (*European Commission*, 2019). In this scenario, it is true that communication is used as a tool to promote one's own values and counteract disinformation campaigns and hybrid threats (*European Commission*, 2018; *Swedish Civil Contingencies Agency*, 2018). The European approach encompasses the protection of data and individual rights, the regulation of digital platforms, the fight against false content, and the protection of electoral processes against possible interference. Thus, European cybersecurity gives priority to international communication, not only to channels or technologies.

In summary, sharp power is unique in its use of propaganda techniques that are already known, as well as in public diplomacy adapted to the new times.

Therein lies the bewilderment of Europeans and Americans, as Russia and China have deployed their powers of seduction and attraction not only to defend their interests, but also to degrade those of others. In a situation of economic crisis and social disbelief, these new threats require a systematic examination by liberal democracies.

3.4. Strategic narrative: consolidating the new paradigm

The fourth theoretical development that should be added to the mix is the proposal of **Roselle, Miskimmon** and **O’Loughlin** (2014): the strategic narrative. These authors describe this phenomenon as follows:

“Political actors attempt to build shared meaning of the past, present, and future of international politics in order to shape the behavior of domestic and international actors” (**Miskimmon; O’Loughlin; Roselle**, 2017, pp. 77-78).

This narrative examines the social dimension of the communicative experience, which creates meaning according to our networks and peers. Identity is developed by networking in a community of shared meaning. This is relevant because personal contact affects the content of the message: it is more reliable if it comes from a source close to one’s own interests (mobile messaging, social networks). Therefore, this narrative explains events and gives them meaning according to a code, an experience, and a future perspective. The design, implementation, and audience reception of the messages leads to the development of shared meaning, either to promote agreements related to international consensus, or to identify blind spots. The definition of concepts such as “terrorist” and “occupied territory”, or even human rights themselves, explain how each political actor projects their interests through narratives in three levels of analysis.

The first level is the system narrative, which explains the position of a political actor when confronted by, as well as within, the international order. The key is knowing how countries perceive themselves, especially when they have been great powers, through their cultural expressions, statements made by their political leaders, and the international events they organize. This international scope has an impact on the local audience. The case of Russia is paradigmatic, as it declares that Russian culture has contributed to universal civilization on the same level as other schools of thought or values, such as public international law or liberal democracy (**Miskimmon; O’Loughlin**, 2017). **Snyder** (2018) points out that the narrative of Putin’s Russia is a mix of nationalist ideology, a sense of destiny, resentment toward the West, and a high dose of cynicism. **Pomerantsev** (2019) explains the disintegration of the Russian information system and how disinformation is managed by political powers with little opposition from professional journalism. This argument is also found in the disappointment demonstrated toward the European Union by the Visegrad group of countries (Hungary, Poland, the Czech Republic, and Slovakia), which see themselves as the losers of European globalisation, as expressed in recurrent disagreement with the *acquis communautaire* (**Krastev**, 2017).

Secondly, the identity narrative explains the rise in the use of history, pre-political values, and the uniqueness of a territory in explaining its participation in global events. In **Fukuyama’s** work (2018), the question of identity, recognition, or dignity (translated from the classical Greek term *thymos*), is identified with the resurgence of strong political leadership with an authoritarian profile. **Norris** and **Inglehart** (2019) explain Brexit as an identity phenomenon rooted in wars between generations regarding culture and values. Stateless nations claim their right to exist as well as international recognition of their identity, whether real or figurative. Other countries recreate contexts of past empires in order to gain legitimacy in their geographical regions. **Frankopan** (2018) explains how Iran is using Chinese investments in the new Silk Road to position itself as the backbone of Asia, thereby reinforcing its own vision of regional power and universal civilisation. In this case, the use of memory is one of the essential changes in the handling of international political communication (**Ociepka**, 2018). Memory compresses mental models and gives internal coherence to international reality, even though it might not be based on true facts. Information chaos and disinformation used as weapons of war allow for manipulation of the past and assumption of the role of victim (**Cull**, 2019, pp. 167-168). Tzvetan Todorov, quoted by **Gascón** (2015), argues that Europe’s shared memory is not really shared, but is divided between those who have always lived on the western side and those who are ex-communists.

