

## MEDIA, EXTENSION, ESCAPISM AND SOCIAL ISOLATION: THE PARADOXES OF COMMUNICATION IN POST-COVID SOCIAL RELATIONS

### MEIOS DE COMUNICAÇÃO, EXTENÇÃO, ESCAPISMO E INSOLAMENTO SOCIAL: PARADOXOS DA COMUNICAÇÃO NAS RELAÇÕES SOCIAIS PÓS-COVID

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#### ABSTRACT

The use of digital media, in comparison to mass media, has influenced the development of social isolation and fragmentation, rather than the unification of cultures, as expected by authors of media theories. One of the consequences of this process has been the rescue of a utopian vision of the past, which was already felt in Postmodernity, and has accelerated due to the crisis caused by the covid-19 pandemic. This article intends to observe this phenomenon, which in addition to leading to social isolation, increases the feeling of uncertainty, which has encouraged the resurgence of escapist ideas, revealed in the post-pandemic discourse as an escape from reality through the will to maintain social isolation, reinforcing the fragmentation in society.

#### Keywords:

Mídia, Extension, Escapism, Isolation.

#### RESUMO

O uso dos meios digitais, em comparação aos meios de massa, tem influenciado o desenvolvimento do isolamento e fragmentação social, ao invés da unificação de culturas, tão esperada por autores das teorias dos meios. Uma das consequências desse processo, tem sido o resgate de uma visão utópica do passado, que já era sentida na Pós-modernidade, e tem se acelerado devido a crise provocada pela pandemia de covid-19. Esse artigo pretende observar esse fenômeno, que além de levar ao isolamento social, amplia a sensação de incerteza, a qual tem incentivado o ressurgimento de ideias escapistas, reveladas no discurso pós-pandêmico como uma fuga da realidade através da vontade da manutenção do isolamento social, reforçando a fragmentação na sociedade.

#### Palavras chave:

Meios de comunicação, extensão, escapismo, isolamento.

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

In the song *Casa no Campo* (1972) by the Brazilian composer Zé Rodrix, but immortalized by the singer Elis Regina, reveals a human desire that seems to constantly return and is strengthened after traumatic moments of crisis and uncertainty: the desire to escape, flee the world, go to the countryside, get back to nature. This escape is expressed in speeches that value a simpler life, in contact with nature, without many desires, wants or wishes, but only the search for the possibility of contemplation, a time to live and appreciate.

It was like the Brazilian neoclassical period, mainly with Arcadian poets, such as Tomás Antônio Gonzaga and Cláudio Manuel da Costa. In his poems, the exaltation of the classic past, the appreciation of the nature, of the simple life is a constant. In addition, these ideals are perceived when observing its maxims: *inutilia trunquat* (banish the useless), *fugere urben* (escape the city), *locus amoenus* (pleasant place), *carpe diem* (seize the day), *aurea mediocritas* (mediocrity is golden) (Abaurre and Pontarra, 2005).

This was escapism in Arcadian Neoclassicism, which seems to have been a reaction, an escape from the vertiginous moment that was constituted earlier: the Baroque. The philosopher Michel de Montaigne (1533-1592) recorded this impression of the Baroque period as a time of uncertainty (Starobinski, 1993). This register can be observed in the visual arts where an aesthetic of vertigo (Dugnani, 2013) was established in the artistic representation of the time, reflecting the feeling of uncertainty in the society of the period. Baroque art sought to represent its time through contradictions: light x dark, movement x formal unity, earthly theme x spiritual theme, but also to present the society's perception of the world at the time. As in Postmodernity, the Baroque period is characterized by the human perception that their world is unstable (Dugnani, 2013), where established models are no longer able to organize themselves based on a classification that is considered immutable (Starobinski, 1993).

The Baroque contradiction, at least in art, was replaced by the search for order and balance and the search for the simple and natural life of Arcadian Neoclassicism. This effect seems to be showing its first symptoms now, in postmodern contemporaneity (Dugnani, 2013), especially after the isolation crisis caused by the covid-19 pandemic, although it is too early to say that this effect is lasting, or that it will pass fast, but living in Postmodernity, with its rapid changes, it is very likely to be ephemeral.

