

Communication System in Niklas Luhmann's Perspective: Conceptual Relevance in the Digital Era

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Abstract

This study examines communication systems from the perspective of Niklas Luhmann's social systems theory, focusing on their relevance in the digital era. Luhmann views communication not as an individual act, but as a fundamental element that shapes and reproduces social systems autopoietic. This approach allows for an in-depth analysis of the dynamics of digital communication, which is complex, differentiated, and operates in a closed manner, yet is interconnected with other systems through structural coupling. The research method used is a literature review of Luhmann's main works and a conceptual analysis of contemporary digital communication phenomena. The results show that digital communication systems have their own operational logic constructed by internal codes and structures, such as in the case of social media algorithms, virality, and mediation between legal, political, and economic systems. Luhmann's theory proves relevant as a conceptual framework for understanding how communication in the digital era is no longer neutral, but rather shapes social reality through a systemic and autonomous reproductive process.

Keywords: communication system, Niklas Luhmann, autopoiesis, digital era, social systems.

Abstrak

Studi ini mengkaji sistem komunikasi dari perspektif teori sistem sosial Niklas Luhmann, dengan fokus pada relevansinya di era digital. Luhmann memandang komunikasi bukan sebagai tindakan individual, melainkan sebagai elemen fundamental yang membentuk dan mereproduksi sistem sosial secara autopoietik. Pendekatan ini memungkinkan analisis mendalam terhadap dinamika komunikasi digital, yang kompleks, terdiferensiasi, dan beroperasi secara tertutup, namun saling terhubung dengan sistem lain melalui kopling struktural. Metode penelitian yang digunakan adalah tinjauan pustaka karya-karya utama Luhmann dan analisis konseptual fenomena komunikasi digital kontemporer. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa sistem komunikasi digital memiliki logika operasionalnya sendiri yang dibangun oleh kode dan struktur internal, seperti dalam kasus algoritma media sosial, viralitas, dan mediasi antara sistem hukum, politik, dan ekonomi. Teori Luhmann terbukti relevan sebagai kerangka kerja konseptual untuk memahami bagaimana komunikasi di era digital tidak lagi netral, melainkan membentuk realitas sosial melalui proses reproduksi yang sistemik dan otonom.

Kata kunci: sistem komunikasi, Niklas Luhmann, autopoiesis, era digital, sistem sosial.

INTRODUCTION

The digital revolution has had a significant impact on the dynamics of human communication, both in the personal, social, and institutional spheres. These changes are not merely technological but also epistemological and ontological, as they influence how humans understand, produce, and disseminate meaning in their interactions. The emergence of the internet, social media, artificial intelligence, and data-driven communication algorithms has transformed communication into a complex, autonomous, and multi-layered system. In this situation, traditional communication theories that rely on linear or interactional models between individuals are often inadequate to explain the non-linear, decentralized, and automated reality of digital communication.

One approach that offers a new conceptual lens for understanding this complexity is Niklas Luhmann's social systems theory. Luhmann views communication not simply as the exchange of messages between individuals, but as a fundamental element that shapes and reproduces the social system itself. In his framework, the social system consists of communication, not individuals, and communication is the sole mode of existence of the social system (Luhmann, 1995a). Communication, in Luhmann's theory, consists of three components that must occur simultaneously: information, utterance, and understanding. If any of these elements is missing, communication does not occur. This model differs radically from the view of communication as a one-way transmission of information.

Furthermore, Luhmann developed the idea of “autopoiesis”, the ability of a social system to reproduce itself independently without external intervention. This means that communication does not originate from individuals, but rather from systems that are operationally closed but structurally open. These systems shape themselves through the selection of information deemed relevant based on each system’s communicative code (Luhmann, 2008; Seidl, D., & Becker, 2006). For example, the legal system only recognizes communication based on the *legal/illegal* code, the economic system based on the *pay/non-pay* code, and the media system based on the *relevant/irrelevant* information code. Thus, communication is an autonomous, systemic selection process and not the result of the subjective awareness of actors.