Finally, the policy narrative is directed at shaping a political objective. The consensus in the fight against climate change heard in the *European Parliament* and in national governments promotes the transmission of messages to the audience. On the other hand, analysis of the international position with regard to the resolution of the conflict between Israel and Palestine reveals the conceptual disagreement related to the actors, the legitimacy of their claims, or their methods of political action.

In short, the strategic narrative is interesting because it deals not only with the way in which a political actor is viewed and placed in the international arena, but also with how public discourse is developed –which political institutions and instruments will be used– and how the audience deciphers the discourse. It measures the persuasive effects that an interpretation of the international order has on the convergence between power and communication, between tangible assets and emotional elements in the globalization story, and between historical experience and expectations.

Ultimately, this narrative offers new lines of research in the field of propaganda. The use of echo chambers, bubbles, computerized propaganda and other similar techniques have a stronger impact in a situation in which the polarization is more “emotional” than ideological (**Tucker et al.**, 2018, p. 19). Del-Fresno and Manfredi point to this cocktail of fiction and emotion in the Catalanian crisis:

“The emotions and feelings are real. It can also be concluded that the objectives are real, and therefore the shared emotions are important. In other words, emotions and feelings are equated with truth and legality. This is how epistemology is produced, as well as the legality of post-truth” (**Del-Fresno; Manfredi-Sánchez**, 2018, p. 1232).

Therefore, to counteract the new propaganda, one cannot design a communication strategy based on reason and sound arguments, but must rewrite the narrative of those who consume such propaganda (**Archetti**, 2018).

4. Critical theory of international communication

Heterodox theories represent the set of ideas and proposals that try to explain the social changes and phenomena that have not fit comfortably into the thoughts of the great authors and debates of the 20th century. However, such developments are now essential for understanding political globalisation, the rise of emerging countries on the international scene, the future of employment in the face of automation, the appearance of feminism (Nordberg, 2015), or the fight against climate change. International communication has supported the growth of these theories through Marxism, constructivism and post-colonialism. Modes of economical production of knowledge and its distribution among social classes, as well as systematic inequality and identity, are descriptive and normative areas of study more important than those of State or foreign policy.

Gramsci believes that hegemony makes and produces social consensus through the expansion of certain ideas, which are assumed to be the dominant public opinion. We are indebted to this Italian author for his use of the notion of consent:

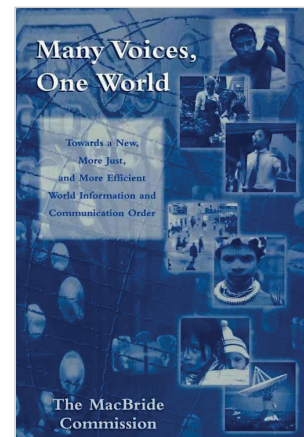
“The state promotes and requires consent; moreover, it educates consent” (Gramsci, 1971, p. 258).

Hegemony controls theoretical advances, provides resources for investigation, and promotes expressions that favour a certain interpretation of events. Robert Cox writes as follows:

“Theory is always for someone, and always has a purpose. All theories have a perspective that emanates from a position in time and space, specifically in the political and social dimension” (Cox, 1981, p. 128).

Heterodoxy has different levels of analysis. The first is the basis of the political economy of communication and the nature of international media; the second deals with the study of social movements and media activism outside the hegemonic agenda (Carroll; Hackett, 2006).

