# Criminological Communication: Understanding Crime through the Media and Human Communication

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## ABSTRACT

Criminological communication could be an important theoretical tool or category to analyze crime for human sciences in our digital era. It is crucial to consider the fact that the new forms of media have revolutionized information and how we communicate amongst ourselves and with the outside world. Therefore the way crime is represented, as well as the deviant use of these technology instruments, should also be regarded: it is impossible not to consider the link between communication and every aspect that falls within the study of criminology, even in the field of investigation and public security.

**Keywords:** Cybercrimes; Criminological communication; Human behavior; Media; Security

## INTRODUCTION

Criminal behavior can be considered a form of communication: a particular, pathological communication that must be further analysed and given more value, a form of communication that is as complex as it is fascinating, deserving more attention as it is always characterized by a relationship that can be established between elements present and something absent, yet to be discovered. Communication today plays a leading role that will most likely continue to become even more important.

Investigating a crime and trying to prevent it means evaluating every possible voluntary and involuntary message left by an author.

We can accept this concept if we start from one of the most important axioms of communication, "it's impossible not to communicate". Moreover, if communicating means acting, moving, influencing all human behavior, consequently the communication process can not be considered within the criminological sciences [1]. It is not just a theme present in fictional literature or TV series, criminology is a real science that is undervalued in many countries, it is a very rich and complex world, defined as a multidisciplinary science. In Italy, however, it is now becoming increasingly more popular, exciting experts and newcomers. The study of crime has become a subject matter in various scientific fields and it is being addressed in a multidisciplinary manner.

It is crucial to consider the fact that the new forms of media have revolutionized information and how we communicate amongst ourselves and with the outside world. Therefore the way crime is represented, as well as the deviant use of these technology instruments, should also be regarded. The web and social networks have made us all active citizens in a virtual space where we receive news in real time; we discuss it, compare it and share it without limits of time and space. Multimedia and new virtual representations differentiate the new forms of media from the traditional ones.

## MEDIA AND GLOBAL INFORMATION

Nowadays we are witnessing an increasing lack in style, respect and confidentiality in terms of communication, as well as a strong sense of insecurity, closure and hostility towards each other, which can now be found globally. Regarding investigative activities, especially scientific evidence, there is no doubt about how the media has helped to achieve the dissemination of information in a positive way. One example of this is how TV viewers have learned about DNA analysis, including the use of luminol as well as interceptions thanks to numerous TV series such as "CSI" and "Criminal Minds" and various talk shows.

However, the reality has been distorted at times, thus magnifying the possibilities offered by forensic science and therefore generating false expectations amongst the general public. The new forms of journalism- conveyed through short articles, posts, tweets , flash ads- are losing their noble goal. The keyword is only "news show", an emotional form of communication that focuses on the "show" and not on critical thinking and truth [2]. The main difference lies in the degree of "anxiety" in the communication of news and

the main similarity lies in the distribution of anxiogenic news. Unfortunately this has led and will lead to underestimating the complexity of criminological sciences which everyone admires and which everyone wants to study all of a sudden. This is unfortunate as criminology is one of the most complete and useful sciences even for those who are not passionate about news concerning anti terrorists or serial killers, precisely because it is possible to consider deviant and criminal behavior as a real form of communication [3]. If we recognize this, two really interesting aspects can be accepted and to explained scientifically. The first would be how this discipline is intertwined today more than ever with the victimization and the media representation of criminal facts and with its relative impact on the public; the second point would be how the deviant language evolves with the technological and digital evolution of global communication.

## "PATHOLOGIES" IN THE HUMAN AND DIGITAL COMMUNICATION

Not surprisingly, an exponential growth in cybercrimes was observed by European investigators and American criminologists.

Now criminals are using the web, chat rooms and social networks as handling tools, primarily recruiting their victims who are often minors unfortunately. The psychiatrist Watzlawicht [1] spoke of "the pragmatics of human communication", a form of communication that is able to influence human behavior . In the new interconnected society, all these above-mentioned aspects must be considered and analyzed even if these issues seem unrelated to each other. This could be done by just following the birth of new forms of communication, relationships and technologies while observing the new actors and spectators who create and/or participate in this cognitive communicative process, building or taking part in the concentrated flow of information in order to spectacularize death and violence [4].

Today, any barriers that once protected the privacy or the identity of a victim or criminal, in particolar regarding images, violence or news about minors, seem to be coming down; there are no more limits. Psychologists, criminologists and journalists talk about a (post) modern society pervaded by "mass narcissism", communication pathologies , internet addiction" and the pathological need to make the private public and to reach fame through social networks even if it requires the use of violence [5]. In addition to this we could add the term "crimin-action", indicating the existence of a close link between criminal phenomenon and communicative-relational practices, because actions of criminals, forensics evidence and objects that characterise a crime scene are all "signs" that communicate the passage of someone, the existence of tracks and clues to follow, aspects related to the personality of an individual and the desire to perform a crime.

## WHAT IS CRIMINOLOGICAL COMMUNICATION?

Communication and the study of criminal behavior are closely linked. The communication processes are present in every aspect faced by the criminological sciences: victimology, criminal language, operational negotiation, intelligence activity, social reintegration of prisoners, communication strategies in interrogations. This is the reason why it is necessary to put all this under a single title and category called "criminological communication" [6]. Criminological communication concerns all those behaviors, all those situations in

which there are two or more communicating actors who send a specific message and who act within a criminal-investigative and media context.

