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Epistemology of Social Networks, Public Opinion and Theory of Agenda

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Abstract

Social networks act in the public sphere and in the institution of democratic practices in social development, in establishing the agenda with issues more inclusive and representative of society. Thus, citizens recognize themselves in the decision-making process more fair and democratic. What is the strength of the passions and emotions on the connection on social networks or even the role of public opinion and the theory of agenda in the network society? Firstly, we present the epistemology of social networks, which describes the changes concerning the new online social media. Secondly, we will look at public opinion, in accordance with the principle of publicity of Kant, the contradiction in Hegel, public opinion and the principle of usefulness in J. S. Mill. Hume's theory of mind and the neuroscientific study of António R. Damásio expose the relevance of perceptions, passions and emotions for decision-making and the connection on social networks. Finally, we present the theory of agenda from Maxwell McCombs, demonstrating the conventional agenda (unique agenda) as opposed to the agenda of social media (plural agenda). Some current facts, such as the uprisings of peoples, social movements and the emergence of social networking, renew the challenge of sustainability and learning on social networks.

Key words: Epistemology; Social networks; Public opinion; Theory of agenda

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INTRODUCTION

We live in a transition that incorporates the Internet as a communication medium. This causes changes in journalism because it implies the inclusion of the public in the media, in online interactions. Before the internet, we had radio, newspaper and television as principal forms of mass communication. These platforms maintained a vertical relationship with those who consumed the information. The possibility of interaction was minimal, because the audience was passive in relation to the media. The interpretation of events restricted the views of the public. This transition occurs in the media and citizens itself undergoes a process of crisis, transition and redesign its role. We will analyze this transition through the epistemology of social networks, then theories on public opinion, and, finally, the explanation of the theory of the agenda face to changing of scenarios.

1. EPISTEMOLOGY OF SOCIAL NETWORKS

When we deal with epistemology, we usually refer to the study of the origin, structure, methods and validity of knowledge, so it is also known as theory of knowledge. Here, we use the term epistemology in order to understand the phenomenon of social networking, i.e. explaining how the learning process occurs through networks at three levels: technical (new media), communicational (new models of communication) and political (new experience in power). The concept of social networks, here, is understood in the operational sense, that is, when a computer network connects a network of people, groups or organizations at all levels thus constituting a social network (Gustavoclopes, 2012, August).

Built, currently, the new scenarios for communication having on the one hand, the large media corporations, television broadcast, print and online and, on the other

hand, the role of independent/alternative press, understood as not bound to a private, public or state-owned enterprise, or any economic group. Configures itself, little by little, the opposition between the conventional media and the independent/alternative press, having, as a support material, the new information technologies. Described below are some changes in this emerging scenario (Bavaresco & Konzen, 2009).

1.1 Logic of Network Society

In the opinion of Ivana Bentes Oliveira¹, there is homogeneity among the newspapers and editorial lines in the conventional press. There is the conventional journalism model of large corporate company, which starts to use technology such as the internet or other electronic possibilities. However, it opens a new pluralistic scenario with the subject who starts to be a producer of media, that is, begins to produce information, analysis and interpretation of the facts. This phenomenon articulates another media player, which is called independent or alternative media. With this change of economic and technological context, with the cheapening of these technologies, the independent media becomes viable and self-sustaining, having visibility to influence the formation and diversification of public opinion, positioning itself critically in the face of great journalistic enterprise.

The logic of the network society is the flexibility that reconfigures itself constantly through the convergence of technologies in an integrated system. For example, the web 2.0 is a new network configuration that establishes a collaborative model in the communicational process. Here it overcomes the classical model “sender-message-receiver” because anyone can produce content in informational flows, interacting to infinity. The new media are social networks where information passes vertical communication (few senders—many receivers) for horizontal communication (senders and receivers, all in interaction), creating an environment of democratization of media and opinion. All are actors in social networks, because all the people connected in the network can play roles and perform actions in plural relationships. The time of social networks is instantaneous, that is, real time.

1.2 Internet and Independent Social Networks or Contradiction in Discourse

Independent media transforms gradually the media that exist on the internet, a media of strong ability to influence public opinion. There is the production of a counter-discourse, which appears in the blogs, mailing lists, websites, independent media, implementing the contradiction in public opinion. The spread of counter-information with such great quickness would be impossible without the internet. According to

Ivana B. Oliveira, this possibility of fast reaction generates a media dispute, because access to diversity is absolutely facilitated through public policies and the increasing democratization of the internet, as well as the multiplication of information.

