# Communication linkages and national sentiment, from the traditional nation to the internet

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**Abstract**

Using concepts such as Imagined Communities, Identity Fragmentation and Post-Modernity and through the analysis of issues related to identity and sharing, this article aims to analyze the formation of communication linkages to the idea of national sentiment and of nation, having the press as early booster of the idea of national identity and the internet as a new focus of formation of linkages through virtual communities by analyzing the different medias, writing, virtualization and speech.

Keywords: Communication linkages, nationalism, identity, nation, communication, media.

## Introdução

CONSIDERING "linkage" as the "first base for communication", and as the "symbolic link or material in a common space (or territory)" (Baitello, 2005), we can assume that communication processes are "constructions of linkages that aggregate and segregate individuals" (Menezes, 2007).

Menezes goes ahead and treats aggregate as an integration between related individuals linked under the term "we" while segregate relates to the term "other", the "outside" ones, so we may well draw parallels to the idea of national sentiment, ie the "we" as more or less homogeneous group of similar ethnic origin and language and the "other", those who are not part of the group.

When we say "we", we are talking about individuals connected by linkages, a language, customs and symbols and signs differently from others.
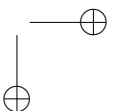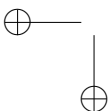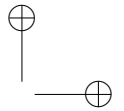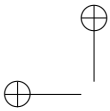
When we talk about "other", of course, we deal with individuals who are not part of our group that have language, customs, symbols and different signs in "our", or even not "identify" with our symbols and signs.

Symbols live longer than men (Pross in Baitello, 2005) and, without any doubt, they integrate or attract men around them. The identification of an individual with the symbols and images of their nation is that what, first, form the national bonds.

The signification of these symbols form linkages between men, the creation of values that permeate these symbols - in the case of nations, are the heroic battles, the shared suffering and joys, the common history, and besides, the language.

The symbols, however, need constant updating, ie, the constant renewal of its meaning and constant interaction between individuals. Advertisements extolling the historical origin, language and national culture are examples of well-finished updates of national symbolism.
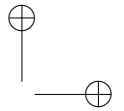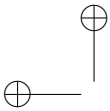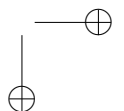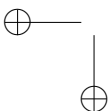
## Nation

In the classic sense, "nation" is a generic idea of political community, a group of people united by natural and eternal ties (language, common history, etc.) and usually within a relatively bounded and contiguous territory.

Ernst Renan (1882), on the other hand, says that the nation is a daily plebiscite and susceptible of accession through the will of belonging. It is up to the individual to accept and want to participate and not be forcibly entered and above all show its willingness to establish ties and identity and belonging.

This desire to belong is by exchanging information based on tensions and rituals of linkages, and is what creates society and its different signs. Communication fosters the bonds that unite us, it allow us to identify ourselves with these symbols and signs creating unique linkages between people: The nation, bound by language, the result of communication and interaction. It is the daily communication that creates bonds or linkages.

Nation would then only be the observation of stronger and significant ties, permeated by common symbols and signs. These bonds or linkages provide the formation of communities and hence nations.

As stated by Norbert Elias (2000), these linkages, understood as webs of relationships, are the genesis of life in society, the formation of groups of insiders and outsiders, and hence the idea of a nation of individuals with similar identities compared to those with for example, different languages.

Traditionally the idea of nation respects defined geographic boundaries (not necessarily the ones of states), nations tend to have their members in touch. The language of a population is spoken in a particular territory and symbols bind this population.

There are cases of diaspora and separate people from their original nation that, however, identify themselves as part of this group, but even in this case the foundational idea of national sentiment is the same. Only new group members (those born later) do not have this contact with the original community, but share the same signs and symbols (foundational myths). The distance that may separate "original" groups from the diaspora sometimes impose problems to the maintenance of the diasporic identity that tend to lose their language or some other identitary characteristic.

