Alternative Communications: A much needed transformation

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Our world has always been in a state of ever-ending change. As human beings, we have the power to preserve useful changes (Taylor, 2008) that should aid us improve our livelihoods and contribute to the common good (Hai *et al*., 2021). In order to adapt to those changes and deal with a new reality (Dort *et al*., 2020; Felepchuk & Finley, 2021) innovation is essential now more than ever, to help us overcome challenges and limitations, imposed rapidly with the arrival of COVID-19 (Islam, 2020).

Digital technologies have played an important role in this 'transformation', with results relating directly to the treatment of the virus and revealing a new 'virtual' way of living (Brem *et al*., 2021). Nevertheless, digital technologies have also instigated a plethora of social issues and challenges, that are not always pleasant to admit; They are, however, important to research, as we seek alternatives to traditional communication, knowing that the world we live in, will never be the same again.

Our first article brings to the fore the very sensitive issue of social media and its negative effect on young people. The paper is entitled '*Social Media Effects and Self- Harm Behaviors Among Young People: Theoretical and Methodological Challenges*' by Argyro Kefala, examines the effects on social media use and online behaviours that leads to self- harm. The examination of those behaviors both suicidal and non-suicidal is grounded primarily in psychological and medical research but the increase in the number of adolescents who self- harm, in the last few years, expanded research into the use of social media. The paper addresses the issue from a communication perspective. The main argument of this paper is that social media are complex interactive, multimodal and multidirectional environments and user created cultures that cannot be understood through traditional theories of media effects or simply in quantitative terms of uses and gratifications. Drawing from contemporary studies on media effects and social media affordances, this is an attempt to map the theoretical and methodological challenges in an effort to lay the ground for an enhanced understanding of social media as mediators in self-harming behaviors. A review of current studies in this field reconfirms the conditional and indirect character of media effects identifying at the same time the limitations and gaps in the examination of a complex behavior as it relates to multimodal "self- mass communication" (Castells, 2009) that leads to new forms of "socialized communication".

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Our second article follows on with our alternative communication perspective and brings forward an emerging discipline within the field of Artificial Intelligence (AI) and Research concerning sex (ro)bots which is very new and has been recently undertaken from various scholarships such as gender studies, post-humanist studies as well as social robotics. *'Sex (Ro)bots: Theoretical Challenges in the study of Human-Machine Communication'*, by Iliana Depounti. The article is a review and examines the research focus of studying sex (ro)bots from a Human-Machine Communication (HMC) perspective. It explores two possible theoretical directions and argues in support of and proposes the most appropriate for qualitative HMC researchers. The relational and post-humanist agential philosophy of Bruno Latour is compared and contrasted with the post-structuralist, hermeneutical philosophy of imagination of Cornelius Castoriadis. This article underlines how each of these theories may impact a study within the discipline of HMC, which focuses on the meaning-making processes between humans and machines (Guzman, 2018). By focusing on the epistemological and ontological underpinnings of the two thinkers and providing distinct possible research directions for each theory, the article agrees with the renewed call for qualitative researchers to ground their research to robust theoretical frameworks (Collins & Stockton, 2018). It is argued that Castoriadis's social imaginary is an appropriate theoretical tool to critically investigate sex (ro)bots as it is compatible with HMC's research interests and key concepts in critical AI studies. The purpose of this review article is to encourage the identification of appropriate methodological tools to address sex (ro)bot qualitative research within HMC and the exploration of unanticipated old and new theoretical frameworks.

Priscila Minussi signs the third paper of this issue, entitled '*Political Communication on Facebook: Comparing the República Portuguesa and La Moncloa pages'*. As social media platforms grow in popularity, political institutions have been using them for more autonomy in public communication. The article analyses the use of Facebook, the most popular social media worldwide, by República Portuguesa, the government of Portugal, and La Moncloa, the government of Spain. First, a literature review on social media use by governments is presented. Then, the results of a manual categorization of a sample of posts published throughout January 2021 are presented. The posts were categorized according to DePaula, Dincelli and Harrison's (2018) typology of government social media communication, which consists of information provision, input seeking, online dialogue/offline interaction, and symbolic presentation. The article provides an understanding of the use of each governmental party's Facebook posts as a communication tool.

'*Applied learning and teaching transformations through project-based action learning in an International Business Management programme'*, by KC Chan, Jürgen Rudolph, and Shannon Tan, is the third paper for this issue. This paper expounds on applied learning and teaching transformations through project-based action learning for students' self-awareness and effective competence development. The purpose of this paper is to track the lead author's two-decade experience in teaching a series of International Business Management (IBM) modules at an Indonesian university, and its effects on students' professional life trajectories after having completed their Bachelor's studies, especially in terms of their career. The overarching research question is: *Has the students' learning during the series of IBM modules benefited them in terms*

of employability and becoming critical, holistic thinkers? The paper is based on an over 13 years longitudinal action research that used a mixed-methods survey with multiple testimonials accessed via thematic content analysis. To succeed, international business management graduates have to continuously strategise, implement, and incorporate a closed-loop feedback system to track and manage individual progress with an action learning balanced scorecard. As whole-brain learners, the pursuit of knowledge must be transformed into a value-added advantage in four types of interconnected and interdependent power: a) holistic thinking, b) systems thinking, c) critical thinking and d) lateral thinking.

Evangelia Avraam, Andreas Veglis and Charalampos Dimoulas present the last paper of this issue entitled '*News article consumption habits of Greek internet users*'. The concept of different news consumption habits during a day has been well known for many decades in the broadcasting industry. News websites are also experiencing a drop in late afternoon traffic and a sharp drop in the evening hours. Furthermore, during the weekend, website traffic numbers appeared to be significantly different than the numbers during the weekdays. That resulted in the adoption of the concept of dayparting in the case of the internet. The existence of internet dayparts can have a significant impact on news websites since they can significantly determine their success. It is quite natural to assume that media organizations have adopted their publishing patterns to best satisfy the audience's consumption patterns. This paper investigates those consumption patterns by conducting an extensive web survey among university students and particularly journalism and communication students that are expected to exhibit high consumption rates. The parameters being investigated include time, weekdays and weekends, and content categories. The study identified distinct periods that exhibit specific consumption patterns. The results appear to be to some degree in agreement with findings of previous studies that reported on publishing patterns, but significant differences have also been identified. Those results can provide valuable information for the implementation of successful content publishing strategies from the media organizations.

The above research papers, coming from academics and researchers in different parts of the world (USA, Singapore, England, Spain, Greece), reveal how traditional modes of communication are changing as we transform and strive to adapt to a world in constant evolvement.

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