1) The *International Communication* section of the *International Association for Media and Communication Research* (IAMCR) strengthens the lines of investigation of the first: the global vision of the media industry, not only that which is Anglo-Saxon, in addition to political economy and other forms of intercultural expression. The very creation of this section at the 1976 conference, and its subsequent formalization in 1978, coincides with the expansion of cultural studies and the multiplication of epistemologies applicable to the consumption and reception of information. Specifically, it studies the role of the media in the development of foreign policy. The work of Galtung and Ruge (1965) structures the analyses of the international press and its contribution to the knowledge and judgement of international crises. For Galtung, the media industry contributes to “cultural imperialism” (Galtung, 1971, p. 93), in which multinational companies operate as control mechanisms (Mattelart, 1979). Schiller (1971) is unrivalled in his ideas regarding the communication industry as a tool for the domination of power structures and the promotion of the capitalist economy. Information technology contributes to the achievement of this objective and the establishment of a flow of commercial and communicative relations of domination. This framework of analysis resulted in the work entitled, “International Commission for the Study of Communication Problems; Many Voices, One World”, commonly known as the *MacBride Report*, which is the key document among the international communication studies sponsored by *Unesco* for the purpose of breaking the American model of pre-eminence over the industries of culture, entertainment and communication. Thus, a “new order” is being pursued, the so-called *NWICO* (*New World Information and Communication Order*), the ideas of which are being disseminated through the proliferation of *Unesco* chairs (Cabedoche, 2013).



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In this intellectual tradition, Alleyne coins the term “imperialism of communication” for the following reason:

“It involves the domination of news and the channels of international communication by preeminent nations” (Alleyne, 1995, p. 58).

Along the same lines, Mosco (1996) published the foundations of the political economy of communication, which has opened the door to works that explain how the exercise of power uses its principles and rules to control the information system: technology, market and cultural products serve the elites to impose their message. Miège (1989) rejects capitalist creation of cultural elements, which has degraded their critical function. Bustamante (2003), Labio-Bernal (2006) and Reig (2015) bring this approach closer to the industry, markets and information structure of Spain. In Latin America, the *Latin Union of Political Economy of Information, Communication and Culture* (*Ulepicc* in Spanish) is the leader in contributions to critical theory in communication and international culture. The recent work of Sierra-Caballero (2019) bears mentioning, as it consolidates the construction of “cognitive capitalism” as the commodification of the social production of knowledge in this school of thought, as well as the contributions of Fernández-Vicente on the commodification of the intimate life, which is overexposed in social networks and urban environments (Fernández-Vicente, 2016).

Under this heading, studies have appeared related to the ownership of agencies and communication companies that influence the international section and the understanding of global issues (Curran et al., 2015). These relationships between political and economic power are defined as the political economy of communication, which have compiled patterns of

research. **Chang** (1998) identified the news patterns of Reuters, as well as the factors and filters that might explain why some countries are part of the global news chain while others are left out. **Wilke, Heimprecht, and Cohen** (2012) coined the expression, “the geography of news” to explain what is considered international reporting in a comparative study of 17 countries, and how journalists and media editors articulate their reporting criteria. In the study, a distinction is made between first-rate international news (political events, elections, economic facts), which deserve international media attention, and second-rate news typical of pages related to society, tourism or culture. With regard to content analysis, the description of the nature of a conflict transmits to the international audience an image of who is a terrorist, a combatant, a mercenary, or a contractor, whose characteristics are very different from those who take up arms in a war scenario. It suffices to recall the recurring controversy related to using the label of “terrorist group” or “separatist group” when referring to *ETA* in the Anglo-Saxon press (**Holder**, 2005). Both descriptions have distinct connotations.

At the institutional level, the free circulation of cultural goods and services, protection of local industry, types of intellectual property, or technological standards, all appear as issues for debate. Non-western countries argue that this framework perpetuates structural inequality based on the control of channels, approaches and messages. **Mattelart** considers the way in which the discourse on migratory movements in the Mediterranean is developed (**Mattelart**, 2014). The growth of Chinese business conglomerates reflects the trend of promoting China as a global player, as well as the interpretation of information according to Beijing’s point of view, and finally, the analysis itself of current issues with its own particular characteristics (**Thussu; De-Burgh; Shi**, 2017). Moreover, the televised news revolution of *Al Jazeera* certainly bears mentioning. Its development has built an audience in the Arabic language that aspires to offer high quality news standards and the introduction of new points of view in the genres of opinion and interpretation. The impact of this Qatar-operated television station has been studied as a phenomenon in revolutionizing the media scene in the Arabic language (**Zayani**, 2005; **El-Issawi**, 2016), as a counterbalance to the hegemony of global information (**Seib**, 2008, 2012a), or as embodiment of the Arab Spring uprisings (**Sultan**, 2013). Whatever the case may be, the Qatar network has unified audiences in the Arabic language, connected existing Diasporas, and generated its own agenda of political and social issues in line with allegations made by the researcher **Cherribi** (2017).