1.3 From the Concept of Exclusive Journalism to Press and Journalists Inclusively

There is a diffuse knowledge in society that is much broader than the conventional media, political parties or the universities cannot capture, says Luís Nassif². Conventional journalism typically operates as follows: the journalist does the interview; Gets ten pieces of information; Selects three, because ten cannot fit; say what is relevant or not; if he wants, takes it out of context and thus the story is prepared. Today, there is a change in the concept of journalism, reiterates Nassif, with the advent of the internet and the blogs, because there is a deconstruction of the attitude of the journalist who excludes which is not applicable to the newspaper, to an inclusive attitude, because he is in interaction with the Internet citizens who express their opinions. Now, the journalist puts the information on the internet and, at the same time, gets the reader’s opinion. The reader interacts and contradicts or has an opinion different from that of the journalist. Therefore, this change of opinion, settling an exercise of democracy and civility, generating a twist in the world of media.

1.4. Social Networks, Representative Democracy and Digital Democracy

Digital Democracy is a project in formation, because to govern a state requires going beyond meetings, political representation and direct votes. It should be recognized that, despite all its faults, representative democracy guaranteed inclusion policies and the rights of minorities, while civilizing advances of modern politics. However, the concepts elaborated by democracy are in crisis. In the current representative democracy, in which political disputes occur, the economic powers participate through influence in the media, financing politicians, employing lobbyists and their social allies, trade unions and business groups, unions and social organizations. Outside of the election, there is little citizen participation. The people of the State are manifested only during times of election, and once the representatives are elected, political participation becomes inexpressive. That is, this representation model is exhausted. The lack of accountability to voters, the remoteness from the citizens, and permanent exploitation of scandal as a political weapon causes loss of legitimacy of various powers. In the face of this crisis of representation, one can understand the worldwide phenomenon of mobilizing public opinion through social networks. The digital democracy implies “accountability”,

¹ Available at: <http://www.ihu.unisinos.br/entrevistas/12724-e-restritivo-demais-pensar-so-no-jornalismo-como-centro-da-discussao-midiatica-entrevista-especial-com-ivana-bentes-oliveira>

² Available at: http://www.fndc.org.br/internas.php?p=noticias&cont_key=237807

that is, the obligation of the public administrator at all levels, states and municipalities, agencies of federal, state and municipal controlling to be accountable to citizens³.

1.5 Democratization of Media- From Mass Media Era to Era of Media for All

Journalism is no longer a monopoly of journalists due to communication facilities offered by digital technologies⁴. There is the possibility of any person taking the role of the media, able to speak for thousands of others, creating audience with the characteristics of journalism. "We passed from era of mass media to the era of mass of media" said Rosental Calmon Alves⁵. Political scientist Giuseppe Cocco⁶ affirms that "the media of the multitude is the multitude of media," as the media of the multitude becomes a multitude of media, that is, there is plurality and decentralization of multimedia used by society. These two ways of doing journalism coexist and complement each other, therefore, are not mutually excluding.

Journalism is not more reduced as the information processed, edited, filtered. Now, you can access more easily the crude information not filtered, not edited. The media ecosystem is changing, because the former was based on limited information, the new is based on abundance and pluralism.

Manuel Castells, in his book *Networks Outrage and Hope—Social Movements in the Internet Age* (Zahar, translation forthcoming)⁷, analyses the social movements as regards formation, dynamics, values and perspectives of social transformation. He investigates the social movements of the network society, which, according to him, constitute societies of the 21st century, because their practices assume the fundamental contradictions of our world.

³ Cf. Luis Nassif. <http://www.advivo.com.br/blog/luisnassif/aredes-sociais-e-o-fim-da-hipocrisia>

⁴ This example engaged in journalism is practiced manifestations by Ninja media group, created in 2012 within the network of artistic exchange off-axis, led by cultural activist Pablo Toffee: "in the transmission of the manifestations of the river they mobilized 300 thousand spectators, but guided the work of colleagues who speak and write for millions. Revolutionaries and activists allegedly non-partisan members of the alternative media group Independent Journalism and Narrative Action (Ninja) broadcast live, with great concern with the image quality and editing". The public seems not to care and the Ninja came to account for 200 hours transmitting live the occupation of the Belo Horizonte City Hall. "Continuously, the site PósTV (www.postv.org) broadcasts live and uncut videos of debates and protests. Retrieved from: <http://www.ihu.unisinos.br/noticias/522353-a-narrativa-que-se-engaja-nas-manifestacoes>

