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Media Literacy Education for a New Prosumer Citizenship

**Educación en alfabetización mediática para
una nueva ciudadanía prosumidora**

Abstract

Access to technology and the Internet is having a positive impact on all levels, personal, family, professional and social. However, the influence of the media has not been accompanied by the promotion of media literacy. The development of the media skill among citizens, especially young people and children, in order to exercise a critical and active role in relation to the media, is a key development in this society of «media prosumers». This paper discusses the results of a research project at state level, surveying a sample of 2.143 students from Kindergarten, Primary and Secondary School, in this study using a questionnaire ad hoc on-line. The objective of the research project is to identify levels of media literacy amongst children and adolescents. It can be seen that a significant portion of the sample is proficient in the media, at an acceptable level. However, and despite belonging to the generation of so-called «digital natives» the sample does not possess the skills necessary to practice as a «media prosumers». We conclude the work highlighting the necessity of complementing the digital competence established in the school curriculum with media literacy as a key element into developing a «prosumer culture». This would resolve the convergence of an urgent need to improve the training of young audiences as responsible citizens capable of consuming and producing media messages in a free, responsible, critical and creative way.

Resumen

El acceso a las tecnologías y a Internet está teniendo consecuencias positivas en todos los niveles, personales, familiares, profesionales y sociales. Sin embargo, la influencia de los medios de comunicación no se ha acompañado con el fomento de la alfabetización mediática. El desarrollo de la competencia mediática en la ciudadanía, y especialmente en los jóvenes y niños para que puedan ejercer de forma crítica y activa su papel ante los medios, se revela como clave en esta sociedad de «prosumidores mediáticos». En este trabajo se presentan los resultados de un proyecto de investigación de ámbito estatal con el objetivo de identificar los niveles de competencia mediática de niños y adolescentes, encuestando a una muestra de 2.143 estudiantes de Educación Infantil, Primaria, Secundaria y Bachillerato, mediante un cuestionario ad hoc on-line. Puede observarse que una importante parte de la muestra es competente ante los medios, en un nivel aceptable, sin embargo, y a pesar de que pertenecen a la generación de los denominados «nativos digitales», no poseen las habilidades necesarias para ejercer como «prosumidores mediáticos». Concluimos el trabajo destacando la necesidad de complementar la competencia digital establecida en el curricu-

lum escolar con la competencia mediática, como elemento clave para desarrollar una «cultura prosumidora», convergencia de imperiosa necesidad para mejorar la formación de las jóvenes audiencias como ciudadanos responsables capaces de consumir y producir mensajes mediáticos de manera libre, responsable, crítica y creativa.

Keywords / Palabras clave

Media prosumers, media literacy, media, digital skill, media skill, school curriculum, audiences, students.

Prosumidores mediáticos, alfabetización mediática, medios de comunicación, competencia digital, competencia mediática, curriculum escolar, audiencias, estudiantes.

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1. Introduction

Media literacy is conceived of as a right of all citizens (Area, 2012), and as a challenge to contemporary society, where the world's educational systems have to constitute themselves an authority that will write the guidelines needed to obtain media-knowledgeable citizens (Dejaeghere, 2009; Gozávez, 2013; Gozávez & Aguaded, 2012), characterized by a new humanistic media (Pérez-Tornero & Varis, 2010). This will connect the educational and communicative domains, as various research studies have been proposing, backed by institutional initiatives, where edu-communication is forged as the necessary resource for obtaining a prosumer society.

The term prosumer is not new. It was already mentioned in the seventies by McLuhan (McLuhan & Nevitt, 1972), and its dimensions have been continuously evolving up until the emergence of social networking spheres, which linked coinciding and reinforced its frame of reference strengthening itself in the convergence of traditional media and the new communications media (Sánchez & Contreras 2012). They have proposed that today, the media prosumer produces and consumes information, To the extent that today's prosumer exercises a leading role in the new paradigm of participative culture, propelled by the technological interactivity which characterizes this new paradigm. (Sandoval & Aguaded, 2012). This leading role also requires at the same time emotional education (Ferrés, 2010). Therefore, a prosumer citizen will possess a set of skills that will allow him or her to perform a series of actions, as a media and audiovisual resource consumer, as a producer and a creator of critical, responsible and creative messages and content. In this way, the autonomous, constructive manner of consumption and production should be constituted as part of the objectives found in current media literacy, using diverse strategies that will favor the creation of critical emitters (Aguaded, 2012; Aguaded & Sánchez, 2013). These emitters will contribute to the creation of critical receptors, just as Kaplún (2010) has argued, re-defining the parameters of audio-visual literacy as regards to the use and habits of chil-

dren and youth in the current digital landscape (Gabelas, 2010), or as part of the social networks as a democratic exercise of prosumer youths (García-Galera, 2012; García Galera & Del Hoyo, 2012).