The perception of this phenomenon is becoming more evident with the return to present activities. At this moment, it is possible to observe, with some constancy, speeches that defend the permanence of the home office, that is, the exchange present social interaction, for virtual interaction, in addition to the development of certain social phobias. What is most surprising about these speeches is that the central issue is not related to convenience, but seems to reflect that face-to-face social interaction does not seem to be interesting anymore, and that it could be replaced by any video conference, live or WhatsApp message. At this moment, it is impossible don't remember a 2009 film, directed by Jonathan Mostow and starring Bruce Willis: "The Surrogates". The film takes place in a dystopian future, where human beings have given up living in person with others, and are now replaced by automatons commanded by human beings themselves from a special chair. Perhaps we are not so far from making this fiction a reality, as

humans are now capable of virtually living together. At least as far as digital media technology is concerned.

Using this idea as a motivator, this article intends to initially observe from the perspective of Mcluhan's (2016) media theories, how the use of digital media, in relation to mass electric media, has served as one of the influencers, and at the same time support, to propagate this new escapist phase that seems to want to manifest itself in Post-modernity. Similar to what happened in the transition from Baroque to Arcadian Neoclassicism, motivated now by the increased sense of uncertainty that seems to be, once again, one of the strongest marks of Postmodernity (Dugnani, 2021), the human walks towards a new wave escapist, which was already foreshadowed in symptoms such as the appreciation of the past, the retrotopia of Bauman (2017). That is, this utopian vision of the past, a nostalgia for what was not lived (Dugnani, 2019) was already a symptom of this new escapism that has been growing in contemporary society, but which, at that moment, was accelerated by the crisis of the covid-19 pandemic, which in addition to forcing the isolation of human beings, slowed down the pace of life (Dugnani, 2020b) and increased the feeling of uncertainty that was already characteristic of Postmodernity.

Even the concept that represents our time – Post-modernity – is still questioned, even by this research, which, for reasons of affinity with the theorists used, will maintain the use of the term, but it is understood that it could be used, in a efficient way to represent the contemporary period, the term coined by Lipovetsky (2004): Hypermodernity.

Based on these reflections, the hypothesis raised is that the media, in their transition from the hegemony of mass media to digital media (Dugnani, 2020a), are creating a fragmentation of communities (Baitello, 2015), a strengthening of individualism (Bauman, 1998), a weakening of otherness (Han, 2015), a deglobalization (Dugnani, 2018), rather than a union of cultures as advocated by Mcluhan (2016) in his concept of Global Village. Diverging from Mcluhan's (2016) view, it is stated that the media, paradoxically, would be acting contrary to their primary objectives. Instead of creating unity they are creating fragmentation. Furthermore, it should be noted that this situation, which is not recent, has produced an increase in the feeling of loneliness, agreeing with Azambuja (2012), and would have been developing for a long time, as stated by Hertz (2021). Therefore, the digital means of communication, by influencing fragmentation, the failure of otherness, the feeling of loneliness, and, with it, the increase in the feeling of insecurity, would be vectors that, at the same time, influence escapist thoughts in post-modern society, as they make materially possible, as supports of the messages that they are, the development of this process. The means, as Mcluhan (2016) would say, are literally messages in this example, they are pure information. This is because the means, as well as information, influence human behavior and consciousness, while disseminating this content in an accelerated manner.

For all this, it is intended to confront the optimistic view of Mcluhan (2016), and his theory of the media, with authors who are reviewing the question that the media, without any external regulation, are producing a society that, instead of valuing collectivity and rescuing the tribal condition of sharing ideas, are generating fragmentation, isolation and loneliness.

Instead of the tribal collectivity, the means of communication, mainly the digital means at the beginning of the 21st century, would be promoting the fragmentation of communities,

the weakening of relations of otherness, loneliness, social escapism, the strengthening of individualism with liquidity in relations and deglobalization, as it is possible to identify in the criticisms made by authors such as Baitello (2015), Han (2015), Hertz (2021), Bauman (1998) and Dugnani (2018).

