Communication in COVID-19 Crisis

Emiliana de Blasio
LUISS Guido Carli University (Italy)
Patricia Coll-Rubio
Ramon Llull University (Spain)

The COVID-19 pandemic poses a communication challenge on a global scale. It forced a redefinition in the communication strategies of companies and media. For several months, crisis communication has become a crucial issue in our society, a society which is witnessing the acceleration (Micó and Coll-Rubio, 2020) of the process of digital transformation in all political, social and economic scopes, including media (Casero-Ripollés, 2020).

The impact of COVID-19 affected all communication disciplines, including journalism, audiovisual communication, digital marketing, advertising and public relations in terms of crisis communication (Coombs, 2007; Yin, 2010; Jin, Liu, and Austin, 2012), Fearn-Banks, 2010), health and science communication (Semir, 1996; Fahy and Nisbet, 2011; Bucchi, 1998), political communication (Davis, 2019; Blasio, 2014; Sorice, 2011; McNair, 2017), influence and virality (Katz and Lazarsfeld, 1955; Rushkoff, 1994; Trusov, Bucklin, and Pauwels, 2009; Scott, 2012) and digital transformation (Rodgers and Thorson, 2017; Coll-Rubio and Micó, 2018; Coll-Rubio and Micó, 2019).

The dimension of the crisis constitutes the interpretative frame within which both studies and practices of public and political communication have been located in the last twenty years. Since 9/11, in fact, the crisis has no longer represented a variable but the constitutive dimension of complex societies. On the other hand, Ulrich Beck had been theorizing the emergence of the "risk society" as early as the mid-1980s, placing risk in connection with the radical transformation of global society.

The concepts of risk and crisis represented important points of reference in the analysis of the western world and its relations with a rapidly changing planet, in which, however, terrible social problems, inequalities and risks for democracy remained.

The development of authoritarian populisms and the re-emergence of nationalisms have represented some of the themes of the crisis, gradually declined as "crisis of representation", "crisis of democracy", "crisis of elites", and so on. Beyond the correctness or otherwise of these definitions, the concept of "crisis" appeared as the one that best explained the transformative dimension of the

world. A different transformation in the various geographical realities but which however appeared evident.

The pandemic resulting from the development of the COVID-19 virus has shown, however, the emergence of a different concept of the crisis. No longer a crisis that affected, depending on the case, different aspects of public life and with different ways and measures. In this case we are in the presence of a crisis not only global —in a global world it is difficult for a crisis not to be global—, but also a crisis that called governments and authorities to behaviours that required supranational interconnection. At a time when the centrality of the nation states appeared to re-emerge, due to the need to adopt measures to contrast the spread of the virus, the idea that a global look was needed, however. The short circuit between the national dimension of the crisis and its inevitably global perspective has represented an element of novelty in the international scenario.

This transformation of the scenario has dramatically affected communication: journalism has been forced to be both national and global; crisis communication had to face new, unpublished problems, with the need to provide medical-scientific information that is always not easy to disseminate and even manage; the media had to completely reprogram their usual programming, taking into account the new role of television in lockdown situations; digital ecosystems have been called upon to guarantee the social connection over time of physical distancing. In this latter perspective, another short circuit must be considered: the need to rely on commercial players for the right to work —smart working— or education —distance learning— with other contradictions, political but even ethical.

In this situation, together with the *Tripodos* editorial staff, we thought of a special issue on the relationship between the pandemic and communication, aware that the communicative dimension is not an intervening variable but a constitutive dimension of the crisis. We can think about the circulation of information in broadcast media, the use of infographics and methods to tell about the contagion and (unfortunately) the tragedy of the victims and their families. We can again think about the narrative on the sanitary personnel. Or again how sensitive the information on containment measures has become and has provoked political controversy. We could again think about the role of political communication which had accepted fake as its narrative element, and which instead seems to show a new interest, temporary or not, to the issues of responsibility and credibility.

This special issue presents works that analyse different aspects of communicative ecosystems, adopting different and plural approaches and methods. They try to propose analytical descriptions, interpretative hypotheses or present empirical research. They study an unprecedented emergency, at least in modern times, and certainly never seen before in communicative terms. The different contributions offer different perspectives of an ongoing phenomenon, without that detachment, even temporal, which is often recommended for social research; yet they manage to offer an insight into a global world not only by photographing it in a given moment but also by interpreting trends and studying evolutionary processes.

Emiliana de Blasio (edeblasio@luiss.it). Professor of Media Studies and Open Government at LUISS University, where she is also Deputy Director of the Centre for Conflict and Participation Studies. She is also invited professor at Gregorian University. Her work is based on the interplays between digital technology and politics, e-democracy, open government and populisms. Among her most recent publications are: "Technopopulism and Direct Representation" (with M. Sorice), in Blokker and Anselmi (eds.), *Multiple Populisms: Italy as Democracy's Mirror*, 2020; *e-Democracy*, 2019; *Il governo online*, 2019; "Implementing Open Government: A Qualitative Compar-ative Analysis of Digital Platforms in France, Italy and United Kingdom", *Quality and Quantity* 53(2), 2019; "The Rise of Populist Parties in Italy: Techno-Populism Between Neo-Liberalism and Direct Democracy" (with M. Sorice), in Hidalgo-Tenorio, Benítez-Castro, and Cesare (eds.), *Populist Discourse. Critical Approaches to Contemporary Politics*, 2019; "Open Government und Demokratie. Zwischen Effizienz und Partizipation" (with M. Sorice), in Schünemann and Kneuer (eds.), *E-Government und Netzpolitik im europäischen Vergleich*, 2018; "Populisms among Technology, E-Democracy and the Depoliticisation Process", *Revista Internacional de Sociología*, 76(4), 2018.

Patricia Coll-Rubio (patriciacr1@blanquerna.url.edu). PhD in Communication from the Ramon Llull University (URL). Director of the degree in Journalism and Corporate Communication at the Blanquerna School of Communication and International Relations (URL). Author of books and academic articles on communication, as researcher. Among her most recent publications (with Prof. Micó) are: *Hiperacelación: La revolución digital en la época del coronavirus*; *Newjacking posdigital: El secuestro de noticias en la estrategia de comunicación*; *Marketing y comunicación en la nueva economía*; and *Estrategias de publicidad y relaciones públicas en la era digital*. As a journalist specialized in digital transformation, she collaborates with media: *El País Retina*, *La Vanguardia* and Wolters Kluwer.

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