In the context of the digital era, this systemic approach is crucial for understanding how digital media is no longer simply a communication tool but has formed its own communication system that operates autopoietically. Social media, for example, is not just a medium for social interaction but a system with its own logic that organizes attention, distributes information, and shapes public opinion through algorithms (Borch, 2011; Moeller, 2012). This demonstrates that digital media systems have become structural actors in shaping social and political realities independently, without relying on the intentions of the individuals involved.

Phenomena such as *filter bubble* (Pariser, 2011), *echo chamber*, and information manipulation through machine learning reinforce Luhmann’s argument about how communication operates selectively and contingently. Digital

communication systems select information based on preferences predictable by data, rather than based on deliberative or reflective processes between individuals. This demonstrates that digital communication systems have become autonomous social entities that contribute to shaping the social world, rather than simply reflecting or representing reality.

The consequences of this development are far-reaching. On the one hand, digitalization opens up broader and faster communication spaces, but on the other hand, it also gives rise to information fragmentation, social polarization, and a crisis of trust in traditional authorities (Habermas, 1985; Sunstein, 2018). In this context, Luhmann's thinking provides an appropriate conceptual tool to explain how communication systems can create different realities through a process of structural differentiation and selection of information. He provides an understanding that society is not the result of an aggregation of individuals, but rather the autonomous operation of communication systems.

This study aims to further explore how Niklas Luhmann's communication systems theory can be used to analyze and understand fundamental changes in communication in the digital age. Using a conceptual approach and a critical literature review, this article demonstrates that Luhmann's autopoietic framework provides a new understanding of communication as a complex and self-contained social system, while also underscoring the importance of a systemic perspective in analyzing digital transformation, particularly in the realms of media, information, and contemporary social interaction.

LITERATURE REVIEW

A. Niklas Luhmann's Social Systems Theory

Niklas Luhmann is one of the most influential thinkers in contemporary social theory, particularly in developing a radical and innovative social systems approach. His theory is based on the fundamental assumption that society is not simply a collection of individuals or institutional structures, but rather a complex and differentiated communication network. In Luhmann's view, society consists of various independently functioning social systems, such as political, economic, legal, educational, health, religious, and media systems. Each of these systems is not directly dependent on the others but operates based on its own internal communicative logic, known as autopoiesis (Luhmann, 1995b, 2012a).

The concept of autopoiesis, borrowed by Luhmann from the biological theories of Humberto Maturana and Francisco Varela, is key to understanding social systems as systems capable of reproducing their elements internally and autonomously. In the social context, this element is communication. Social systems do not produce individuals or actions, but rather communication itself. Thus, social systems are not driven by human consciousness or interactions between actors, but by a continuous and ongoing communication mechanism. Communication is the sole *modus operandi* of social systems for survival, development, and adaptation to the environment (Luhmann, 1995b).

Luhmann emphasized that communication is an observational process consisting of three main components: *information* (the information or content of the message), *utterance* (the act of conveying or expressing the message), and

understanding (the recipient's understanding). These three components must be present simultaneously for communication to be considered to have occurred. This process is not simply the transfer of information from sender to receiver, as in Shannon and Weaver's linear communication model, but rather a systemic construction that is reflective and context-bound (Luhmann, N., Baecker, D., & Gilgen, 2013; Moeller, 2012). If any of these elements fails, communication does not function as a social operating system.

Another important aspect of Luhmann's social systems theory is the concept of *functional differentiation*. Modern society, according to Luhmann, develops through the specialization of distinct social functions organized into autonomous systems. For example, legal systems operate on a *legal/illegal* code; economic systems on a *pay/don't pay* code; political systems on a *power/powerlessness* code. Each system has a *binary code* that directs how communication within the system operates (Luhmann, 2012b). This differentiation enables high efficiency and complexity in modern society, but also creates fragmentation and the potential for social disintegration if there is no coordination or oversight within the system.