## 2. ESCAPISM, ISOLATION AND PANDEMIC

Because of this paradoxical phenomenon of fragmentation that the media have produced in society, and, moreover, driven by the isolation imposed by the covid-19 pandemic, discourses that value the maxims of Arcadian Neoclassicism, which, going against the neoliberal imperative of production and acceleration of performance (Rosa, 2019; Han, 2015), suggest the search for simplicity, escape from the city, valuing what is essential.

Durante a quarentena a sociedade encontra-se imersa em um quadro paradoxal quanto às suas próprias percepções dos fatos sociais. De um lado, vivência situações cotidianas com uma abundância de informações as quais, muitas vezes, somos incapazes de processar; por outro, a sociedade se vê brutalmente desacelerada com a impossibilidade de seguir com o ritmo frenético que a modernidade nos impõe. O fato de ser obrigada a ficar em casa para que a disseminação da doença não se propague simboliza uma epifania indesejada na relação consigo mesmo e, também, com a nossa própria casa enquanto extensão do eu. Se outrora buscávamos na cidade ou em alguma viagem uma forma de escapismo social ou de novos encontros existenciais, ora isso não é possível, ao menos quanto ao contato físico com o outro. (Fois-Braga e Brusadin, 2020, p. 45)<sup>2</sup>

Although this search for the postmodern human being is valid, another effect seems to be felt: direct personal relationships, when they have been replaced by virtual relationships, mediated by digital means of communication, have accelerated the desire for isolation of human beings, which is reflected in phenomena such as the Great Renunciation (BBC News Mundo, 2021), the increase in discourses linked to the Cabana Syndrome (Borges, 2020), the increase in psychic illnesses such as the feeling of loneliness, “obsession, social phobias or agoraphobia”. (Sánchez, 2020).

The Great Resignation (BBC News Mundo, 2021) would be the departure of thousands of professionals from their jobs, claiming that they were seeking to improve their lives.

É o fenômeno que tem sido chamado de a "Grande Renúncia", conceito que se popularizou nos Estados Unidos depois que 4 milhões de profissionais (2,7% da

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<sup>2</sup> “During the quarantine, society is immersed in a paradoxical situation regarding its own perceptions of social facts. On the one hand, experiencing everyday situations with an abundance of information which we are often unable to process; on the other hand, society finds itself brutally slowed down with the impossibility of keeping up with the frantic pace that modernity imposes on us. The fact of being obliged to stay at home so that the spread of the disease does not spread symbolizes an unwanted epiphany in the relationship with oneself and, also, with our own home as an extension of the self. If we used to look for a form of social escapism or new existential encounters in the city or on a trip, now this is not possible, at least in terms of physical contact with the other.”

força de trabalho) deixaram o emprego em abril deste ano, estabelecendo um recorde histórico. (BBC News Mundo, 2021)<sup>3</sup>

Cabana Syndrome (Borges, 2020) is a very strong fear of leaving the house, which is reflected in illnesses such as social phobias and agoraphobia.

Finalmente, existe um terceiro grupo de patologias em trajetória ascendente: os padrões de esquiva, relacionados à fobia social. Ou seja, a tendência à inibição social, a evitar o contato com outras pessoas por não confiar muito no outro ou acreditar ser alvo de avaliações constantes. A ansiedade, a vontade de se afastar de lugares onde há muitas pessoas e a preocupação por ir a algum lugar onde possa haver uma multidão são sintomas dos transtornos ligados à fobia social. Entre seus fatores de risco estão as experiências negativas, como a atual, em que sair às ruas pode nos fazer achar que a massa, inevitavelmente, nos contagiará com a COVID-19. (Sánchez, 2020)<sup>4</sup>

In addition to these psychic phenomena, it is possible to perceive others that represent this almost Arcadian neo-escapism in Postmodernity, of which two stand out: I) the stampede to gated communities on the outskirts and suburbs of large cities, as in São Paulo, Brazil. II) the escape to virtual realities and the construction of a fantasy world, be it utopian or even dystopian.

