

# Editorial

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## From Infocication to the Right to Communicate

Desde la infocicación al derecho a la comunicación

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**W**e spend hours hooked to our screens for many and various reasons: for work, study... but increasingly for pleasure and to feel connected. Twitter, Facebook, Whatsapp are now part of our everyday language and habits. The latest figures for 2013 show that there are 6 billion mobile phones in use around the world one for each inhabitant – but unevenly spread among regions and social classes.

**A**ccording to recent stats, teenagers in Germany and the USA spend more than seven-and-a-half hours a day using these media in what can only be described as a total convergence of the audiovisual, multimedia and digital. We are witnessing compulsive hyperconnection, a global excess of information, an obsession for perpetual communication but which is devoid of content... Infocication, infopollution... are now real factors affecting our lives. Overexposure to the media is generating more infrainformation. Moles saw this coming decades ago, that this pollution of information was going to require «an ecology of communication». There have been many responses to this situation and most seem to take to it like «a fish to water», blithely unaware of the changes that these technological absorbents, which are increasingly universal, accessible and cheap, have on our lives. Media have become the mod cons of our lives today, almost like «extensions of our personal selves» as Marshall McLuhan put it. There always appears a radical reaction, none more so than Nicholas Carr, who left his hyperconnected life behind to retire to the Colorado mountains, as he relates in his book «The Shallows: What the Internet is doing to our brains?» (Taurus, 2011).

**H**owever, when faced with media, there really is no other sensible choice other than to learn to live with them since we cannot live without them unless we go on a spiritual retreat from civilization, like Carr. As an individual response, empowerment is the best strategy in order to consume media in an intelligent way, and enjoy and make the best use of them in our everyday lives; to learn about them, get to know them and relate to them. Citizens' media competences, a skill that is sadly lacking in today's school curricula, is the key for preparing people to understand the media message, with an overview and a critical eye, to establish a healthy relationship between the two.

**B**ut we need more than just individual actions and educational initiatives; we need worldwide communication strategies. As a universal human right in our hypecommunicated society, it is crucial that governments develop communication policies that defend the right of citizens to communicate and to have access to good quality communication. For this reason, a group of professors and academics in Chile set up PolComChile «Public Communication Policies» ([www.politicasdecomunicacion.cl](http://www.politicasdecomunicacion.cl)), a space for reflection, research and proposals that aims to reconfigure and establish a digital-media system that is pluralistic, diverse and participative along the lines of the «Universal Declaration of Communication Rights». They have drawn up a 12-point manifesto which, on a social and community level, amounts to



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the best instrument available to counter the effects of infopollution and the infrainformation that follows in its wake. These are:

- 1) Communication as a right, as a basic human right that must be embodied in structures and communicative practices worldwide.
- 2) A media system, with regulations that respect the right to communication, in line with digital convergence and respect for plurality not only from public service media and the private sector but also from the third sector.
- 3) Encourage pluralism, because the media must represent social, cultural, geographical, rational and ideological diversity beyond the agenda of a few proprietors in whose hands the major media outlets are concentrated.
- 4) A space for publicity that is state-owned, pluralistic and open to all media regardless of their orientation or supports.
- 5) Regional, local and community media, to encourage initiatives that promote pluralism in news reporting and territorial diversity.
- 6) Internet, as a universal public service. Connectivity must be the duty of the state, as well as the development of digital competences in its citizens in order for them to make intelligent use of the Net.
- 7) The entities that manage and promote communication as a citizen's right must be properly institutionalized and independent.
- 8) Media and digital education, based on an active state policy that encourages the instruction of citizens as critical, creative and participative beings when dealing with digital and audiovisual media.
- 9) A television that is educational and cultural, with the creation, implementation and sustainability of educational and cultural television programming in the context of digital media. This should generate a space for citizens to meet and express their various cultural backgrounds.
- 10) Public television of real quality committed to the common good, as an expression of cultural diversity.
- 11) The promotion of an audiovisual industry that generates content which is plural in form and crosses over media, and has multiplatform applications within the digital convergence.
- 12) A communicative citizenship, with the encouragement of public-private sector alliances, citizens' organizations, universities... which, with projects, observatories, experiences of good practices, research, seminars and workshops... generate information and knowledge for the citizen and effectively encourage people to avail themselves of their communication rights.

**T**hese measures are some of the best strategies for making communication a right for all citizens. Yet for this to happen, public policies are needed that can diagnose the major problems behind the infopollution and infoxication we see all around us, and that can set out clear plans and preventive actions based on citizens' rights.

**F**ree citizens, citizens who can communicate... in a dizzying and dynamic panorama of digital transformation in communication. Six billion mobile phones that are more and more «intelligent» require citizens to be educated and well-instructed in media as well as the development by governments of plural policies of communication as a universal human right.