This coordination between systems is facilitated through the structural mechanism of coupling (*structural coupling*), a loose connection that allows different systems to observe and respond to each other without interfering with each other's internal operations. In other words, the legal system can "observe" the political system and adjust its communication based on that observation, but it cannot control or replace the communication operations within the

political system itself (Borch, 2011; Luhmann, 2002). This is Luhmann's depiction of the primary complexity of modern society: social systems operate in parallel, fragmented, and interdependent ways through structural architecture, rather than through normative unity or collective will.

In today's digital age, the relevance of Luhmann's social systems theory is increasingly prominent. Digital communication not only accelerates the production and reproduction of communication, but also expands the possibilities for differentiation and autopoiesis within various digital platforms, such as social media, recommendation algorithms, and other bold communication systems. Each digital ecosystem can even be viewed as a semi-autonomous system with its own communicative logic, thus opening up space for new analyses of contemporary social dynamics based on a systems perspective (Esposito, 2012).

B. Autopoiesis and Complexity in Digital Communication

The concept of *autopoiesis*, adopted by Niklas Luhmann from the biological theory developed by Humberto Maturana and Francisco Varela (1974), is the ontological and epistemological foundation for constructing Social Systems Theory. In biology, *autopoiesis* refers to the ability of living systems (e.g., cells) to reproduce and maintain their own structures through internal processes without relying on external control. Luhmann adopted this concept and transferred it to the social realm, specifically communication, assuming that social systems are also capable of autonomously producing and reproducing their own elements, namely, communication, through an internal operational logic

(Luhmann, 1995b, 2000).

Within this framework, social systems are not controlled by individuals or external agents, but rather driven by *self-referential* communication. This means that each new communication can only emerge from previous communication and can only be understood within the context of the existing communication network. This results in *operational closure*, a situation in which the system operates solely on its own elements, while remaining open to the environment through the mechanism of *structural coupling*, a process by which the system can interact with the external environment without losing its autonomy (Luhmann, 2002; Moeller, 2012).

In the context of digital media, the media communication system is understood as an autopoietic social subsystem. This system no longer relies on human actors as the center of communication, but instead operates through its own communicative logic and codes, for example, through algorithms, platform design, and the structure of digital information networks. Social media such as Facebook, Instagram, YouTube, or TikTok operate autopoietically by reproducing messages, content, and communication patterns based on algorithmic selection controlled by the system's own operational logic (Seidl, D., & Becker, 2006; G. Teubner, 2019; G. (Ed.) Teubner, 1987).

The phenomena of personalized algorithms, *filter bubbles*, and *echo chambers* are concrete manifestations of the principle of autopoiesis in the digital world. As explained by Pariser (2011), a *filter bubble* occurs when internet users are only presented with information that aligns with their preferences, based on their

search history, clicks, and previous interactions. This process demonstrates that digital media systems construct their own communication spheres and reinforce communication patterns independently, without direct user intervention. Meanwhile, Qvortrup (2006) notes that the fragmentation of information in digital spaces creates increasingly complex and closed communication systems, where information is filtered and disseminated within fragmented communication ecosystems.

Thus, in addition to functioning as information channels, digital media has also transformed into a distinct social system with its own communication logic, selection criteria, and autonomous message reproduction mechanisms. Moeller (2012) emphasizes that in the digital era, the concepts of *self-reference* and *operational closure* become increasingly relevant, as digital communication cannot be fully controlled by humans. Although humans remain users and producers of information, the structure of digital communication allows the system to operate and evolve independently through its own technological and algorithmic logic.

However, while this digital system is operationally closed, it remains structurally open to its environment. This means that media communication systems can “observe” other systems such as economic, political, and cultural systems and adapt through *structural coupling* mechanisms. For example, digital media content may be influenced by political trends or popular culture, but the process of selecting, distributing, and reproducing content still follows the internal logic of the digital system (Esposito, 2012; Luhmann, 2002).