The ironic term almost Arcadian neoescapism is understood here as this tendency observed in Postmodernity of a utopian rescue of the past - described by Bauman (2017) as Retrotopia - which has been strengthened because of the feeling of uncertainty and the social isolation imposed by the COVID-19 pandemic. This term was compared, as presented in the introduction, to the escapist ideas of the Brazilian Neoclassical period (Archadism). Taking it as a reference, escapism is understood as the search to escape reality through imagination (Fois-Braga and Brusadin, 2020; Abarre and Pontarra, 2005), so common, both in literature and in everyday and political discourses of Postmodernity in this return to activities with the weakening of the pandemic. After all, it should be noted, as it is not intended to value any type of denialism, that at the time of writing this article, the pandemic has not yet ended, although we are calling it post-pandemic.

In all these cases, the escape from reality seems to reveal the anguish caused by the feeling of losing control of one's life and the search for certainties, even if they are unreal, virtual or imaginary.

Outro problema que tende a crescer são os transtornos do espectro obsessivo, relacionados com o controle que temos do nosso ambiente. Durante a quarentena, é uma tarefa simples: sem interação com outras pessoas (ou apenas com membros

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<sup>3</sup> "It is the phenomenon that has been called the "Great Resignation", a concept that became popular in the United States after 4 million professionals (2.7% of the workforce) left their jobs in April this year, setting a historic record."

<sup>4</sup> "Finally, there is a third group of pathologies on an upward trajectory: the avoidance patterns, related to social phobia. That is, the tendency to social inhibition, to avoid contact with other people because they do not trust the other very much or believe that they are the target of constant evaluations. Anxiety, the desire to move away from places where there are many people and the concern about going somewhere where there might be a crowd are symptoms of disorders linked to social phobia. Among its risk factors are negative experiences, such as the current one, in which taking to the streets can make us think that the mass will inevitably infect us with COVID-19."

da família ou coabitantes), com regras e horários definidos e facilidade para limpar cada canto de casa, é fácil manter cada coisa em seu lugar. Mas a situação se complica com o desconfinamento, no qual muitas das pessoas que sentiam dominar a situação perdem essa sensação, porque tudo é menos previsível fora de casa. “Questões como a hipocondria vão aumentar e, por isso, muitos pensarão estar mais seguros em casa e, embora possam, não vão querer sair”, explica Mansukhani. (Sánchez, 2020)<sup>5</sup>

Even the convenient lie seems to be more attractive than the feeling of uncertainty for the postmodern human. This need for order and control described by Sanchez (2020) is what has rescued the nostalgia for unlived pasts - Bauman's *Retrotopia* (2017) - the certainties presented by fictional narratives, fundamentalist movements and their promises of order and stability (from who accepts its imperatives without question). See, for example, a symptom of this utopian situation of construction of convenient realities is the intense dissemination of fake news and the construction of a post-truth, which must be understood, not as a lie, but as a truth based on emotion, in desire, not in reason (Genesini, 2018; Prior, 2019).

In this sense, the perfect world of digital media, especially social networks such as Instagram and Facebook, has helped to expand this escapist vision, this desire to rescue utopias, or rather, retrotopias (Bauman, 2017).

O usuário do computador é uma metáfora perfeita desta mudança: aberto para liquidez online, mergulhando no fluxo de ligações e conexões, mas solitariamente fechado em seu próprio quarto ou, pior ainda, hipnotizado com os olhos fixados na tela. Reuniões de rede, "amigos" em redes sociais e blogs, jogos online e, em geral, qualquer contato ou conexão, em caso de comportamento viciante, servem muitas vezes como reforço narcisista e conferem ao indivíduo habilidades que ele queria ter na vida real. O sujeito se coloca nesse registro imaginário que não indica necessariamente um encontro com o Outro, mas, ao contrário, permite o distanciamento da relação e o gozo solitário, em um mecanismo de glorificação do Outro e da relação com o Outro, um dos modelos de expressão da internet. (Manno e Rosa, 2018, p. 123)<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> “Another problem that tends to grow is the obsessive spectrum disorders, related to the control we have of our environment. During quarantine, it's a simple task: no interaction with other people (or just family members or cohabitants), with defined rules and schedules and ease of cleaning every corner of the house, it's easy to keep everything in its place. But the situation is complicated by lack of confidence, in which many people who felt they were in control of the situation lose that feeling, because everything is less predictable away from home. ‘Issues such as hypochondriasis will increase and, as a result, many will think they are safer at home and, although they can, they will not want to go out’, explains Mansukhani.”