⁵ Retrieved from: <http://www.ihu.unisinos.br/noticias/522354-qpassamos-dos-meios-de-massa-para-a-massa-de-meiosq>

⁶ Retrieved from: <http://www.ihu.unisinos.br/noticias/522445-a-midia-da-multidao-e-uma-multidao-de-midias>

⁷ CASTELLS, Manuel. *Networks of outrage and hope*. Polity Press: Cambridge, 2012. Read part of the book Retrieved from <http://zerohora.clicrbs.com.br/rs/cultura-e-lazer/segundo-caderno/noticia/2013/06/caderno-cultura-antecipa-trecho-de-novo-livro-do-sociologo-manuel-castells-4178419.html>

In the book *Communication Power* (2009), Castells argues the theory that the power provides the substrate for the understanding of social movements. Power relations are constitutive of society because those who hold power build institutions according to their values and interests. The power is exercised through coercion (the monopoly of violence, legitimate or not, for control of the State) and/or by the construction of meaning in people's minds, through mechanisms of symbolic manipulation. Power relations are immanent in all institutions of society, particularly in the State. However, societies are traversed by the contradiction, because where there is power, there is also counter-power. That is, social actors claim their opposites and plural values and interests, that is, there is a fighting for the creation of the network of meanings in the minds of people. Human groups create meaning by interacting with their natural and social environment, connecting their neural networks and those of nature, and social networks. The networking is operated by the act of communication and the exchange of information socialized.

The epistemology of the networks, in their technical dimension, is presented by the continuing transformation of information technology (IT), which, in the digital era, extends the range to all levels of social, political and economic life, in a network that is simultaneously global and local, massive and personalized. The meaning-making process is characterized by pluralism. However, this process depends on the messages and technical structures, formatted and broadcast in multimedia communication networks. We know that the individual human mind constructs its own meaning, interpreting in their own concepts, information. However, this mental processing is conditioned by the communication environment, i.e. the change of the communicational environment affects the construction of meanings, and therefore the power relations. However, there is a contradiction between the Governmental power and companies, faced with the power of *global self-communication*.

1.6 From Local Communication to Global Self-Communication

According to Castells, the fundamental change in the field of communication was the emergence of what he called *self-communication*, that is, the use of the internet and wireless networks as digital communication platforms, reaching a multiplicity of receptors, connecting to an endless number of digital information networks. Self-communication produces the message of autonomous mode, because it is based on horizontal interactive networks, becoming a power almost unchecked by the power of Governments or companies. Therefore, Governments and companies want to limit their potential for freedom, controlling file sharing or internet networks.

Digital communication is multimodal and allows for constant reference to global hypertext information whose components can be articulated by the communicative

actor second private communication projects. The technological platform allows the construction of the autonomy of the social actor, whether be it individual or collective, in relation to the institutions of society. In the network society, the power is multidimensional and is organized around scheduled networks in every field of human activity, according to the interests and values of plural social actors. The global self-communication of multimedia networks influence the human mind and decision making, forming networks of power in various fields of human activity:

(a) Meta network of finances. Financial networks and the global media are closely linked, constituting, according to Castells, a private meta network; (b) network policy, cultural production, military/security and criminal network; (c) network of production and application of science, technology and knowledge management. These networks develop partnership strategies and competition, forming networks around particular projects or global. They have, however, a common interest: control rules, the norms of society and decision-making through a political system that corresponds to their interests and values. The dispute is, in fact, among the various networks with the purpose of regulating the State on the basis of their specific interests.

Who holds the power in the network society, question Castells? According to him, the programmers who have the ability to elaborate the main networks on which depends the life of people (Government, Parliament, military and security establishment, finance, media, science and technology institutions etc.). The programmers are the switches that operate the connections between different networks (media barons introduced into political class, financial elites who pay political elites, political elites who use financial institutions, media companies interconnected financial companies, academic institutions that are financed by large companies and so on).

Our goal in this part of the article was restricted to study three epistemological dimensions of social networks: the technique, communication and politics. We understand that these three dimensions are crucial to the learning process of the communication technique in the exercise of power in network.