C. Digital Transformation and Medialization from the Perspective of Luhmann's Social Systems Theory

Digital transformation has fundamentally altered the structure of communication in contemporary society. One of the main implications of this transformation is the emergence of the phenomenon of “medialization”, a process in which the logic and workings of media influence not only the content of communication but also the way social institutions function, how society perceives reality, and the formation of value orientations and social behavior (Schulz, 2004). In this context, Niklas Luhmann's social systems theory provides a highly relevant analytical framework for explaining these complex dynamics.

According to Luhmann (2000), the media system is a social subsystem functionally differentiated from other systems. Each system has a binary code that serves as its distinguishing principle. In the media system, the primary code is *information/non-information*, meaning that only events or issues constructed as “information” are worthy of being communicated and reproduced within the system. This code distinguishes the media system from the legal system (*legal/illegal*), the economic system (*paid/unpaid*), or the political system (*powerful/powerless*). Therefore, the logic of the media system is unique, and message selection is based on whether the message contains informational value within its internal operational framework, rather than on objective truth or direct public interest.

The phenomenon of medialization demonstrates that media no longer function merely as reflectors of social reality but rather as active actors in the construction of that reality. Media select,

frame, and convey information not solely based on available facts, but based on internal calculations consistent with the system's logic. This reinforces Luhmann's notion of a *self-referential system*, namely a system that operates based on its own internal references, uncontrolled by external actors.

Similarly, Sunstein (2018) explains how social media algorithms operate not merely as tools for disseminating information but as defining structures for public communication. These algorithms regulate the flow of communication by filtering information deemed relevant, interesting, or commercially profitable, thus creating *echo chambers* and *filter bubbles* that narrow individuals' information horizons. This confirms that the social media system operates as an autopoietic system, not subject to direct user control but rather producing communication through its own internal logic.

From Luhmann's perspective, this condition demonstrates the characteristics of a *self-organizing* and *operationally closed* social system. This means that although the media system interacts with its environment (e.g., the public, political institutions, and the economy), it maintains operational boundaries that cannot be directly penetrated by other systems. The relationship between systems is established through *structural coupling*, a connecting mechanism that enables mutual influence without eliminating the autonomy of each system (Luhmann, 2002). For example, the political world must adapt its communications to media logic to gain public attention and visibility, but cannot directly regulate news content or information dissemination algorithms.

Luhmann's social systems theory provides a more realistic understanding of communication in the digital era, namely that communication does not occur in a neutral, open space, freely controlled by the will of individuals or institutions. Communication occurs within a complex, multi-layered, and often completely unpredictable system. Therefore, efforts to understand and manage digital communication cannot be achieved through a normative or technocratic approach but require a deep understanding of the underlying systemic structure and logic (Wahyuni, 2019).

RESEARCH METHOD

This research employs a qualitative approach using the library research, aiming to explore and analyze the conceptual relevance of Niklas Luhmann's communication systems theory in understanding communication dynamics in the digital era. This research is descriptive-analytical and does not use empirical field data, but instead relies on credible scientific sources as the primary study material. The approach employed is theoretical discourse analysis, an approach that emphasizes the conceptual reconstruction of Luhmann's key ideas and connects them to contemporary communication phenomena, such as medialization, algorithmization, and autopoiesis in digital communication systems.

The data sources in this study consist of primary and secondary sources. Primary sources include Niklas Luhmann's original works, including Social Systems (1995b), Theory of Society ((2012a, 2012b), The Reality of the Mass Media (2000),

and Theories of Distinction (2002). Secondary sources were obtained from relevant academic literature, such as the works of Borch (2011), Moeller (2012), Seidl and Becker (2006), and journal articles discussing Luhmann's thinking in the context of digital communication, such as Qvortrup (2006) and Wahyuni (2019). Source selection was conducted purposively, taking into account academic authority and thematic relevance to the study topic.