<sup>6</sup> “The computer user is a perfect metaphor for this shift: open to online liquidity, plunging into the flow of calls and connections, but shut up alone in his or her own room or, even worse, hypnotized with eyes fixed on the screen. Network meetings, "friends" on social networks and blogs, online games and, in general, any contact or connection, in case of addictive behavior, often serve as narcissistic reinforcement and give the individual skills that he wanted to have in real life. The subject places himself in this imaginary register that does not necessarily indicate an encounter with the Other, but, on the contrary, allows distancing from the relationship and solitary jouissance, in a mechanism of glorification of the Other and the relationship with the Other, one of the models of Internet expression.”

Because of this, the next chapters will compare the vision of the global unification of media theories, represented by the concept of Global Village by McLuhan (2016) and the paradoxical effect of this idea, felt in this moment of Postmodernity: the fragmentation of cultures (Baitello, 2015), the weakening of otherness (Han, 2015), deglobalization (Dugnani, 2018) and the increased sense of loneliness (Hertz, 2021).

## **2.1. MEDIA AS AN EXTENSION**

McLuhan (2016) advocated in his studies that with the extension produced by the advent of electrical means, the tendency of detribalization promoted by the development of the written and printed word would lose strength, and that these new means would expand the tendency of tribalization, inaugurated by the spoken word and rescued by the new electrical communication technologies (retribalization).

Extension should be understood as an effect and a superior function of means, which McLuhan (2016) noted. Before the researcher presented the concept of extension, the means of communication were seen only as transmitters of information, that is, the material support of the message. However, for McLuhan (2016), the media should be considered as extensions of the human being, in addition to transmitting information. For him, the means of communication extend the perception and senses of human beings. The means, according to McLuhan (2016) are the extension of the own human nervous system. Therefore, with the extension of perception, promoted by the media, it is possible for human beings to access much more information, perceive and understand many more phenomena, which were previously beyond the reach of the senses.

As a result, as the means of communication develop technologically, the greater is the reach that they print in relation to the exchange of information, and, consequently, the greater will be the effect of the extension of human perception in relation to the different phenomena that appear throughout the terrestrial globe. The extension produced by the media also makes it possible for different cultures, separated by space, to get closer and exchange information. Taking into account that culture is neither a hermetic nor immutable phenomenon, with the increase in the exchange of information between them, there will be a mixture between them, which may lead, in the future, to homogenization, that is, the fusion between different cultures, forming just one. This phenomenon is observed by McLuhan, mainly in the book *The Media as Extensions of Man* (2016). During the reading, it is noticed that as the means evolve technologically, the effect of the extension of the senses is amplified, producing the mixture and even the fusion between them.

Speech stands for the formation of tribes, writing for great civilizations, print for modern nations and empires, and electrical media for global society. This effect of homogenizing cultures produced by the technological development of the means, for McLuhan (2016), would lead to the formation of the Global Village. That is, due to the acceleration of exchanges between the cultures of the planet, promoted by the global reach of electric media, there would be a global miscegenation between the contents of different human groups, which, consequently, would promote a homogenization of the contents, resulting, finally, in a unique culture.

These concepts by McLuhan are based on his studies, mainly in the book "The Media as Extensions of Man" (2016). In the book in question, the author develops his theory in each chapter, mainly linked to an analysis of a specific medium: The Spoken Word; The Written Word; Radio, The Tribal Drum; The Printed Word; TV, The Shy Giant.

During the reading it is possible to perceive the relationship between the technological development of the means and the transformations produced in society, mainly in relation to what he called tribalization, detribalization and retribalization.