But on the internet, the nation can go beyond, transcending ethnic and national boundaries and adding all those who feel a strong bond (linkage) with signs and symbols of a specific group, even when not connected geographically and historically. (Pross, 1980). Diasporic groups that might have lost to some degree identitary characteristics might once again connect to the "homeland" and start a new communicational process.
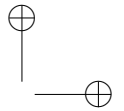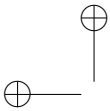
## Identity

Identity is something that is acquired, is formed over time, but at the same time is "imposed" by nationality, by the habits of its immediate neighbors, the linkages that form between individuals.

The linkages may be treated as identity formers, such that Hall (2001) historically divided into three:

1. The Identity of the subject of the Enlightenment, based on the centered, unified, rational individual, always remaining the same throughout its existence, individualism;
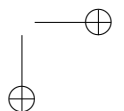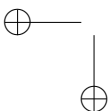
2. Of the Sociological subject, reflecting the complexity of the modern world, based on the interaction between subjects in relation to others, the identity changes in the relationship between "self" and society;

3. Finally, of the Postmodern Subject, fragmented, changeable or multiple identities according to the historical moment and the situations presented identity.

The identity has to be analyzed from the Enlightenment, the same time that the press passes to popularize and spread through Europe, providing a solid education for not only individual identities, but the group, the nation.

Not that there were no pre-Enlightenment identities, they were only linked to the collective, under orders of the church and feudal lords. Humans were treated just as brainless part of the group and not as individuals. With the press and the Enlightenment man passes be provided of an individual consciousness at the same time begins to see himself as part of a society.

This means that before the modern idea of the nation, state and nationalities – strong and special linkages between individuals of a particular kind – did not exist, they did not have the need to arise as resistance to state pressure using the idea of nation as fidelity of individuals.

Nation or nationality can be understood as building communities based on relationships and not as an ideology or as fidelity population.

## The medias

Harry Pross, in 1972, defined three groups in which the media can be divided (Pross Menezes in 2007). The primary media would be the one that comes down to the body and natural languages, relationships face to face; the secondary, as a more particularly binding, in which man uses artifacts to communicate, from paintings to writing, press and books.

It is from this stage when humans begins to forge national ties, when he moves away from his small community of primary relationships and starts to communicate - and link up with a larger society that, though, maintains significant similarities to his village.

Man passes of family identification, micro-identification with their city to another form of binding or linkage, the identification of common features in communities that are not necessarily located in their corner, but perhaps
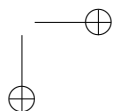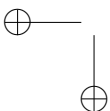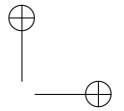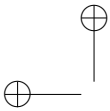
hundreds of kilometers away. Through the press man starts to see themselves as part of a much larger group and at the same time, recognizes the presence of others who share different values, different languages.

Tertiary media already gives us an exacerbation of these ties or linkages encountered in secondary media. The support becomes the internet and the press itself is re-signified. We no longer limit ourselves to information in our country or region (or in our language), but we are led to the world and, of course, we can create links that overflow physical boundaries.

The internet surpasses the mere printed paper and the geographical and territorial boundaries and begins to encompass the entire world population, without physical barriers, that has an internet connection, thus allowing the existence of consciousness of other people, groups, languages and ideas while the creation of a common identity in the midst of diversity.
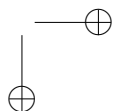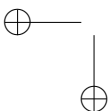
## Writing and virtualization

McLuhan coined the term "detribalization" to classify the period in which writing - now the press - replaces the tribal, oral universe of conversations around the table (Menezes, 2007), the period in which the literate "can read about themes and issues that are far removed from the 'tribe'".
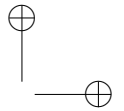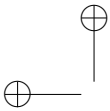
McLuhan also shows us the importance of writing in saying that from it we can understand fundamental features of our own culture (Menezes, 2007): homogeneity, uniformity and continuity (of writing). Traits that are define the nation: The society's ethnic and linguistic homogeneity and uniformity and the continuity of symbols.