Data collection was conducted through a systematic literature review of books, journal articles, and other authoritative academic documents. The data obtained were then analyzed using content analysis and thematic analysis approaches. The analysis process involved three main stages: identifying key concepts in Luhmann's social systems theory, such as communication as a system, autopoiesis, functional differentiation, operational closure, and structural coupling; contextualizing these concepts within the digital communication landscape, particularly in the context of phenomena such as social media algorithms, filter bubbles, and closed information systems; and critically interpreting the relevance and limitations of social systems theory in addressing the challenges of today's digital communication.

To maintain the validity and legitimacy of the analysis, theoretical triangulation was conducted by comparing Luhmann's concepts with other approaches in contemporary communication studies, including the thoughts of Habermas (1987), Rogers (2003), and Schulz (2004). Data validity was also strengthened by utilizing trusted academic sources from reputable publishers such as Stanford University Press, Routledge, and indexed international

journals. Through this approach, this research is expected to be able to present an in-depth and contextual theoretical study of communication systems in digital society from the perspective of Luhmann's social systems theory.

RESULT

A. Redefining Communication as a Systemic Operation

Initial findings of the study indicate that Luhmann's approach to communication differs significantly from the classical view, which positions communication as a process between subjects exchanging messages (such as the Shannon-Weaver model). In social systems theory, Luhmann asserts that communication is not a human activity, but a systemic operation that only occurs when three elements: information, utterance, and understanding occur simultaneously and mutually condition each other (Luhmann, 1995b).

This means that communication is not the result of individual intentions, but rather a product of the social system itself. Communication systems operate autonomously and do not depend on subjective human intentions. For example, in digital systems like social media, communication occurs not simply because someone posts information, but because the digital system "permits" and "interprets" that communication as part of a larger communication network. In this sense, the system is not only the place where communication takes place, but also the entity that produces and reproduces communication as its own element.

This approach shifts the focus from actors to systems, where the meaning and structure of communication are not determined

by the subject, but by the social system in which it takes place. Therefore, in the digital world, communication systems are not reflections of human action, but autonomous structures that use humans solely as a medium.

B. Autopoiesis and Communication Reproduction in Digital Systems

This study finds that the principle of autopoiesis (the system's ability to reproduce its own elements independently) is a crucial foundation for understanding digital communication systems. Social systems, particularly communication systems, are considered operationally closed yet cognitively open. This means that the system can only produce communication through pre-existing communication, yet it remains capable of "reading" its environment selectively through its internal structures (Luhmann, 1995b, 2000).

In the context of digital communication, for example, in social media algorithms, the system does not directly absorb social reality. It only absorbs and disseminates systemically relevant information based on its internal logic, such as clicks, impressions, or viewing time. Thus, what appears to be the flow of public information is actually the result of the digital communication system's autopoietic selection. The social reality displayed is a constructed reality, not an objective representation.

This finding clarifies how digital systems like social media are not neutral. The communication that circulates is the result of *self-reference*, where the system sees and shapes the world solely through its own perspective and internal codes. As a consequence,

people often get trapped in *filter bubbles* or *echo chambers*, where the information they consume only reinforces existing beliefs, because the communication system is not designed to explore differences, but rather to maintain continuity.

C. System Differentiation and the Phenomenon of Structural Coupling

This study also shows how Luhmann's theory of *functional differentiation* explains the structure of modern society as a collection of autonomous, non-overlapping social systems, such as the political, legal, economic, media, and educational systems (Luhmann, 2012a). Each of these systems has a specific *binary code* that cannot be replaced by another system, for example, the legal system operates with a *legal/illegal* code, the economic system with *profit/loss*, and the media with *information/non-information*.

In digital communication, the phenomenon of *structural coupling* is crucial. This means that although each system is autonomous, they can be structurally "connected" under certain conditions without losing their autonomy. For example, the legal system can respond to digital communication through media regulatory policies, such as Indonesia's Electronic Information and Transactions Law (UU ITE), but still maintains a *legal/illegal* code. The economic system can access data from digital platforms for market needs, but still operates based on calculations of value and profit.