In the epistemology of networks, we described the facts in which occur the learning processes and changes: (a) The technical level, it articulates the television press, broadcasting, print and online, and, with the advent of the internet and independent social networks, we move from the era of mass media to media for everyone, that is, the media democracy; (b) The communicational level, it passes from exclusive concept to inclusive journalism for press and journalists; (c) The political level, social networks have questioned representative democracy and challenged the implementation of digital democracy and democratization of the media. Thus, the learning that occurs in social networks develops a public opinion in network.

2. PUBLIC OPINION: THEORIES AND SOCIAL NETWORKS

Here, we present some theories on public opinion that we think are important to understand the phenomenon of social networks and their relationship to perceptions, impressions and ideas (Hume's theory of the mind) and the feelings and emotions theory (A. Damasio) in order to understand the logic that moves the new subjects and social actors in the network.

2.1 PUBLIC OPINION: PUBLICITY, CONTRADICTION AND UTILITY

2.1.1 Principle of Publicity⁸

Modernity instituted the principle of publicity as a foundation for advancement in the protection of the right to freedom of the press and of opinion: "Every human being has the right to freedom of opinion and expression; This right includes the freedom to, without interference, have opinions and to seek, receive and communicate information and ideas through any media and independently of frontiers" (*Human Rights*, Article 19)⁹. This principle was constituted simultaneously to the formation of the public sphere. Thus, there is a mutual imbrication between publicity and public sphere, freedom of the press and public opinion.

In the philosophical level, Kant theorizes the principle of publicity as a stage of adulthood, as an emancipation of mankind. Kant inaugurates the discussions about public opinion through the principle of publicity presented in *Perpetual Peace*: Justice "... can only be thought of as publicly disclosable" (Kant, 2010, p.75). Publicity is a political concept that creates, in political philosophy, the idea of the public sphere as structure protection of individual rights. The right to express one's own opinion has, in the principle of publicity, its legitimacy.

Hegel, however, makes explicit the theory of public opinion to thematize the principle of contradiction as their immanent movement. Public opinion is a phenomenon of contradiction of opinions in all levels of society.

2.1.2 Contradiction of public opinion¹⁰

Hegel understands public opinion as a phenomenon of contradiction that needs to move from their immediacy to mediation. The phenomenon of public opinion is contradictory, because contains itself, at the same time, the universality of the constitutional principles of Law

⁸ Bavaresco, A.; Konzen, P. R., & Sordi, C. (2012). Media, democracy and public opinion: Diagnostics, theories and analyses. In A. Bavaresco, M. G. Villanova, & Rodrigues, T. V. (Orgs.). *Projects of Philosophy II* (pp.8-39). Porto Alegre: EDIPUCRS. Retrieved from <http://www.abavaresco.com.br/publicacoes.html#capitulos>

⁹ United Nations Human Rights. Retrieved from <http://www.ohchr.org/EN/Pages/WelcomePage.aspx>

¹⁰ Bavaresco, A., & Konzen, P. R. (2009, June). Scenarios of freedom of the press and public opinion in Hegel. *Kriterion*, 50(119). Retrieved from: <http://www.abavaresco.com.br/publicacoes.html#artigos>

and Ethics, and the singularity of the rights and interests of citizens and the expression of their subjectivity. This contradiction finds its solution through mediation of freedom of the press itself within a framework of democratic legality. This is the strength of the contradiction: Effect of dialectical tension mediation between the opposing poles of universal and singular in freedom of the press, guaranteeing the right of every citizen to express publicly their opinion.

Hegel elaborates the principle of contradiction in his *Logic of Essence*, describing the movement wherein the being opposes itself insofar that reflects in itself and in the other. The contradiction is a logical concept that moves the whole political reality. Hegel analyzes the fact of public opinion and understands it as a contradiction, i.e. the right of the citizen to say their opinion freely allows one to express opposing views. This is the logic of the opinion, say what one thinks immediately, exposing the contradiction of pre-judgments, preferences, interests, so on. The logic of the opinion is the movement of the contradiction of right to freely express what they think and want, through the mediation of sociopolitical institutions.

The principle of Hegelian contradiction gives us a diagnosis and an understanding of the relevant public opinion to understand both their time as the complex nature of contemporary society. But how the public opinion is treated later by J. S. Mill? What is their diagnosis and interpretive horizon for analyzing public opinion?

