

THE CHURCH'S MEDIA COMMUNICATION IN A CHANGE OF ERA

Introduction

Talking about a new era sometimes frightens Church people, while other times it fascinates them. A new phase of history means a change in thinking, acting, planning and evangelising. Each new era introduces distinct processes and innovative tools linked to the modernisation of communication and the transformation of the entire culture. Some communication structures are loosening up, others are crystallising, even in the Church, as the public acquires unprecedented skills and has increasingly innovative expectations.

The previous media era was characterised by one-way messages - the recipient had few tools to respond to the message received. In the age of new media, recipients engage with proposed content interactively, and the sender must expect the recipient to act and interact. Every now and then a new media era comes along and this change is particularly evident right now. There is no doubt that some ways of creating content from a few years ago already seem archaic, because media, especially social media, is changing dynamically.

A new era in media

The digital age has changed the world of communication and will continue to revolutionise it. Media users are essentially constantly in touch with the world, friends, family, news and events. Technology forces audiences to become more active and seek innovation. In turn, companies around the world are entering the new era of communication with incredible professionalism, offering users products related to all areas of human life.¹ Moreover, in the age of new media, every user can be a source of news. Information and communication technologies make it possible, in principle, for a single media user to become a private news agency that influences millions of people around the world.² The skills acquired in content creation, knowledge of social media and the Internet (SEO, algorithms) are enough to spread information like a virus, which sooner or later reaches many corners of the world.

PR consultant Anastasiya Golovatenko says 2021, during the Covid-19 pandemic, marked the beginning of a new era of social media communication. The consultant outlines 5 trends of change in the messaging era: greater emphasis on digital strategies and SEO, creation of huge amounts of content, virtual events will become part of corporate communication, online sales will grow rapidly, while high-level communication managers (CEOs) will be at the forefront.³

¹ ISPGRUP, The new era of communication: digital communication, <https://www.ispgrup.cat/nueva-era-la-comunicacion-digital/>.

² Paolo Mancini, The evolution of communication: old and new media, https://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/l-evoluzione-della-comunicazione-vecchi-e-nuovi-media_%28Atlante-Geopolitico%29/.

³ Entrepreneur, Anastasiya Golovatenko, Five trends signalling a new era in communication, <https://www.entrepreneur.com/en-ae/growth-strategies/five-trends-signalling-a-new-era-in-communication/364001>.

And Michelle Marasch Ouellette, a specialist in PR, Crisis Communications, Strategic Planning, and Storytelling, says the world has radically changed the way we communicate after the pandemic. Here are some principles of changing communication style: the need to be authentic, to actively listen to the audience, to speak a new language, to work closely with the target audience and to offer a message linked to values.⁴ In 2017, branding expert and authority Andy Stalman (Mr. Branding) said that we are not in an era of change, but we are experiencing a change of era, and each new era gives life to a new person. According to the expert, the essence of the new man is the *humanoffon*, a human being who lives simultaneously in the offline and online world, which a dozen years ago were different worlds, but now are no longer so.⁵

The epochal change in the media refers to the evolution that is taking place in the way humanity communicates and receives information. The metamorphosis of media inspires social development in a significant way - the above theme is found in several media theories.⁶ Technological changes, trends and habits have a fundamental impact on these transformations. The technological development of smartphones, online videos, the increasingly fast Internet, content personalisation or online marketing are taking users and broadcasters into a new era. The meeting between globalisation processes and the media brings new forms of communication and accelerates them.⁷ "The most dominant and objectifying technology of the future is undoubtedly the Internet, defined as a communication platform, cyberspace and new society."⁸

Communication in the new era is distinguished by the attention to the target audience to be reached, in order to create adequate content, bearing in mind that the future of communication is increasingly in the digital world. In addition, the focus must be on creating a variety of content tailored to specific communication channels; hence the role of so-called content creators. The next step considers the use of storytelling techniques in content creation, combining facts, narratives and emotions and promoting a contemporary communication language in messages.

A new era in the Church

New technologies and the development of the Internet are changing the way the Church approaches evangelisation. Thanks to devices unknown only a few years ago, the Church has entered pulpits that are seen and heard by billions of people around the world. In theory, almost 3 billion people can follow a news item uttered by Church people on Facebook, for

⁴ PRsay, Michelle Marasch Ouellette, 7 Rules for a New Era of Communications, <https://prsay.prsa.org/2021/01/06/7-rules-for-a-new-era-of-communications/>.