This study found that in the digital space, structural coupling demonstrates a tendency for the media system to

dominate as the primary interface between systems. The media system bridges communication between other systems, but it still operates based on its own internal code: what is newsworthy and worth attention. This distorts society's perception of reality because information is constructed through media logic, not through the objectivity of data.

D. Mediatization and the Production of Social Reality by Media Systems

This research emphasizes that media systems in the digital era are not merely a means of disseminating information but have become agents of the construction of social reality. This phenomenon is known as “mediatization”, where media influence not only the way communication occurs but also social structures and other institutions (Couldry, N., & Hepp, 2013). From Luhmann's perspective, media systems do not convey reality, but rather produce it through the logic of their communication selection (Luhmann, 2000).

This finding is reinforced by empirical examples from disaster communication, where digital media often portray crisis narratives in a hyperbolic manner, not based on factual accuracy, but rather on clickability or attention-grabbing. As a result, society experiences reality as a media construct, rather than an objective reality. Even in politics, candidates or public issues can gain support not because of their substance, but because of media visibility.

Media systems operate through a cycles of attention, where the value of information is determined by its capacity to attract

attention, not by its truth value. This results in society living in a reality increasingly constructed by media communication systems, that is a systemic reality, rather than a factual one. Thus, viral information is not socially important information, but rather information that is compatible with the logic of the media system.

DISCUSSION

A. The Luhmannian Conception of Communication and Paradigm Shift in the Digital Era

Niklas Luhmann's social systems theory has revolutionized the way we view communication. Luhmann does not view communication as a mere process of human interaction, but rather as a systemic operation that occurs autopoietic and independent of the subject's intentions (Luhmann, 1995b). This view is relevant in the current context of digital communication, where interactions are no longer direct and intentional, but rather mediated and structured by algorithm-based digital platforms. Social media, as a digital communication system, not only conveys information but also determines what constitutes valid communication through its technological structure.

Within this framework, communication cannot be understood as the transfer of messages from one individual to another, but rather as a reproductive network that continuously evolves through the system's internal logic. For example, "trending topics" on social media are not the result of a conscious collective voice, but rather the system's selection based on engagement parameters and algorithmic patterns. Thus, digital communication reflects operational closure, responding only to itself and not

directly to the external world.

This transformation marks a major shift in communication studies: from a normative-subjective approach to a systemic-complex approach. This means that communication analysis must focus on the logic and structure of the communication system itself, rather than on the actors or the intentions of the communicators. This opens up space for the use of Luhmann's theory as a conceptual tool for understanding the digital era, where communication occurs massively, automatically, and often beyond conscious human control.

B. Digital Communication Systems as Technological Autopoiesis

One of Luhmann's important contributions is the concept of "autopoiesis", namely the ability of a social system to reproduce itself autonomously. In the digital context, this principle is clearly reflected in the operation of social media, search engines, and artificial intelligence (AI)-based platforms. The communication that occurs within these systems is no longer controlled by individual humans, but is reproduced by the system based on internal criteria such as user preferences, previous behavior, and network structures.

The *filter bubble* phenomenon (Pariser, 2011) is a concrete example of digital autopoiesis. Social media systems display information that is compatible with the user's internal structure based on algorithms. Thus, individuals no longer receive information randomly or neutrally, but are systematically directed towards certain types of information that reinforce existing biases.

This indicates that digital communication systems have become autonomous social entities capable of constructing reality based on their own selective logic.

From Luhmann's perspective, this condition demonstrates that digital communication systems function through *self-reference*, they refer only to themselves in responding to their environment. Society no longer exists within an open communication system, but rather within a closed system that is functionally open, meaning it is open to external interference only if it is compatible with its structure. Therefore, the diversity of information in the digital world does not guarantee open communication, but rather demonstrates the complexity of a segmented and differentiated system.