For McLuhan (2016) there are tribalizing and detribalizing means. The printed media and writing, for example, would be detribalizing means, as their use produces a concentration of the individual to the message of the medium, reducing the volume of information exchange with the other, thus promoting individualism. The means that derive from the written word, end up referring the human attention too much to the content itself. This process would delay the development of Global Village.

Remembering that the creation and beginning of the valorization of the written word in human society dates back to around 3,000 years BC, passing through the development of printed media in the 15th century and going on to the 20th century, with the advent of electrical media, it is possible to agree with McLuhan (2016) that humans lived most of their existence in the last millennia, subjugated by the hegemony of the written word, consequently postponing for a long time the development of the utopian project of a Global Village.

On the contrary, the tribalizing means would be those that would produce a tendency for individuals in a society to approach each other, would promote a strengthening of the collective relationships of individuals, as existed in previous communities, in the tribes. For McLuhan (2016), speech and electrical means (mass media, digital media) are tribalizing means. Tribalization does not only presuppose the approximation and exchange of information between individuals, but the strengthening of the sense of collectivity in human beings, to the detriment of individualism. It is not just an exchange of information, but a transformation of social relations. Tribalizing means would lead, according to McLuhan (2016), human cultures on the globe to homogenization and the formation of a global community: the concept of Global Village.

Through this reflection, one cannot confuse the concept of globalization and the Global Village, as the first assumes that the exchange of information with a global reach would produce homogenization, a global society, however, not a tribe, a Global Village. So, what's the difference, if both presuppose a mixture of global cultures? The difference is that in the Global Village, according to McLuhan (2016), in addition to the homogenization of cultures, it would produce a strengthening of collective ties between humans from different groups.

This article's critique of the concept of Global Village is based on these reflections. After all, being still in the period in which the flow of information is carried out massively by electrical means, not only by the means of mass communication, but also by digital means: Why do we observe an increase in the feeling of loneliness (Hertz, 2021), and the resurgence of the will to escape, to escape face-to-face social relationships (contemporary escapism), which is observed in postmodern society, as previously presented? Why do we



observe, instead of the formation of a Global Village, the fragmentation of cultures according to Baitello (2015), the weakening of otherness according to Han (2015) and the deglobalization according to Dugnani (2018)?

### 3. MEANS OF COMMUNICATION AS ISOLATION

Hertz (2021) tells us about the feeling of isolation and loneliness that occurs in postmodern society, where this feeling, for the author, also covers those who are not connected to digital media: the disconnected.

Remodelada pela globalização, pela urbanização, pelas crescentes desigualdades e assimetrias de poder, pelas mudanças demográficas, pelo aumento da mobilidade, pela revolução tecnológica, pela austeridade e agora também pelo Corona vírus, acredito que a manifestação contemporânea de solidão vai além do nosso anseio por conexão com aqueles que estão fisicamente ao nosso redor, do nosso do nosso desenho de amar e ser amados, e da tristeza que sentimos quando nos consideramos desprovidos de amigos. Ela também incorpora quão desconectados nos sentimos dos políticos e da política, quão desligados nos sentimos do nosso emprego e do nosso local de trabalho, quão excluídos muitos de nós se sentem dos ganhos da sociedade e quão impotentes, invisíveis e sem voz tantos de nós acreditamos ser. É uma solidão que inclui, mas ao mesmo tempo é maior do que nosso desejo de nos sentirmos próximos de outras pessoas, porque também é uma manifestação da nossa necessidade de sermos ouvidos, vistos e cuidados, de termos arbítrio, de sermos tratados com justiça, gentileza e respeito. As medidas tradicionais de solidão captam apenas parte disso. (Hertz, 2021, p. 19)<sup>7</sup>

In the John Cacioppo and Stephanie Cacioppo's article, published in the newspaper *El País* on April 13, 2016, the authors warned about a new global epidemic: loneliness. In that article, based on a survey initiated in 2002, the authors state that one in four people interviewed expressed a feeling of loneliness. Thinking in a global dimension, calculating that the world population is reaching close to 8 billion people, then, taking into account the proportion indicated by the research, about 2 billion people must feel loneliness intensely and constantly. In this sense, we agree with Cacioppo and Cacioppo (2016), the world is really experiencing an epidemic of loneliness.