From the tertiary media these characteristics are even more marked. As Menezes (2007) commented, writing ushered in the era of virtual, virtual presence where a person can keep a special bond or a deep relationship with the issuer without, for example, even knowing the other in person and hundreds of kilometers apart.

Press extends this virtual capacity through its range and if we think in tertiary media – internet – we will have the complete abolition of borders and boundaries whare this links or linkages can be created.

It is obvious, however, that these links even without borders, have limits, and this is the one of identification, language, reading capacity and interpreta-

tion of symbols which, incidentally, won't ever die as long as the keep being recorded. They are just updated, otherwise they would lose their meaning.

## Press and Imagined Community

Through Benedict Anderson (1989, 2005) and Levy (2003a, 2003b), we understand that the Press marks the nation's emergence, when the communication linkage expands from the mere face-to-face relationships to form bonds through the print media covering great distances and disseminating common symbols throughout a disperse population.

Levy (2003a, 2003b) considers speech as the turning point in the creation of a society. From the moment the man speaks and creates their language, creates also its first bonds. In using the primary media – the body – man goes to live in society.

Writing marks the moment when the man begins to live in villages, in cities, it is still the point of intersection between the primary and secondary media, the principle is the use of tools to communicate. The man, with writing, shall not only live in society, such as organizing it, creating boundaries and rules.

Levy (2003a, 2003b) goes on to describe the advent of printing as the nation's forming, for, among others, marks the boundary between those who can understand what was printed (language) and those that can be defined as "other(s)".

Anderson agrees with Levy (2005) and relegates to the press the role of forging the nation's idea, by bringing us together, by creating the idea of "us" (not just the language we all understand, but by approaching stories and people in a wide territory).

The links or linkages created by the language and the signs described by this same language give birth of national feeling, the idea of an imagined community, which is nothing more than a "[...] imagined political community – and imagined as implicitly limited and sovereign. It is imagined because the members of even smaller nations will never know most of their fellow countrymen, nor find, not even hear about them, but in the mind of each is alive the image of their communion." (Anderson, 2005).
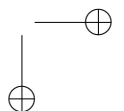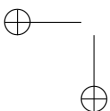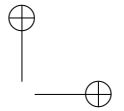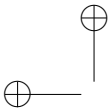
Press was largely responsible for solidifying and even expanding ties or linkages between individuals, of creating a major source of identification - the language - among individuals who, otherwise, could be disconnected.

By one hand language was a great unity factor since the beginning of human communication and, today, with the advent of the Internet, a connection or re-connection is possible, a social network where other links are created that transcend the traditional relationship between man and a group.

Linkages are nothing but strong ties between individuals that, according to Anderson, can reach great distances through the press, and create the concept of nation that transcends the boundaries of small communities (cities and towns). Press facilitated the process of creating an (national) identity for strengthening ties, creating a common language and approaching individuals.

Following the thought of Anderson (2005) we can understand three key periods of creating a national identity, and the press – understood as press-paper and press-internet – as the main actor, removing the monopoly of the church books and, consequently, of knowledge:

1. 15th century: Embryo national feeling, invention of the (western) press and increasing diffusion of books and knowledge. From that moment the ideas of the elite become easier to access.

2. 18th century: Through various historical processes, nationalism as we know it today emerged as a strong and present ideology. Nationalism, then, is related to various ideologies and political thoughts and begins to permeate our society daily (Billig 1995).

3. 20th/21st century: With the advent of internet nationalism reaches new heights, becomes transnational (Appadurai, 2004) and breaks physical boundaries. Lemos (2002) adds the phone, the TV and the Radio for the potential to facilitate communication over long distances and by facilitating the spread of information to the masses, to a greater number of people.