C. System Differentiation and Tension in Structural Coupling

Luhmann's concept of functional differentiation is highly relevant in explaining how digital communication systems interrelate with other social systems such as politics, law, economics, and education. In modern society, each system operates according to its own operational code, for example, the law system is based on *legal/illegal*, the economic system on *profit/loss*, and the media system on *information/non-information* (Luhmann, 2012a).

In the digital era, structural coupling occurs between the media system and other systems. For example, the legal system attempts to regulate digital communication through policies such as Indonesia's Electronic Information and Transactions Law (UU

ITE). However, the logic used by the law system (*legal/illegal*) cannot change the logic of the media system (*interesting/uninteresting*). This creates “irritation” or tension between systems, which does not always result in change but can trigger structural adaptation.

Similarly, political systems must adapt their functioning in the digital communication environment, not by conveying substantial messages, but by creating images that conform to the logic of media virality. In this case, the political system is not subject to the media system, but is forced to reproduce it through couplings that keep it relevant to the digital public. This adaptation occurs without subordination between systems, but rather as a response to increasing social complexity.

D. Mediatization and the Production of Social Reality by Media Systems

The process of “mediatization” studied by Schulz (2004) and expanded within Luhmann’s framework, shows that digital media not only conveys information but also shapes social structures through the construction of reality. In modern communication systems, social reality is no longer objective or independent of the media, but is shaped by what the media system produces and reproduces. In Luhmann’s perspective, media is a communication system that operates based on the logic of selection, not representation.

This is particularly evident in cases such as natural disasters, political crises, or social conflicts, where the media tends to highlight the “interesting” aspects rather than the “important”

ones. For example, in coverage of floods or earthquakes, the media will present dramatic narratives that align with audience expectations, rather than based on the urgency of information for mitigation. In this context, the media system works not to convey the truth, but to reproduce communication that maintains its existence. Thus, social reality is no longer an entity separate from the media, but is shaped, framed, and disseminated based on the codes of the media communication system.

Wahyuni's (2019) findings in the Indonesian context reinforce this, explaining that the handling of ecological disasters is influenced by how the media frames information. When the media chooses to highlight the emotional or conflictual aspects of an event, the resulting public communication tends to be more responsive than reflective. This demonstrates how the media system functions as a shaper of reality, not simply a communication intermediary.

CONCLUSION

This research confirms that Niklas Luhmann's social systems theory provides a strong and relevant conceptual foundation for understanding the dynamics of communication in modern society, particularly in the digital era, characterized by high complexity, system differentiation, and the rapid development of information technology. Luhmann's approach, which views communication as a constitutive element of social systems rather than simply an interaction between individuals, allows for a deeper analysis of how communication is systemically reproduced through the elements of information, utterance, and

understanding.

In the digital era, communication systems increasingly demonstrate autopoietic characteristics, namely the ability to reproduce themselves based on internal structures and codes, without direct dependence on external factors. Phenomena such as social media algorithms, the logic of virality, and the dominance of media systems in the construction of social reality are concrete evidence of operational closure and self-reference in digital communication systems. In this context, digital communication systems are no longer neutral or transparent, but possess their own logic that directs the selection of information, shapes public opinion, and mediates relationships between other social systems.

Furthermore, Luhmann's theory is also relevant in explaining the relationships between differentiated social systems, such as law, politics, and the economy, in a digital context. The concept of structural coupling allows for an understanding of how these systems interact indirectly through digital communication while maintaining their respective autonomy. For example, legal responses to hate speech on social media, or the adaptation of economic systems to digital consumption patterns, show increasingly complex forms of structural coupling in the information technology era.

Thus, Luhmann's social systems theory is not only important as a theoretical framework in communication studies but also highly applicable in understanding the transformation of communication in a digital society. Its relevance lies in its ability to explain communication as an autonomous, complex, and differentiated systemic process, and in its emphasis on the

structures and codes that govern how information is produced and disseminated. Therefore, the Luhmannian approach can be an important tool in critical studies of digital media, the algorithmization of communication, and the relationship between technology and social systems in the contemporary era.

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