2.1.3 Principle of Utility

The utilitarian horizon is present in the political philosophy of J. S. Mill¹¹ and therefore is applied to his irreducible defense of freedom of expression. In the conception of this philosopher, a society where freedom of expression is effective brings more positive consequences for their members than those where freedom is curtailed; and free opinion is a more appropriate system than the flagrant partiality front of the censorship of private opinions.

Mill points out that there is also the *principle of utility*, guiding the defense and maintenance of free public opinion, as it brings benefits to the communities where

it is applied. A democratic society allows its citizens to satisfy their desire to form the best possible opinions and as the most appropriate scenario to impartial consideration of all the views, without arbitrary privileges to one in particular. We can affirm that Mill applied the moral principle of utility to public opinion. There is happiness in telling his own opinion. More than that, there is a pleasure in expressing what you think. The individual seeks a benefit or an interest and may want to influence the other with their opinion. It is useful to ensure individual moral pleasure to have his opinion recognized by the public. The game of opinions recognizes the utility of everyone saying their opinion. However, the justification of the various opinions is given by impartiality, namely the opinion needs to be useful for the greatest number of individuals and not just satisfy the partiality of some opinions.

We have, thus, the publicity, the contradiction and usefulness as three principles of public opinion. We think they are very consistent in order to understand the fact of public opinion. The publicity of policy, the logic of contradiction and utilitarian moral are constitutive principles of public. They allow understand the new scenarios of the public sphere built or influenced by multimedia, social networking and expanded national and internationally in global dynamics of self-communication (cf. Castells). Thus, it can be seen that the network of opinions follows logic of contradiction moved by perceptions and immediate impressions, the utility struggle of interests, enabled by the principle of the public who articulates emotions in neural and social networks.

2.2 “Subject-Mind”, Self Neuronal and Social Networks

The theory of mind composed of perceptions and impressions, ideas and passions, as described by D. Hume, allows making a diagnosis to understand the dynamics of opinion and its expression in social networks. As well as, the neuroscientific study of António R. Damásio, in which the author exposes the relevance of emotions from the study of the brain and its implications for decision-making at self-neuronal.

2.2.1 Mind

Perceptions, impressions and ideas— all contents of the human mind are *perceptions*. These may be the impressions originating, since they are present in the mind with great intensity, such as the sensations and emotions: simple impressions. Or perceptions can be *derived*, that is, ideas, because they are images produced by the *memory* from the impressions: simple ideas.

Put another way, the distinction between feeling and thinking, Hume distinguished perceptions into two categories: impressions and ideas. The impressions we have to see, hear, feel, love, hate, desire are strong and vivid, while the ideas are weak and dimmed copies of impressions. The simple ideas are caused by simple impressions because they resemble and are subsequent

¹¹ Cf., Barbara ORLANS. et al. (1988). The human use of animals: case studies in ethical choice. Oxford: Oxford University Press, (1) the principle of utility: for utilitarians, the idea that individuals seek to maximize their well-being. It is part of a utilitarian ethic, so the postulate that one should seek the greatest happiness for the greatest number of involved in action; (2) a range of benefits: utilitarian argue that the benefits and the harm from the consequences of an action can be measured through items that count as goods or primary utilities; (3) the consequentialism: all utilitarian theories are consequentialistas. This means that actions are morally right or wrong according to its consequences, far beyond the virtues for any moral quality that they may have, such as fidelity, friendship or trust; (4) impartial: Finally, all parties involved in the action must receive an impartial consideration. Any partiality concerning particular individuals must possess a reasonable and strict utilitarian justification.

to, since it lacked the original impression, also lack the corresponding idea. There is a circular relationship between impressions of sensation originated from the sense organs and the pleasure and pain that cause ideas. These cause new impressions such as passions, desires and emotions. These, in turn, are again copied on ideas, generating an uninterrupted experience of the human mind.

For Maria Isabel Limongi¹², Hume changes to modern classical conception of reason. This is one reason it is no more intuition or perception of the order of things, but reflection on our way of associating ideas. This reason that is not opposed replaces or submits to the imagination, but which is formed from its operations. Hume changed the way of conceiving the human being; his relationship with nature and history, i.e. subject is the constituent's own experience.