In short, **Mattelart** and **Koch** (2016) consider the systematic growth of large channels to be a response to the “Americanization” of audio-visual markets. The list includes satellite ownership, as well as digital information providers and aggregators (**Samei**, 2016). The conglomerate headed by *Russia Today* (**Audinet**, 2018), or Venezuela’s *TeleSur* venture (**Lugo-Ocando**, 2017), are instruments of “television diplomacy” used to counteract the hegemony of large western operators. The paradox is obvious. Models created during the fervor of ‘Chavism’, or in Putin’s Russia, do not meet the standards of journalistic ethics of quality, objectivity and freedom of expression. Their close ties to the executive powers are harmful to their reputation. Moreover, when the United States copied this model far from the standards of the *United States Information Agency (USIA)* (**Cull**, 2012), it made the same mistakes: the *Al Hurra* project –although alive– is not a journalistic benchmark in the region³ (**Rugh**, 2017).

<https://www.alhurra.com>

Regarding this same point, the study of language and the international scene can be included. **Bially** calls this phenomenon the “representational force” (**Bially**, 2005), which foreshadows the decision-making process in the international sphere. It results from events on the international stage, the selection of leaders and spokespersons, and the choice of “humanitarian” conflicts, or those that cannot be attended due to “national interests”. The novelty lies in the use of fiction to achieve these political goals. **Saunders** states that “geopolitical television” has constructed a cognitive map based on aesthetic values far from the monopoly of national television programming, so that new ways of seeing and learning about international politics are being produced (**Saunders**, 2019, p. 693). The aesthetic power of television fiction gives cultural meaning and context to current affairs news, while the audience naturally makes an association between reality and fiction. In a global market of content and platforms, consumption is not associated with a national setting, but instead transforms the entertainment industry (**Cunningham; Craig**, 2016).

Finally, the contributions of **Fuchs** (2018) should be highlighted. The author argues that *Twitter* has promoted social polarisation and the rise of political demagoguery based on emotion and nationalist sentiments. Thus, the Brexit situation, as well as Donald Trump’s presidency, are part of the same phenomenon of the intensive use of social networks to achieve nationalist political objectives regardless of social problems (climate change, unemployment, etc.). This trend toward using digital communication to control behaviour, and for social purposes, is worrisome because it affects public policy and individual freedom (**Zuboff**, 2019).

2) The second level brings together the alternative modes and uses of international communication. Social movements and global protests appeared in academic literature in the mid-1990s. After September 11, 2001, anti-war actions and anti-neoliberal interpretations of protest have been on the rise. The demonstrations in Seattle and Genoa, the *March 15th* movement, the *#Yosoy132* show of defiance, or *Occupy Wall Street*, expanded the repertory of international protests and provided the basis for the theoretical approach of “mass self-communication” (**Castells**, 2008). It is no longer enough to have a vision of left/right or workers/employers, but instead we are witnessing the emergence of moral and post-material demands linked to individual and collective identity. It is not possible to establish categories after analysing the events in Spain, Chile, Catalonia, Hong Kong or Ecuador, yet patterns of behaviour that utilize protest in order to create images that promote political change can be inferred. The repertory of protests of diverse social origins connect with

political information and the global scene (**Sampedro; Martínez-Avidad, 2018**). The management of social networks and their specific techniques (memes, videos, *Twitter* campaigns) are being studied in line with the proposals of **Melucci (1985)**, which are as follows: the development of symbols and social relations has replaced the material production of protest, eliminating the boundary between direct activism and activism of a media-oriented nature.

Within this dynamic, it is worth highlighting the growing interest in political movements that have modified the agenda with actions that have had an impact on the international audience, despite the inequality of capabilities (access to large international media or campaign financing). Therefore, symbols that give anthropomorphic meaning to political demands (**De-Andrés; Nos-Aldás; García-Matilla, 2016**) are being promoted. The names of Greta Thunberg, Aaron Swartz and Audrey Tang have made the number of references greater.