⁵ Diario de Mallorca, David Arráez Palma, Andy Stalman: "We are not in an era of change, but in a change of era", <https://www.diariodemallorca.es/economia/foro-negocios-businessdm/2017/01/27/andy-stalman-cambio-cambio-3476168.html>; Andy Stalman, Humanoffon: Is the internet changing us as human beings?, Deusto 2018.

⁶ Stanisław Michalczyk, Teorie mediów w nauce o komunikowaniu, in: M. Kita, M. Ślawska (red.), Transdyscyplinarność badań nad komunikacją medialną, T. 1, Stan wiedzy i postulaty badawcze (33-51), Katowice 2012, p. 36-38; Marek Łuczak, Media jako katalizator globalizacji, Media i społeczeństwo, nr 6/2016, p. 16.

⁷ Asy Briggs, Peter Burke, Społeczna historia mediów, tłum. J. Jedliński, Warszawa 2010, p. 21.

⁸ Marek Łuczak, Rola nowych technologii w ewolucji globalizacji, Studia Ekonomiczne. Zeszyty Naukowe Uniwersytetu Ekonomicznego w Katowicach, nr 317, 2017, p.13.

example. This new era of evangelisation is sometimes perplexing, other times it is a challenge that many people are responding to as a gift of the Holy Spirit. It is also worth adding that one of the biggest challenges for the Church at the beginning of the 21st century is two-way and interactive communication, which has become practically a daily occurrence when it comes to media communications. As a result, communication theology is not only concerned with the religious realm, but also helps to make sense of secular forms of communication in a changing world. It indicates the centrality of the person as a fundamental attitude and emphasises the spiritual dimension of communication.⁹ "We are experiencing an epochal change: a not only cultural but also anthropological metamorphosis that generates new languages and discards, without discernment, the paradigms handed down by history."

Before our eyes, a change of epoch is taking place, and with it a reformulation of paradigms. Transformations in communication involve changes in the way we reach people with the gospel message, which has remained unchanged for years. Pope Francis understands this situation and is trying to convince Church people to adapt to the new reality. "All this has a particular value in our time, because what we are experiencing is not simply an era of change, but it is a change of epoch. We are, therefore, in one of those moments in which the changes are no longer linear, but epochal."¹⁰

The previous culture of face-to-face meeting is giving way to communication through technological tools. Humans communicate faster, but often without direct contact. The boundaries of time and space in two-way communication are disappearing and a sense of power is emerging thanks to technological developments. This raises the question in the field of religion: Does God also exist in the virtual world? The answer is unequivocal: God is omnipotent and therefore can also be recognised in the digital world through signs, symbols and images. An image in virtual space, for example, remains a tool, but, like images in churches and museums, it can become a way to establish an interpersonal relationship with the Creator. Communication tools in the digital world belong to the real world and make possible the processes of evangelisation in the vast Areopagus of modern times.¹¹

Conclusion

The 21st century is characterised by a new era of information exchange, which is entering unknown territory. People communicate differently today than they did 10 years ago, and 10 years from now the situation could change radically. The way we communicate and receive content is changing. It is not so much a momentous change as a change of era, both at an institutional and personal level. The Internet, social media or artificial intelligence have revolutionised the way humans interact, especially with modern tools, creating different content and exploring new channels of communication.

⁹ Bianchi Jean, Bourgeois Henri, *Theology and communication*, in Franco LEVER - Pier Cesare Revolt - Adriano ZANACCHI (edd.), *Communication. Dictionary of Sciences and Techniques*, www.lacomunicazione.it.

¹⁰ Audience of the Holy Father with the Roman Curia on the occasion of the presentation of Christmas greetings, 21.12.2019, <https://press.vatican.va/content/salastampa/it/bollettino/pubblico/2019/12/21/1022/02087.html#inglese>.

¹¹ Jan Kazimierz Przybyłowski, *Komunikacja w nowej kulturze i w Kościele*, *Studia Włocławskie* 20, 2018, pp. 363-374.

The media in the cultural-religious-communicative puzzle are defining progressive trends, linked to the digital world. As for the Church, the challenge is to find a balance between evangelisation, the transmission of values, and the use of modern media to convey information in a crowded media space. In this regard, the Church needs multi-channel and interactive communication and to adapt to changing realities, since it has received from Jesus Christ the task of evangelising the entire world, including the digital continent, which is not so small.

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Maciej Makula SDB