The sentimental British tradition in which Hume inserts (Shaftesbury, Hutcheson and Adam Smith) considers that the genesis of morality is the feelings or affections, from which to approve or disapprove the actions within a process of formation of moral judgment. Among the feelings, stands out the sympathy which is responsible for the relationship between morality and sociability. Hume introduces the concept of sympathy in the section "From love to Fame", book 2, part I of the *Treaty* (Hume, 2000), by analyzing the passions of pride and humility. Sympathy enables social interaction, allowing the formation of moral judgments. There is a tendency to the sympathy that intensifies the feelings, moderates or even extinguishing the pleasure and the pain.

In the *Treatise*, Hume also defines sympathy as the conversion of an idea in impression by the force of imagination, which translates in virtue of the principles of association of ideas and impressions. A passion of another appears as idea, because their behavior is an effect, which leads us to the idea of the cause, the passion. Our association with him, by contiguity and similarity, gives strength and vivacity to this idea, converting it into impression, i.e. his own passion, that, now, we feel.

2.2.2 Passions

sentimental basis of the subject of inferences. The passions are impressions formed by combinations, associations (resemblance, contiguity in space-time, causation) and relationships. The main passions are pleasure and pain. For Livia Guimarães¹³, the contribution of Hume is describing that the passions are at the origin of our judgments and that the morals and knowledge have a sentimental basis. Hume develops this theory through the relationships between impressions and ideas, which relates the reason to passions, making it dependent on the

passions and not above them, hence the famous phrase: "The reason is the slave of the passions." The analysis of causal inference confers on the feeling an epistemological status, because the connection between cause and effect, inferences based on habit and the belief consist in a feeling of determination of the mind, which conceives of force and liveliness the idea of an impression. The moral inference expresses a feeling of approval of useful or pleasing qualities, or unpleasant or harmful qualities.

2.2.3 Subject-"Mind" or a Network of Perceptions in Motion.

To Hume, the mind is a "bundle of perceptions", i.e. a complex network of impressions and ideas. The ideas in the mind are not entirely loose and disconnected, nor associate by mere chance. So, it is not immediately to identify the human subject with the fragmented subject as usually call it postmodernity. Hume claims that an idea introduces another, joining, by similarity, contiguity (in space or time), cause and effect. The mind is a network of perceptions united by these principles, according to the criterion of force and vivacity.

This model of subject-mind is inclusive, because covers from perceptions (impressions and ideas), the passions and feelings, until facts understood by inferences based on habit and beliefs. In this model, the "Self", or the "subject-mind", is constituted by a dynamic network of perceptions, surpassing the ontological model, based on "self-substance" static.

This subject-mind, today, is the subject connected in social networks, virtual relationships and circumstantial of space-time instantaneous and simultaneous, such as, on the network, with friends or strangers, in privacy or in society, in town or country, under a democratic or non-democratic Government, consisting of power of representation or indifferent, young or old, in the diversity of times and places, all articulated in online networks. This is the new subject of social networks which presents an epistemological proximity to the subject-mind Humean by the following: The model of the constitution of the "subject-mind" composed of perceptions, impressions and ideas, forming the basis of sentimental of the subject of inference, articulates a network of perceptions in motion.

2.2.4 "Subject-Mind" and Social Networks.

Social networks, you can build a relationship according to the desires and identifications of pleasure, as the Group and/or selected virtual community. Relationships are structured from the interaction, namely the ability to establish a relationship with other individuals who have the same worldviews, same social, aesthetic and behavioral categories. The subjects interact in the context of the Internet and print their perceptions or rebuilt according to other perceptions, based on exchanges of impressions, exchange ideas, mixtures of convivences and passions of pain and pleasure.

The cultural and social life becomes a global network through the plurality of styles, time and places, travel,

¹² An alternative to the notion of subject. Available at: http://www.ihuonline.unisinos.br/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=3993&secao=369

¹³ Skepticism, naturalism and sentiment: Hume's contributions. Available at: http://www.ihuonline.unisinos.br/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=3989&secao=369

media images and communication systems on social networks. The subject in Network World binds in times, places, stories, traditions, floating freely, from anywhere and at any time. The interactivity of the subject is given for participation in the production of content by creating messages, sending suggestions and opinions, allowing that all involved are, in some ways, agents in the process of social networking.

The logic of the subject of social networking is crossed by the contradictions of opinion inserted in networks of perceptions of subjectivities; therefore it is an area of production, circulation and construction of meanings in the network. Experiences to share impressions of content, exchange information, participate in forums to express opinions or create/join communities, provokes in the subject the sensation of freedom, to live with pleasure, display intimacies, construct subjectivities and identities in a network of impressions and ideas.