International symbolism offers value that supports a cause (independence, climate change, human rights), and unifies the discourse when facing distinct audiences. Symbolic meanings have been fed by the global culture of social networks, which have allowed for the rapid and easy accumulation of symbolic value (hashtags, icons) that can be published, promoted or shared on worldwide platforms. Low-budget campaigns compete with large advertisers thanks to a less rigid, more proactive, and inexpensive organisation in terms of individual commitment. Collective action obtains immediate results, strengthening the sense of community, whether or not it breaks its own information bubble. Linking the channel and the message reduces production costs as there are no differences between senders and receivers. Each participant has the same level of access to the networks, so they become potential message creators or re-senders of successful viral content. The quality of the video or meme is irrelevant, since commitment takes precedence over the professionalization of journalistic or audio-visual production.

The symbolic communication of protest generates emotional closeness and a sense of community away from conventional political institutions (parliament, political parties or trade unions). The causes bring together individual interests, accelerate cognitive change, and erode trust in institutions. Impact is measured by the ability to influence the agenda rather than by the achievement of specific objectives (a referendum, a legislative change, a resignation). In the political arena, the “secessionist world of Catalonia” stands out (**Ordeix; Ginesta, 2014, p. 6**), which uses #CataloniaWins, #FreedomForCatalonia, and #CatalansForYes to spread its messages on *Twitter*. Supporters of Scottish independence in 2014 met on *Twitter* with users such as @wearenational or @celebsforindy. Global companies have taken up the discourse of political causes and have developed purposeful or commitment-oriented business strategies (**Matos; Vinuales; Sheinin, 2017**).

It can be concluded that these heterodox ideas, now on the side-lines, are on the road to occupying the centre stage of academic research. The new political geographies, the question of individual and collective identity, the feminist movement, or the symbolism of causes (climate change, freedom in China or Egypt) take up more space in congresses, journals and centres of analysis. The basic foundations of state and nation seem insufficient when it comes to cataloguing and examining alternative international communication channels.

6. New paths of research

International communication has become a discipline with growing impact on social science, yet it still occupies a position halfway between international relations and social communication. The new political consideration of globalisation has accelerated this process to the extent to which factors of change have been linked to the production of messages, distribution through various channels, and the consumption of content for an international audience. At this point in time, it is one of the most vibrant and transdisciplinary fields of study. From political science to economics, the rapid transformation of international communication has generated an important academic corpus with regard to instruments for the use of power, influence and war. International studies have included the theories and tools of communication, and the result has been the development of new lines of research. In recent times, a review of the different methodological and analytical approaches to the phenomenon of disinformation has been enough to understand the new international reality. In addition to those from other branches of life sciences, all social scientists document, study and examine the relationship between truth, falsehood and uncertainty in the various domains of public life (**Fletcher; Schwartz; Wong, 2019**).

The balance is positive for studies that build theory from practice, or in other words, that need empirical force to consolidate working hypotheses, methodologies or terminological specifications. There is an extensive academic bibliography, yet with a serious deficit: in university curricula, the subject still must struggle to be considered basic or core, so there are few monographs that facilitate progress in the systematic study of the discipline. Moreover, the subject is not consolidated in the Anglo-Saxon world, but instead is an area destined for postgraduate studies.

Nevertheless, research work in international communication seems to be productive and open to a crossover of study frameworks and subjects. Below I have outlined five major areas that could be used to structure an agenda and serve as a guide for the coming years. They are as follows:

- Application of interdisciplinary methods to redefine political globalisation
- Nature of the international journalist
- Hybridization of the political system and the new populist era
- Information structure, and
- The old new propaganda; the cutting-edge of international communication.

Let us look at each one.

1) Firstly, interdisciplinarity consists of the ability to use different methodologies and theoretical foundations in order to explain an increasingly complex reality. International communication will assist in establishing epistemological and normative pluralism as a native element of globalisation. It is not a question of creating a new academic discipline with requisite standards and its own jargon, but it might serve instead as a guideline for those that currently exist. At this point, we should mention the need to promote a transfer of knowledge among professionals and academics for complex disciplines such as climate change, worldwide public health, or migration, which are realities that will shape the international scenario in this century. Through international communication, meanings are negotiated, power is structured, and the course of events is understood. **Waisbord's** work (2019) lays the foundations for this methodological and theoretical renewal.