Uma análise recente – de 70 estudos combinados, com mais de três milhões de participantes – demonstra que a solidão aumenta o risco de morte em 26%, aproximadamente o mesmo que a obesidade. O fato de que mais de uma em cada quatro pessoas em países industrializados pode estar vivendo na solidão, com

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<sup>7</sup> “Reshaped by globalization, urbanization, growing inequalities and power asymmetries, demographic changes, increased mobility, the technological revolution, austerity and now also the Corona virus, I believe that the contemporary manifestation of loneliness goes beyond our longing for connection with those who are physically around us, our design to love and be loved, and the sadness we feel when we consider ourselves bereft of friends. It also embodies how disconnected we feel from politicians and politics, how disconnected we feel from our jobs and our workplace, how excluded many of us feel from society's gains, and how powerless, invisible and voiceless so many of us believe to be. It is a loneliness that includes but at the same time is greater than our desire to feel close to other people, because it is also a manifestation of our need to be heard, seen and cared for, to have agency, to be treated fairly, kindness and respect. Traditional measures of loneliness capture only part of this.”

consequências certamente devastadoras para a saúde, deveria nos preocupar. (Cacioppo e Cacioppo, 2016)<sup>8</sup>

Although communication is mediated by digital means, which have the potential to keep human beings connected 24 hours a day to contacts that have global dimensions, it seems that this is not enough to satisfy the human desire for company. In fact, what these data warn of is that just being connected to the media is not enough to fill this feeling of loneliness. So what's missing?

Dugnani (2018) speaks of deglobalization, Baitello (2015) of the fragmentation of social organizations formed in the 20th century, mediated by traditional mass media. So, what's going on? Even with the means of communication extending human perception, expanding the capacity for contact and the reach of communication, do human beings continue to feel alone? In addition to loneliness, is the world fragmenting into increasingly radical, fundamentalist and polarized positions? What happened to the prediction of a Global Village advocated by McLuhan (2016)?

The means that extend the senses and the presentification of the human, far beyond their material and bodily limits, do not seem able to generate this unification of societies, nor to satisfy the need for companionship for human beings. That is, McLuhan's promise (2016) of a global unification seems to be increasingly distant. Is it an initial problem, of adapting to the use of new digital media, which arose from the fascination and innocence of the use of these media by human beings, or would it be an irreversible trend? This cannot be answered now, one can only observe and raise an alert for the development of these trends. In this sense, from the latest verifications, it seems that the digital media, by itself, do not present themselves as a material support of communication efficient enough to sustain a balanced globalization, as stated by Santos (2001) since the beginning of the 21st century, which would help in the development of the Global Village advocated by McLuhan (2016). Worse than that, social relationships mediated by digital media do not seem to satisfy the need for human contact, causing this epidemic of loneliness presented by Hertz (2021) and Cacioppo and Cacioppo (2016).

According to Manno and Rosa (2018), although human beings are gregarious, or rather, live in groups, the new digital means of communication do not seem to be able to strengthen social bonds alone. They end up developing, on the contrary, unstable, liquid relationships, as Bauman (2004) would argue. It is believed that in a world of such accelerated transformations, human beings are showing a fear of affiliating themselves in a more stable way with others. The liquidity and acceleration of society, added to the use of digital media, seem to influence human behavior, producing more fragmentation than unity, more loneliness than coexistence.

A associação em grupos é uma necessidade fundamental para os seres humanos, mas, enquanto no passado as comunidades eram reais e geograficamente localizadas, hoje as pessoas pertencem a comunidades virtuais. Como bem destaca

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<sup>8</sup> "A recent analysis – of 70 studies combined, with more than three million participants – demonstrates that loneliness increases the risk of death by 26%, about the same as obesity. The fact that more than one in four people in industrialized countries may be living in loneliness, with certainly devastating health consequences, should be of concern."

