

## EDITORIAL

### INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS AND SOCIAL NETWORKS<sup>1</sup>

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This thematic dossier systematizes the main lines of reflection presented in the International Relations panel of the II International Congress on Communication and Social Media in the Information Society, which took place at Universidade Autónoma de Lisboa between 31 March and 1 April 2021.

The common denominator that guided the debate highlighted the role of information and communication technologies as a vehicle for action on a large scale. The construction of this globalizing web cemented strong interdependence of the economic, political and communicative powers among countries and blocs.

Zygmunt Bauman<sup>2</sup>, with the acumen that characterizes him, considers this process to be one of the irreversible features of our time, when we all depend on everyone. Decisions

<sup>1</sup> Editorial translated by Carolina Peralta.

<sup>2</sup> See the interview given by the sociologist to the project *fronteiras do pensamento*; <https://www.fronteiras.com/artigos/zygmunt-bauman-especial>



and events that take place in the “world culture”<sup>3</sup> can produce multiple direct, indirect, immediate, distant effects (even if certain societies may appear to be impervious to a set of phenomena).

This situation underlies an intensive digitalization of our lives, exposed to a continuous flow of information and frequent sharing. The rapid circulation of networked information shapes incessant opinions, in a public debate increasingly marked by issues of a globalizing nature. Aware of this situation, public agents (governments, political agents, interest groups and corporations) give primacy to the communicative phenomenon as a strategic “arsenal” for negotiation and domination.

We glimpse an relinquishment of the perception of communication as a soft power<sup>4</sup> instrument, having increasingly become a hard power instrument. The Cambridge Analytica<sup>5</sup> phenomenon, of common knowledge and which would be difficult to summarize here, would be the illustrative paradigm of the use of communication as a definition of power relations in the international scene. This is the starting point for this thematic issue. The articles that comprise this dossier address this issue in several significant aspects.

A first group discusses the importance of digital tools at the service of what is advocated as “cyber-diplomacy”. A first consideration addresses the scenario of technological migration to the 5G reality, which opens up fierce disputes between States, taking into account the security and defence issues that it raises (Text 1; Muñoz-Satre, Rodrigo-Martín and Rodrigo-Martín). A second text assesses Qatar's communication strategy to rehabilitate its international credibility. The procedures operated from a crisis management situation are discussed, after this country of the Arabian Peninsula was accused by its neighbours of supporting terrorist causes, becoming the target of international sanctions (text 9; González).

A second set discusses misinformation issues. Text 3 (Guzmán and Rodríguez-Cánovas) comprehensively analyses the strategies used by States to spread false information with the clear intention of gaining political dividends. This issue materializes in a more concrete way in the reflection that proposes a look at the existing tension between the European Union and the misinformation attacks conducted by the Chinese and Russian agendas (text 6; Benedicto).

Text 10 by Magallón-Rosa and Sánchez-Duarte relates misinformation issues in the context of the pandemic, comparing southern European countries. It bridges the gap between the topic of misinformation and the current pandemic context we are experiencing. This is the third guiding axis of this issue of Janus.net, e-journal of international relations, which includes two more texts to complement the reflection on the epidemic. An article addresses the communication mechanisms used by European and Portuguese entities that oversee the management of vaccines, to communicate the vaccination plan (text 11; Santos et al). A second article looks at the phenomenon of

<sup>3</sup> Lipovetsky, G., & Serroy, J. (2010). *A Cultura-Mundo. Resposta a uma sociedade desorientada*. Lisbon: Edições 70.

<sup>4</sup> Wendzel, R. (1985). *Relações Internacionais: o enfoque do formulador de políticas*. Brasília: Universidade de Brasília.

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.netflix.com/pt/title/80117542>



tourism, marked by a strong scenario of fluctuating information and global uncertainty (text 13; Caldevilla-Domínguez et al).

A fourth group of articles discusses the role of social media as a political communication instrument; by the Spanish and British royal houses (text 2; Rodríguez, Vázquez Jorquera), by the Trump administration (text 8; Costa), and as a communication instrument of the Portuguese and Spanish Catholic Church in the relationship as power interlocutors (text 12; Sabaté and Chiva).

A fifth group of papers closes this debate, proposing three perspectives on the use of digital resources as enhancers of human rights awareness. The first scrutinizes public discourses about disability in the Spanish context, seen through the viewpoint of international guidelines that propose more inclusive societies (text 7; López-Cepeda, Maña-Viniegra and Vivar-Zurita). A second (text 5; Bernabé) studies the communicative strategies adopted by an organization such as Amnesty International, in its recurrent stance on issues of a humanitarian nature. The third perspective examines how commercial corporations incorporate civil rights issues into their advertising approaches. In text 4, Díaz-Bajo and Martínez-Borda analyse an advertising campaign for a world-brand, which proposes a modelling strategy for a commercial identity based on gender and racial equality issues.

These are the five guiding axes of this thematic dossier, which contain texts that reveal a better understanding of a hyper-communicated world<sup>6</sup>, marked by corporate possibilities that simultaneously dispute each other in relations of permanent competition and tension.

Happy readings!

### How to cite this editorial

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<sup>6</sup> Constantinou, C., Richmond, O., & Watson, A. (2008). International Relations and the challenges of global communication. *Review of International Studies*, 34, 5-19.