2) The second area of study is the very nature of the international journalist, the professional who reports, interprets and gives their opinion on events of a global nature for a specific, delimited, and often local audience. The crisis of journalistic companies has led to a systematic reduction of the networks of professionals and collaborators abroad, as this service is hard to justify due to its declining benefits and the fact that it is no longer unique. The decline of the correspondent should be systematically studied, both as an indicator of the interest (or lack thereof) among the audience for what happens in a country as a subject of the profession's transformation outside the logic of the newsrooms. At this time of ongoing disinformation, the departure of the correspondent is not good news: there is no longer anyone at the actual destination to contrast, question and explain an international context. The future of the journalist or special reporter should be linked to public demand. There is no media literacy without an international component of the state of the world, international political relations, or the position of a country in the face of conflict. A large amount of fake news and disinformation campaigns feed the partisan view, thereby fuelling stereotypes and rumours. Benkler, Faris and Roberts have mapped out the polarisation networks in American democracy and categorised these actors as "fake news entrepreneurs and political clickbait makers" (**Benkler; Faris; Roberts**, 2017, p. 9). The user as both producer and consumer of disinformation products and services is part of the value chain. Stroud, Thorson and Young make sense of the phenomenon with the following statement:

"The leverage of social identity would be more effective at the point of distribution rather than the point of reception by the audience" (**Stroud; Thorson; Young**, 2017, p. 46);

Displaying our identity on social networks, and above all our disagreement with traditional media, lengthens the life cycle of disinformation. There is no longer any trace of the journalistic profession.

3) The third area is consolidation of the populist realm, which uses emotional roots in developing strong leadership. As a result, aggressive rhetoric and discursive instability emerge, or in other words, a "time of hyperbole" in political discourse, using the wise metaphor of **Gallardo-Paúls** (2018). Electoral campaigns, social protests, and political decisions all contribute to models of public leadership based on the cult of personality and celebrity (**Wheeler**, 2013). From an international perspective, it should be pointed out that the populist model offers two ways in which it can be studied. On one hand, there is the use of international affairs to strengthen national policies by presenting economic data, the recovery of historical memory, and the reinforcement of a culture of security based on the idea of allies/enemies. On the other hand, hyper-leadership contributes to the de-institutionalisation and undermines the credibility of political entities. The establishment is composed of diplomats, military officers and journalists, yet they do not represent the "people" in a phenomenon that is already global: "the steady erosion of independent journalism and the deterioration of democratic politics" (**Crilley; Gillespie**, 2019, p. 273). Donald Trump and Boris Johnson are the preferred objects of study in this phenomenon, but the contribution of other leaders such as López Obrador, Barack Obama, Emmanuel Macron, and Justin Trudeau to this overexposed political model of leadership should not be overlooked. Pop politics and entertainment have found a comfortable position in the government communication apparatus that uses public resources to decisively influence the political and social structure (**Amado**, 2014).

4) The fourth area of future research would be a review of the global information structures in the media system, a kind of mapping of the political, economic and social powers. Business groups, the role of global cities, lobbies, the concentration of ownership, the impact of technology on industry, or the situation of independent journalism are all factors in understanding international communication. The digital geography of power will also be an instrument of authority when promoting the emergence of technological operators, start-ups or telecommunications companies with global ambitions. Everything points to the fact that we are moving toward a multipolar system of spheres of influence with their own characteristics in the United States, the European Union, and China. It remains to be seen which models will be developed in Russia, Turkey, Qatar or Iran. The regulation of issues such as privacy, media ownership, data protection, transparency, or governance have already appeared in congresses and specialised journals. It will also be relevant to discover the real impact of social networks on the resolution of international political conflicts. Reports on the "CNN effect", or that of "Al Jazeera", diminish in the face of studies on the value of *Twitter*, *Instagram*, or whatever else may emerge. The issue of network neutrality will ultimately grow when faced with globalisation of the processes of digitized production, distribution of content, and liberalisation of digital services (**Pickard; Berman**, 2019). Neutrality affects the good governance of international communication, reduces arbitrariness in prior censorship, and promotes inter-state as well as supra-state instruments of cooperation.