The interpretation and the inferences about choices of themes, the way they defend their ideas, their beliefs are expressed in actions that these individuals engaged in these groups and their interaction in virtual communities articulate themselves in social movements. Thus, the subject of social networks is a bundle of relations of perceptions, articulated in impressions, feelings, desires, passions, constituting the “neuronal subject.”

2.2.5 Self neuronal and subject of social networks

Public opinion and the theory of the agenda must be understood, currently, in the scenario of the subject as *self-neuronal*, i.e. the insertion processes in social networks is a process of organic interaction which is determined by the logic of self and neural networks. Our goal is to clarify the influence of emotions in the process of interaction and connection in social networks. For this, we present initially, the neuroscientific study of António R. Damásio, *Descartes' error: Emotion, reason and the human brain* (Damásio, 2006), and then we make explicit the relationship with social networks.

The author exposes the relevance of emotions from the study of the brain and its implications for decision-making in a broad sense and the influence on behavioral decisions in particular. He defends the *thesis of the organism*, to overcome the biological reductionism, avoiding the reduction of mental states to brain states, showing the organic relationship between body and brain and physical and social environment. The mind is the product of the interrelation between the biological and the social, forming the self or the subject in neuronal network, which not get stuck to naturalism or biological reductionism of neuroscience. The study of philosophy of mind, according to Searle (Searle, 2006), confined itself, only the “subject of consciousness (subjectivity), conceiving the mind as *neutral*, reducing it to the external behaviors (Behaviorism), the relationship of cause and

effect (functionalism), or being understood as mere brain phenomenon (eliminative materialism)” (Lima, 2013).

Damasio points out those emotions have a primacy in decision-making. This thesis is taken up of Hume's theory about the role of perceptions and impressions, ideas and passions of pain and pleasure in relation to human action. Then, decide it's not just knowing and judging from reason, but from feeling, i.e. take into account “the emotional dimension”, because “feelings *are as cognitive as any other perceptual image* and so dependent on the cerebral cortex as any other image” (Damásio, 2006, p.190). In fact, the brain is a unit in which “there are no ‘individualized’ centers for vision, for the language or even to reason or to social behavior. What actually exists are ‘systems’ formed by various units brain interconnected” (2006, p.35).

The body works through feelings and emotions, in which the sentimental states precede emotional states. Damásio understands that feelings are connected the main states of the body, generating basic or primary emotions, such as happiness, sadness, anger, fear, joy, etc., and then these secondary emotions generate re-signified by interaction with the environment. It is noted that the brain is not an automaton that works separately or above the body, but he works from “somatic markers”¹⁴, which register the emotions that influence our decision-making processes or actions, second Damásio. The somatic markers are the registry or the emotional mark of our experiences, i.e. are “a repertoire of stored stimuli in the brain which are activated either consciously or unconsciously” (Lima, 2013, p.19), when the subject need to act or make decisions. Therefore, the somatic markers are dynamic, because emotions can be recreated, that is, the subject is in a continuous process of learning on their mental states.

Therefore, self-neuronal overcomes the dualism between *res cogitans* and *res extensa* (Descartes), where we have, on one hand, reason with clear and distinct ideas, independent of the senses, and on the other hand, the body moved by biological and emotions impulses. Thus, for Damasio, there is the primacy of emotions in decision-making, questioning the myth of pure rationality. The self-neuronal configures the logic of social networks through a rationality that integrates simultaneously the emotions, the brain processes and the surrounding world. Participation in social networks currently follows the logic of self-neuronal, i.e. there is a primacy of emotions (pain, suffering, pleasure) in discussions of public opinion.

We consider initially the phenomenon of public opinion based on the principles of publicity, contradiction and usefulness. Described, then the logic of the

¹⁴ The somatic markers are therefore acquired through experiences, under the control of an internal system of preferences and under the influence of an external set of circumstances that include not only entities and phenomena with which the organism has to interact, but also social and ethical rules conventions (Damasio, 2006, p.211).

perceptions of the “subject-mind” Humean, noting that impressions and ideas and passions are sentimental basis the subject of inferences that opines, may be asserted that the “subject-mind” is a network of perceptions in motion. Finally, we conclude that the subject of social networking interacts and establishes contacts, opines and forms opinion, from the logic of self-neuronal. In this scenario, public opinion in the network, it puts the question of how and who makes the choice of themes and emerging issues, in other words, how and who sets the agenda of what is a priority for society?