Currently, the prosumer that dominated the «first wave» society (Toffler, 1980), becomes again the center of economic action, but this time, s/he achieves this status through the high-end technology owned by the «third wave». Toffler (1980) denominates this phenomenon as the «resurgence of the prosumer», which gives its name to chapter XX of his work, but in this case the prosumer becomes a «technological prosumer». The term can be interpreted from different perspectives, with the most common one being the one that relates it to the world of marketing (Tapscott, Ticoll & Lowy, 2001; Friedman, 2005; Werner & Weiss, 2004), and the power it can eventually exert on the socio-economic structure. The meaning, however, is far from the one adopted in this article, which defends a humanistic vision of a prosumer as producer and not a mere consumer. Nevertheless, the truly important thing is not knowing that she is able to produce or consume, or to reflect about what kind of relationship s/he can establish with the media or the environment, but at what expense, with what values and with what ethical principles.

Contemporary society, more globalized, and paradoxically more private and individualized than ever, is shaped by prosumers of different natures, such as those labeled by a few specialized digital newspapers as—persuasive, middlemen, opinion leaders, apprentices, skeptics, innovators, social and critical- (puromarketing.com, 2012). But, what is the profile of the perfect prosumer? A Producer of new messages, who knows how to arrange the necessary resources for generating creative and innovative content; A Reviewer, of the content he or she receives, as well as that which s/he creates, with a critical, thoughtful and pluralistic eye; he or she has to be an Observer of the message's production and emission processes, as well as its impact, taking into account the possible audiences. The prosumer should be a Selector of the content and resources that are adapted to the technological era and the new styles of learning, and a Unifier of the criteria for quality, equality, inclusion, and the maximal diffusion of the message. Another of the qualities that are inherent in the prosumer would be the capacity to become a Manipulator of the technological tools that are adapted to the new communications media, and to the characteristics of the new messages and media products, as well as an Identifier of stereotypes, bad practices, abuse and lack of veracity of some messages that are distributed through communication media and social networks. A complete prosumer would be a Booster of the communication and interaction between emitters and receptors, the Organizer of the resources that are required for the production of creative, critical and responsible content, favoring democratic participation, and the Producer of new messages, shouldering the responsibility of caring for the technological, artistic, ethical and moral quality of the final product.

Having all, or some of the characteristics that idealize his or her figure, it is true that most of the prosumers see in the media, an excellent tool for actively participating in the social fabric, recognizing in them a fundamental role in processes of creation and diffusion of social values (Fernández-Beaumont, 2010); maybe this

is why articles that discuss active citizenship are more frequently found (Jenkins, 2006). In general, prosumers are also aware of the value of the information that they are able to generate, and the power that this value gives them. Large businesses have long ago detected this tendency some time ago, resorting to the figure of the prosumer for the analysis of tendencies or for collecting opinions that will help them to correctly transform their products. Just as Fernández-Beaumont (2010:15) asserts, «the old media consumer is passive, predictable, isolated and silent; while the new one is active, migratory, is socially connected, is loud and public» But, is he or she, then, more ethical?

Immersed in a new educational paradigm that we could denominate technoholistic (Melgarejo & Rodríguez, 2013), the real work of media literacy should be done in parallel to moral requisites that could help in discerning and weighing the different criteria that accompany these acts. Holistic education (Gardner, 1999; Gallegos, 2000; Wimpier, 2008), the basis for his human development theories, melds itself with technology, that not only allows, but also facilitates (if adequately used), an immersion in the humanistic vision, the vision that this new paradigm boasts of; it's a comprehensive education, complete and integrative, based on the search for individual identity through community liaisons. But for this use to be adequate, we have to equip the users with media competency, doing this at different stages. Of the six basic dimensions proposed by Ferrés (2007: 100-107), the fifth, linked to ideology and values, acquires special protagonism, especially when related to the «ethical attitude when downloading products [...] documents or for viewing entertainment», or when advocating for the possibility of «taking advantage of the new communication tools for transmitting values and for contributing for the improvement of the surroundings, coming from an attitude of social and cultural commitment» or to «commit themselves as citizens in a culture and society in a responsible fashion».

Media literacy based on technology is then, fundamental if we want to shape creative, participative and free individuals, who are also equipped with a high degree of responsibility and critical vision. Adding media literacy to the school curriculum, from the first stages, is a necessary requirement for the achievement of a prosumer society, a society that has been pushed for by different international institutions and organisms (Comisión Europea, 2007; UNESCO, 2007, 2011a). Media literacy when understood from this angle, has to favor teaching and learning processes that are focused on educating for the reception of the communicative message, as well as its critical and creative, collective and dialogic, conscious and emotional production and emission.