As we see today with the advent of the Internet, the formation of linkages is no longer limited to a small group or limited by borders, but shall cover all over the world, opening the possibility of new forms of identification and connection between individuals.

Internet presents itself as a large(r) evolution by facilitating the exchange of information not only in real time (Virilio, 1997) but also for turning anyone
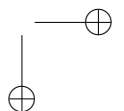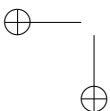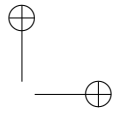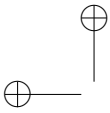
with a computer in an agent. The internet user is not just a listener/passive player, but an actor/author active and participatory in an open environment and – theoretically – outside state control.

## The nation-state and false linkages

On the one hand Sinclair (2002) argues that the nation-state has been losing ground in the face of global relations flows, included but not limited to, the trade without borders, the internationalisation and transnationalisation of production chains, tourism and the virtual contacts through computer and telematic networks, on the other hand, it's worth mentioning that while individuals start to notice more the specifics of their own environment, they start to observe the most striking differences between human groups, between nations.

Globalisation is, therefore, a two way road where you can easily travel globally and get in touch with individuals from around the globe, but at the same time the differences between individuals, countries, etc are even more visible.

When exposed to differences one might start to have a greater sense of their own reality and vitality of its linkages with its surroundings.

It is common to believe that the nation-state reached its old age (Mann, In Balakrishnan, 2000), however, although this weakening in fact exists, is not as deep as it is commonly preached. The degree of impairment is clearly different between states, which are relatively modern, and, although weakened by subnational nationalisms, transnationalism, and other various forces, it remains prevalent in militarism, communications, economic and social regulation. (Mann, in Balakrishnan, 2000).

But this weakening of the nation-state - albeit uneven, limited of sorts – leads to a weakening of the identity of individuals and, at the same time strengthens the identity of other individuals.

Historically identity is (virtually) linked to the states and the development of capitalism – at least in the 19th-mid-20th century and when we talk about the modern or postmodern man (Hall, 2001) – the state of social welfare tried and succeeded at some point in linking individuals to the idea of nation determined by its state.
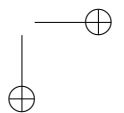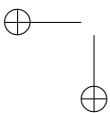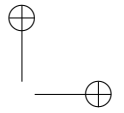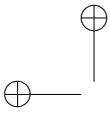
At the end of the 20th century, then the marginal national or regional movements (regionalists) within the already consolidated states started to emerge with renewed strength and started to seek a place in the sun, with the crisis of the state of social welfare, the fall of the Berlin Wall, the emergence of new states from the ashes of the USSR and the economic flows and the transnational nature of business relationships in a scale never seen before brought a new wave of identity fragmentation and the arise of new (or renewed) local identity groups. It's a new two way road of fragmentation and rebuilding of identities in a somewhat complimentary process.

The linkage between national groups is strengthened in diversity and adversity, if on the one hand state loses ground on the other we understand that the state is based on artificial settings of links of belonging that goes into crisis and not one relatively homogeneous, drawn in "national" lines.

## Sharing and the space-time compression

Virilio (1997 and 1999) speaks of the immediate, the instantaneity and interactivity that reduce the world to almost nothing. Today you can be in several places and witness different experiences at the same time, and keep in touch with thousands of people as if they were on the doorstep, or closer, thanks to changing technology of transport and instant communication that tends to lead us to a world polluted by 'dromos' (race).

This view is supported by Gulia (1999, online) and Wellman (1997, 2000, online) who claim that the changes brought about by the development of transportation and the media contribute to the expansion of social networks by allowing social ties to be created and kept even from a distance and, in many cases, overcoming the geographical territory.

Lemos (2002) is another that supports Virilio's vision of immediacy and instantaneity saying that the new digital technologies allow us to escape the linear time and geographical space. We are therefore transported to a reality-based telepresence and instantaneous time (not timeless) where we have virtual control over space and time.