3. THEORY OF AGENDA AND SOCIAL NETWORKS

Why do people think certain topics and put aside others? What influence or forms public opinion? According to the Agenda Setting theory developed by Maxwell McCombs (McCOMBS, 2009), the agenda of talks and debates is caused by newspapers, television and radio (conventional media). These media have the power to change the social reality, i. e., inform the facts to be thought of or discussed by the public. They set the agenda of issues and its contents at local, national and international level.

However, in the face of conventional media schedule emerges the agenda of social networks: the internet and social networks allow citizens to express opinions and interests, without the filter of conventional media. Through social networks, many agendas have been established, protests and uprisings were organized. The public sphere has found in new technologies a form of direct expression of his opinion, so much that some experts are seeing a new phenomenon: the formation of a new public opinion.

On the one hand, we have the conventional public opinion, scheduled by traditional media and controlled by private interests and by regulations and state powers. On the other hand, the new differentiated public opinion by inclusive participation, the autonomy, speed and transparency, which has, as agents, protagonists and decentralized citizens with instant mobility and articulated on social networks.

The public sphere was transformed by the internet that altered the communicational ecosystem, creating a new public opinion. The sociologist Manuel Castells calls this phenomenon of mass self-communication. The collective actions in the network, such as the collaborative construction of Wikipedia, join thousands of small communities that develop expressions of collective intelligence, articulating an autonomous public sphere and by networking.

Large corporations and international communications agencies that have the power to spread their version of events and to set the public agenda are faced with the agenda of social networks which express opposite

opinions, introducing a contradictory public with strength plural expression and democratic action¹⁵.

This brief exposition of the theory of the agenda and the implications of the public network explains the conflict between the logic of the conventional press and the new logic of the internet¹⁶, that is, the objectivity of the description of facts is given by the logic of an inclusive, plural and transparent agenda and not just the exclusive editorial interests from an agenda restricted to a segment of society. The conventional media was trapped, only the business model that is, as an enterprise that generates profit as an industry, being the information treated as a commodity. For example, newspapers have migrated to the internet, but they did not understand that the network assumes another economic logic, journalism post-industrial, that is, this is no longer a mere industrial activity, and the journalist just a worker, or a conventional employee. We entered in the information era, and no more in the industrial era. Need to a new concept of sustainability from the media, journalists and communicators, with the challenge of logic network, that the internet represents, it becomes new economic logic of the information society.

In addition to the challenge of economic sustainability, we have the normative question when debating the topic of “subject-mind,” self-neuronal and social networks. For Korsgaard (2010), the problem is not to reduce the normative sphere to naturalism, in his version of eliminative naturalism. She observes that by placing a common origin of moral behavior between humans and animals from empathy, cooperation and altruism, it does not exhaust the normative question. Animals do not have the normative level the capacity for self-government, that is, the reflexive ability to assess potential reasons for beliefs and actions, discerning whether these reasons are good reasons for action (Lima, 2013, p.25).

Anyway, Damasio’s theory on self-neuronal connected in social networks is a good example that it is possible to treat traditional themes while maintaining a theoretical and practical tension that avoids, to the epistemological level, both biological reductionism as personal or social aprioristic normativism, building an interdisciplinary dialogue between naturalism and normativity that, classically, was among the empirical sciences and humanities (Lima, p.25).

CONCLUSION

The current context presents a changing situation regarding the role of citizens, the conventional media and social networks. Interactivity is the dynamics of this

¹⁵ Cf. Bavaresco, A. Media Agenda x Agenda of social networks. Available at: www.abavaresco.com.br

¹⁶ Cf. <http://www.ihu.unisinos.br/noticias/522548-midia-ninja-e-preciso-oxigenar-a-velha-midia>

new configuration, making democratic and pluralistic information. Public opinion and the theory of agenda are formed from the contradiction of opinions. The citizen becomes protagonist of information because social networks allow citizen overcomes manipulation: He becomes an articulator of opinions that diffuse immediately in time and digital space. That is, the world is entering an era of digital autonomy, in which citizens are increasingly independent, active and interactive. Citizens can build a new citizenship in which the processes of the network society consolidate the power of communication.

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