Although much progress has been made for attaining this objective, much is left to be done. (Federov, 2014), as Sánchez and Contreras state «Children, in their role as prosumers, find serious limitations [...] the preparation given to them in the school system and family surroundings for shaping themselves at the same time, both as producers and consumers is null or lacking» (2012: 70). However, there is no doubt that the adding of basic competencies to the curriculum has contributed in some way to the preparation of children and young people, who belong to the «digital native» generation (Prensky, 2011), in the acquisition of abilities, skills and contents, through comprehensive training that allows them to

understand in a critical manner, and to adequately act in modern society (Bernabeu, 2011).

The digital competency curriculum, as part of the basic competencies, tries to develop abilities that are more related to the technological and digital sectors, so it is necessary to complement it with media competency, related to communication media and audio-visual language, but in a convergent and complementary way, as Pérez-Rodríguez and Delgado (2012), and Gutiérrez, Palacios and Torrego (2010) propose, towards media literacy as a common framework.

Another of the necessary requisites for attaining media literacy is the improvement in the training for media education teachers. For this, the UNESCO (2011b), through the «MIL Curriculum for Teachers», tries to favor informational and media literacy to improve intercultural dialogue, due to the fact that, as mentioned by the Gabinete de Comunicación y Educación (2013), the teacher's attitude favors the use of ICT for innovation and educational improvement. Also, it is necessary to improve the training of families in media competency, as highlighted by the Ofcom (2013) report «Children and Parents: Media use and Attitudes Report».

There is no doubt that succeeding in making the new generations acquire an adequate degree of media competency is a challenge, making the knowing of the degree of media competency that children and youth have, indispensable. Once this is known, we can determine the actions to follow, going beyond previous studies that were focused on the evaluation of the degree of digital or technological dexterity, in order to attain a comprehensive competency development of the prosumer citizenship. The objective posed in this research study is to try to determine the degree of media competency that the Spanish school-age population possesses, to be able to respond appropriately. Likewise, the running hypothesis is that student competency in relation to communication media is inadequate.

2. Methods

The methodology used in this research study falls within what is known as empirical-analytical methodology, based on experimentation with posterior statistical analysis. To ascertain and explain a concrete reality and to establish certain generalities that could predict later behaviors in the participants, a survey was used. On this occasion, it was achieved through four on-line questionnaires designed ad hoc¹, for each of the school stages analyzed (pre-school, primary school, compulsory secondary education (ESO), and Spanish Baccalaurate (Bachillerato). Also, this research study follows a non-experimental, correlational and descriptive design.

The population is made up of Spanish students who were attending pre-school (ages 5-6), 4th grade in primary school (ages 9-10), third year of ESO (ages 13-14) and the first year of the Baccalaurate (ages 17-18). More specifically, the sample, non-probabilistic or intended, is distributed in table 1.

Provinces	Pre-school		Primary School		Compulsory Secondary Education (ESO)		Baccalaurate	
	f	%	f	%	f	%	F	%
Cantabria	25	9,10	58	10,00	70	10,50	52	8,30
Córdoba	28	10,20	59	10,20	82	12,30	53	8,50
Granada	25	9,10	57	9,80	52	7,80	58	9,30
Huelva	25	9,10	53	9,10	49	7,40	37	5,90
La Rioja	25	9,10	74	12,70	105	15,80	109	17,50
Lugo	25	9,10	52	9,00	102	15,30	110	17,70
Málaga	25	9,10	60	10,30	50	7,50	50	8,00
Murcia	26	9,50	50	8,60	54	8,10	50	8,00
Sevilla	44	16,10	49	8,40	51	7,70	49	7,90
Valencia	26	9,50	69	11,90	50	7,50	55	8,80
Total	274	100	581	100	665	100	623	100

Table 1. Sample distribution according to province and educational stage.

The variables that were used for this research were socio-demographic data such as sex, age, type of educational center, province, and previous training in communication media. As for the dependent variables, these were configured around the six dimensions of media competitiveness established by Ferrés (2007): languages, technology, interaction processes, production and diffusion processes, ideology and values, and esthetics.

The procedure follows a series of phases that start with the design of the questionnaires, picking up from those already designed by the members of the Project entitled «Media Competency. Research on the degree of competency of the citizens of Spain», with the participation of representatives from 17 Spanish universities. Starting with this, the items were adapted according to the participant's ages. In all of the questionnaires, the validation was performed through the Delphi Technique, where all the members of Project took part, composed of 23 members, whose specialties encompassed all the education and audio-visual communication fields. They also belonged to all 10 participating provinces.