Bauman, no seu livro *Amor líquido: sobre a fragilidade dos laços humanos* (2004), os laços de uma sociedade agora se dão em rede, não mais em comunidade. Dessa forma, os relacionamentos passam a ser chamados de conexões, que podem ser feitas, desfeitas e refeitas, dependendo da vontade do sujeito. Ao mesmo tempo em que as pessoas buscam o afeto, existe o medo de criar um sentimento mais profundo que provoque uma imobilidade num mundo que é movimento permanente. Comunidades reais têm existido para oferecer um lugar seguro aos indivíduos que a elas pertencem, em detrimento da liberdade individual e em obediência às regras da mesma comunidade. Mas o que se vê nos dias de hoje, ao contrário da busca de segurança, é um forte desejo de independência, de mudança, e de inconformidade. Nos contextos virtuais, os indivíduos têm muito mais liberdade; eles podem escolher quem eles querem ser, qual identidade para se apresentar e como querem construir sua rede de relacionamentos: o preço a pagar por esta grande liberdade, no entanto, é a insegurança. Os laços construídos são instáveis, inseguros e podem ser quebrados facilmente. (Manno e Rosa, 2018, p. 122)<sup>9</sup>

This phenomenon, added to the contact restrictions caused by the covid-19 pandemic, mainly in 2020 and 2021, seem to be causing the issue to worsen, with the new crisis described in this article, the desire to move away from contact with the other. This spasm of reality has been strengthened in the discourse of those who are returning to socializing and presential work.

O individualismo tem sido associado ao “encapsulamento” do homem contemporâneo em um tempo e espaço virtual, generalizando-se a ideia de um novo homem que prefere se comunicar com o restante de seus pares sobretudo por meios eletrônicos (celulares, *e-mails*, redes sociais). (Azambuja, 2012, P. 74)<sup>10</sup>

Will it be a constant trend, or a passing reflection of the trauma of isolation that covid-19 has produced?

It is still too early to draw a conclusion, but it is necessary to be attentive and analyze the evidence that can be seen in postmodern society and its relationship with the new digital means of communication.

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<sup>9</sup> “Membership in groups is a fundamental need for human beings, but whereas in the past communities were real and geographically located, today people belong to virtual communities. As Bauman points out in his book ‘Liquid Love: About the Fragility of Human Ties’ (2004), the ties of a society are now networked, no longer a community. In this way, relationships are called connections, which can be made, undone and redone, depending on the subject’s will. At the same time that people seek affection, there is a fear of creating a deeper feeling that causes immobility in a world that is in permanent motion. Real communities have existed to provide a safe place for the individuals who belong to them, to the detriment of individual freedom and in obedience to the rules of the same community. But what is seen today, contrary to the search for security, is a strong desire for independence, change, and non-conformity. In virtual contexts, individuals have much more freedom; they can choose who they want to be, which identity to present themselves and how they want to build their network of relationships: the price to pay for this great freedom, however, is insecurity. Constructed loops are unstable, insecure, and easily broken.”

<sup>10</sup> “Individualism has been associated with the ‘encapsulation’ of contemporary man in a virtual time and space, generalizing the idea of a new man who prefers to communicate with the rest of his peers, mainly by electronic means (cell phones, e-mails, networks social).”

#### 4. FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

What further increases the strangeness in relation to the use of the media is the fact that an invention created to bring together human groups, making information common, causes such an opposite effect, such as loneliness, the fragmentation of society and a process that rescues the escapist vision of Arcadian neoclassicism. This symptom seems to deviate profoundly from McLuhan's (2016) predictions regarding the possibility of forming a Global Village, a world community that would organize itself more collectively than individually.

However, a doubt, which is formulated as a small hope, hangs in the air: this process of fragmentation and isolation of society, promoted by the use of digital media, would be a passing effect, a consequence of the dazzle by the increase in the emission potential and the lack of understanding how it works, or would it be a permanent effect?

This is a question that communication researchers will have to ask in the coming years, in search of an answer to the hypothesis raised by this article, and which is afflicting postmodern society: digital means of communication are capable of uniting communities, or they will only produce fragmentation, uncertainty, escapism and loneliness, expanding individualism, which is still a very present characteristic in the human of Post-modernity.

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