5) Finally, the fifth area is propaganda, which provides an endless source of subjects and possibilities for research projects. Information disorder allows for the defence of interests with communicative instruments now labelled as post-truth, post-factual, or something similar (Mearsheimer, 2011; Amado, 2016; Bennett; Livingston, 2018). With both new and old techniques, political campaigns that use active cognitive manipulation (e.g. exposure to false data, the *Cambridge Analytica* scandal), as well as passive manipulation (algorithm black box, bubbles, echo chambers) are now being generated. There has been less impact than dreamed of by writers of totalitarian-style literature, but there is evidence that

“when people are flooded with information, they perceive the information that matches their interests as being of higher quality, and it is more likely to be consumed” (Stroud; Thorson; Young, 2017, p. 46).

This challenge forces democracies to deploy appropriate public policies to counteract the effects of manipulation in the political and electoral system, as well as in its priorities of foreign policy. Such a decision requires sound ethical consideration in order to define the challenge to be addressed, and how to address it (Bjola, 2018).

It seems likely that technology will change the dynamics and scope of the issue as the cost of production continues to experience decreasing marginal expense, with special mention of bots and trolls (Bradshaw; Howard, 2017), artificial intelligence (Ufarte-Ruiz; Manfredi-Sánchez, 2019), the production of automated texts, and low cost fake videos (Bullock; Luengo-Oroz, 2019). Adler (2018, p. 13) has contributed to the theoretical groundwork and introduced the figure of the math keeper as the one who controls the algorithms that draw out knowledge regarding international reality. After the gatekeeper and info keeper, this new element analyses the automation of data and decisions. On the cultural side, fiction has helped to disseminate concepts of international relations, in spite of how superficial or imprecise they might be. In particular, the semiotics of walls and borders that “Game of Thrones” has popularized help distinguish a barbaric “they” from which to safeguard oneself. Like Lacoste (2009), geopolitical communication is an instrument of power for promoting conflict, imposing peace, or fabricating nations, because it connects maps, histories or border controls. Whether through platforms or state communication systems, the dissemination of content under the label of a documentary film “based on real events” and other similar labels builds an emotional narrative that seeks the identification of audiences with a pool of social values together with an alteration of judgment. Finally, the creation of propaganda is based on the management of emotions. Emotion constitutes an ethos of authority that challenges the closed structures of the State, which cannot manage the feelings of its population expressed in social networks (Zaharna; Uysal, 2016).

Emotion constitutes an ethos of authority that challenges the closed structures of the State, which cannot manage the feelings of its population expressed in social networks

In short, the new era of political globalization revolves around international communication structures and policies that are consolidated in social science studies. This occurs even more so when new actors emerge who are willing to innovate in the design and execution of communicative power in such a way that they transform the methods, concepts and tools of international communication. We are at the very beginning of a research discipline that has been called to participate in the explanation of numerous phenomena. Therefore, it will be exciting to talk about these issues in the coming years.

7. Notes

1. In memoriam

On January 15, 2020, María-Teresa La-Porte, pioneer in Spain of international and development communication, died. Born in Madrid in 1961, she was a professor at the *Faculty of Communication* of the *University of Navarra*, where she was the first woman to practice as dean.

2. Günter Schabowski, member of the *Socialist Unity Party* of the German Democratic Republic, became world famous in November 1989 when he gave a slightly wrong, improvised answer in response to a question at a press conference, raising popular expectations much faster than the government had planned, and as a result, massive crowds gathered on that same night at the Berlin Wall, forcing it open after 28 years.

Shortly afterward, the entire German internal border was dismantled.

3. *Al Hurra* has not been able to impact the media agenda in the Arabic language. The project is alive, like so many others, because it has funding from the *US State Department*, but it is not a reference television from the journalistic point of view.

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