All the communication elements that the communication theorists speak about are present in every criminal act, in every attempt to explain and analyze a crime, in every relationship between victims, killers and security operators (sender, recipient, channel, medium, etc). Criminological communication is an instrument of investigation, analysis, and prevention and resolution of a crime, but also a criminal technique to manipulate or deceive. It can also be seen as a means of informing , learning and understanding reality [6]. Everybody-from the novice criminals to the mafia bosses, from the teenage gangsters to the terrorist organizations, from the victim of a theft or murder to the street policeman all the way up to the chief police officer-is either a conscious actor or not. They may be primary or secondary protagonists of this communicative process which is always present when we speak of criminological sciences and deviant and criminal behavior. The socio-anthropological, communicative-relational and that criminological-investigative dimensions are all intertwined. This work, expressed better in the Italian book "Forms of criminological communication" ( Italian edition), underlines how it is impossible not to consider the game between communication and every element and aspect that falls under the study of criminology [6]. It is important to give greater clarity and identity to these issues, while underlining their communicative nature and the strong relational and media component. Not surprisingly, every time we speak about crime , the analysis of the terms "communication and relationship" should be included. Criminal behavior can be understood as a form of communication, and through media and communicative-relational analysis, it can be analyzed and understood [4].

If every behavior is communication, it is necessary to analyze the processes of communication and relationship in order to understand the languages and actions of a criminological nature. Criminological communication is thus confirmed as a whole set of all those behaviors, all those situations in which there are two or more communicating actors who send a specific message and act within an investigative criminal context ; its analyzed forms are instruments of investigation, analysis, prevention and resolution of a crime, but also criminal techniques to manipulate or deceive. They can also be seen as a means of comparison for information, learning and understanding reality. It is useful today for all of us who live daily within complex global scenarios, where the level of insecurity is always higher. Adequate training in the criminological sciences and this path can not and must not forget the need for a culture of communication in its various aspects, in particular in relation to non-verbal and internet language , considered as complementary and indispensable elements in the legal, psycho-sociological and communicative spheres.

## PUBLIC COMMUNICATION AND INVESTIGATION

The irresponsible and superficial use of electronic and digital media has led to a distorted representation of justice and what is good over time, reinforcing the presence of deviant phenomena and violent behavior in our society , fueled by lack of education, self control, difficulties in the development of empathic relationships, insecurities and low self-esteem.

Communication is confirmed as the first power (no longer the

fourth) and it is precisely for this reason, it can also be a cause of violent behavior if not carried out correctly. The public political battle reported on all the media outlets on 27 October 2015 between the FBI and the former US President Barack Obama confirms the close link between crime , security and the mass media .

In response to Obama's question about why crime was continuing to rise in the United States, alluding to the idea that the police were not responsible for this, the former director of the Federal Bureau James Comey pointed his finger at the media, blaming their public and interactive nature, as the media had ridiculed police actions; law enforcement officers feel insecure in carrying out their tasks, they are afraid of being filmed and having these videos uploaded on the web. With an obvious gap and a low level of trust and collaboration between law enforcement agencies, institutions and citizens, it is difficult to tackle crime effectively. Communities need to be consulted and they must get more involved in the problems they face every day [7].

Involving the population represents a complex and open challenge in communicative and institutional terms, but this solution could lead to a greater trust in the political and judicial systems. The police have a fundamental role in communicating with local communities to prevent and control criminals ; in this regard the role of social media and communication technologies could strengthen and support this task. In most cases law enforcement agencies have joined virtual dialogues by entering the hyper-connected world , by making their results and accomplishments public and transparent and and by implementing investigative action programs implemented against various forms of crime. Public communication of law enforcement is now handled using the languages of the web, informing the user directly with up-to-date information and making it interactive, but always respecting the traditional procedures adopted in cases of crisis and emergency, thus also passing through traditional media channels, organizing press releases and press conferences, interacting with journalists and institutions.

Interactions between the police and public on social networks is useful, not only to keep users updated, but also to assess information and multimedia materials that could be useful in an investigation: photos, videos, post or suspicious tweets, fake profiles; the same user can use new technologies to report or report live deviant or criminal behavior [8].

In reality, the involvement of the community, where a crime happened, has become an essential component to create new strategies and forms of cooperation and of investigation between municipalities, regions, schools, social services, public and private sectors. Media professionals can contribute with an updated and less spectacularized narrative, checking sources and educating the public about crime prevention strategies and how to recognize risk factors. However, the media can negatively affect the perception of crime. The showing and the exaltation of a violent behavior, giving little space to the story of the victims, a profiling too similar to a film and unrealistic line of a killer, a storytelling built ad hoc that traces all the stages of a series of murders or attacks , generates fears, distrust, egoism, instinctive reactions [4].

## CONCLUSION

We are in a historical period in which communication and public safety must be given special attention; they should be synonymous with sharing and cooperation. We must work to create a new safety culture, educating the general public about what this means. It is therefore impossible not to consider the link between communication and every aspect that falls within the study of criminology , even in the field of investigation and of security . In a hyper-connected society, with new needs, crises and languages, knowing and analyzing communicative-relational phenomena is inevitable and fundamental to avoid forms of "social isolation", so that individuals always cooperate in all sectors to build a better society and so that the people do not turn into "anonymous aggregates", alone and disorganized. Otherwise, the real risk would be to give life to what the sociologist Durkheim calls "anomie", a new social context without rules, where only deviance and criminality reign. This is criminological communication.

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