Internet promotes a "time sharing", as it promotes an approach, in the same national soil, of acts and actors who do not necessarily need to be connected by ethnic, cultural and national ties (Anderson, 2005), however, the
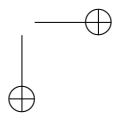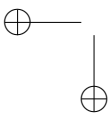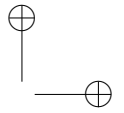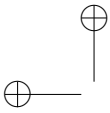
sense of belonging of an individual to a community is a result of the moment this individual, together with others recognizes and is recognized as a community.

It is to way that to form linkages between individuals, whether they are in the same territory – "soil" – or in different territories but connected by internet.

Space can be understood as communication networks or a tangle of the previous, where the dissemination of information ends up reducing distances and bring together individuals from various places on the globe in a single virtual territory marked by virtual presence and online interactivity that subverts spatial and temporal perception.
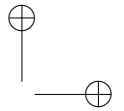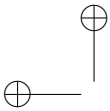
## Post-modernity

Internet inserts itself in the post-modernity - understood here as a fragmented, discontinuous and chaotic phenomenon (Harvey, 1993) – as creator of an ideal conditions for the coexistence in a "impossible space", of a "large number of possible fragmentary worlds" or, more simply, boundless spaces that are juxtaposed or superimposed one another (Harvey, 1993), but at the same time as an element sometimes of aggregation amid the postmodern chaos, as a repossession or re-territorialisation platform or environment (Ortiz 1999).

Jameson (2006) considers the new forms of communication as markers of the passage from modernity to postmodernity, a productive social order to a reproductive one based on simulations and simulacra, erasing the distinction between real and appearance (Featherstone, 1995) and is exactly this chaotic scenario where we can see the formation of linkages between dispersed individuals, enabled by new media and the new social situation in which we find the world, based on the reproducibility and simulation and endless instant exchanges (space-time compression).

The network appears as an extension of our sense of belonging, of community (Anderson, 2005) amidst fragmentation and globalisation – understood as a dialectic between the local and the global (Smith, 2003) – in a society of dynamic culture, a "new citizenship", linked to the speed of information and global and globalised relations, no longer defined in terms of state borders, never a "simulation of the world" as once said by Baudrillard when he argues
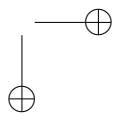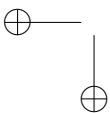
that cyberspace allows not true simulations (Baudrillard in Lemos, 2002), a pessimistic view of what we have today as the mere flow of information and not a process of rapprochement and relationship between different individuals around the world.

Post-modernity, by means of computer networks, provides a sense of space-time compression where the real and digital are somewhat confused, where there is a process of de-territorialisation of individuals, culture and economic relations. But at the same time, internet can also be seen as a space for the re-possession or re-territorialisation, an idea that is supported by Lemos (2004), which claims to be the internet, cyberspace, a way to overcome borders, escape the limits of the territory, and the physical space and find new ways of reframing, a new instance for the integration of people (Ortiz, 2004).

At the same time it de-terrotirialises and re-territorialises in a constant process of creating and demolishing identities.

## Identity fragmentation and re-signification

> "Internet is the heart of a new socio-technical paradigm, which actually constitutes the material basis of our lives and our ways of relating, working and communicating. What Internet does is process the virtuality and turn it into our reality, constituting the network society, which is the society we live in. (Castells, 2003, p. 287)."

Internet is more than just technology, is a means of communication, relationship, interaction, through which to structure this organizational form of our societies and our social relations, giving them new meanings that are appropriate by individuals and then modified, reconstructed and redefined. There is a well defined cyberculture, understood as social action in cyberspace, ie, there is a redefinition of cyberspace result of the action of individuals, which forms a specific cyberculture.

Today, although society is connected globally via computer network, individuals still feels the need to integrate (into) groups with which they have some identification; to interact to live in society by, for example, the formation of virtual communities as a strategy of individuals inserted in a network society of recognize itself by one or more identities (Corrrêa, 2005).
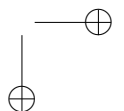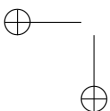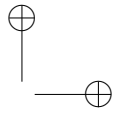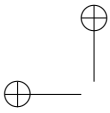
Also according to Corrêa (2005), the method of allocation of these identities is fundamentally a personal and elective choice, which is the main difference from the traditional model of assigning characteristic identities, as, according to the author, cultural and national identities, resulting from an imposition process - ones identity is that of where he was born of the one of his parents.

The fragmentation of identity makes one individual to live in a different reality, without spatial barriers, geographic and time (as) significant (Hall, 2001). At the same time, this individual will seek people with whom to share common interests, a close identity, a way of relating socially, which are approximated by computer networks, which eliminate distances and create a virtual and real world – at the same time – in its dimension. These amplify reality in a process of concurrency where they connect the physical and digital spaces, made one.

Internet allows anyone to get (or create) identities whenever wanted. It is, at the same time, a relaxation of national identity, and a search for identity in a restatement of this apparently contradictory movement.

By the time it is bombarded by information, where it is exposed to diversity and otherness, the individual or individuals may seek to reaffirm their national identity as re-affirmation of its origin and its roots. It is the answer to de-territorialisation provided by internet, the answer to the need that men must be part of a group and the identification with symbols of their ancestry.

At the same time, individuals find at the internet an environment for re-signification, where they can identify with other symbols and signs and even participate in virtual communities with striking similarities to the imagined community described by Anderson.

In short, internet can, at the same time, help individuals do strengthen their ties to their original (ethnic, lingusitic, historic) communities and also provide an environment for the acquisition of a new identity or new identities.

André Lemos (2002) recalling Michel Maffesoli, proposes the term *Cibersocialidade* (cybersociality), the tribalisation processes and social reframing together with the new technologies of cyberspace and, from this point we can better understand the process of formation of cultural ties in a fragmented society in a virtual environment, a process of breaking physical barriers, the abolition of physical space and replacing the virtual space.
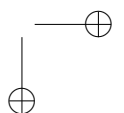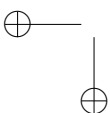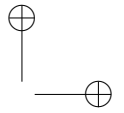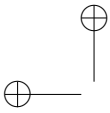
The process of tribalisation, the *Cibersocialidade* amid identity fragmentation is verifiable by the concept brought to us by Aristotle's (1998) that man tends to live in society and only feel full while living in society. Virtual communities are a safe haven to the individual thrown amidst the informational storm and a social locus where this individual can found himself and re-signifies himself.

## Brief Conclusion

I can conclude that nationality is the result of the formation of communication linkages between individuals, of coexistence and observation of symbols and common signs that are loaded with meanings.

Through the press, this idea of nationality expands, leaving the tribe, village and covering a larger population that shares identity links between them, the same language, customs and traditions (ancient history).

Press allows and helps the formation of bonds or linkages ant they can connect dispersed communities that share common traits and history, thus creating an imagined community among its diverse members, the idea of belonging to a group.

Even on internet is possible to verify the formation of bonds or linkages between individuals in virtual communities, which respect the same rules of production and reproduction of social relations and update of symbols.

At the same time, internet allows individuals to go beyond the mere identification imposed by its nation-state or by the language, but can connect individuals that relates in different levels, based also on common interests.

The virtual community is nothing more than the imagined community designed, to say, for the internet, lived on the Internet, through the possibility of multiple identifications and identities.

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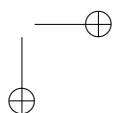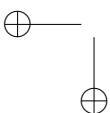
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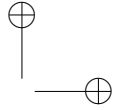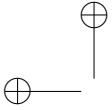
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