In the second phase, a pilot study was carried out with all the questionnaires. After its design on paper format, and the subsequent pilot study, the digital version was worked on for its implementation on-line. For this, the effort was focused on reducing the phrasing of the questions to their minimal expression, to provide an attractive web interface and easy navigation, and lastly, to use a graphic design that was adequate to the age groups of the test groups.

In the third phase, we proceeded to finalize the design of the questionnaires. Keeping in mind the pilot study and a second application of the Delphi Technique, we modified them accordingly, and proceeded with the application of the final instrument.

In the provisional stage, as well as in the final stage, each questionnaire was accompanied by an evaluation rubric that measured the answers given by the students, in accordance to pre-established criteria that defined the degree of competency shown by the students. Each question from the different questionnaires was evaluated as a function of the different competency levels that could be attributed to the answers offered by the participants. As for the reliability index, the

questionnaires have given different figures, from 0.61 to 0.787 for the different questionnaires.

The application of the on-line questionnaires was done in successive phases as a function of the educational stage, but simultaneous to the 10 participating provinces, and always in the presence of researchers in the classrooms. The 40 educational centers were selected based on their availability, their type, and their internet connection. After the application of the questionnaire, the resulting database was transferred, and the data encoding for each of the questionnaires was prepared. Lastly, the answers were re-categorized with the statistical program SPSS (v.18), according to the evaluation rubric that was previously created during the questionnaire design phase.

3. Results

According to the objectives that guided the research study, three levels of media competency were established. These were defined as: a) Basic level: the lowest value to 33 percentile; b) Intermediate level; 34 percentile to 66 percentile; c) Advanced; 67 percentile to the maximum value. Table 2 shows the designations to each level according to the educational stage of the participants.

Levels	Pre-school		Primary School		Compulsory Secondary Education (ESO)		Baccalaurate	
	f	%	f	%	F	%	f	%
Basic	95	34,70	118	20,30	246	37,00	228	36,60
Intermediate	103	37,60	328	56,50	195	29,30	223	35,80
Advanced	76	27,70	135	23,20	224	33,70	172	27,60
Total	274	100	581	100	665	100	623	100

Table 2. Media competency levels.

In graphical form, figure 1 shows how Primary School children mainly place themselves in the intermediate competency level, while the ESO students show the most polarization in relation to their competency levels, placing themselves primarily in the basic level of media competency. Pre-school children, as well as Baccalaurate students, show a similar tendency, where the basic and intermediate levels overcome the advanced level.

Except for the ESO students, the rest of the school-age population show, on average, intermediate levels of media competency.

By analyzing the results as a function of the established dimensions in the questionnaires, which correspond to the dependent variables, we highlight the most relevant results.

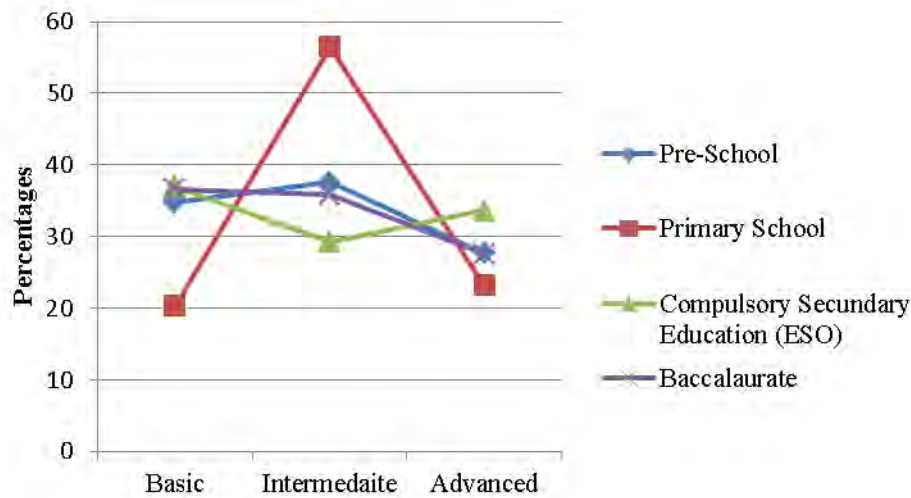


Figure 1: Competency levels

The dimension that is related to Languages refers to the knowledge that the students possess with respect to the codes found in the audio-visual language, and the ability to use them to communicate; it also refers to the ability to analyze audio-visual messages, according to their sense and meaning, narrative structure, category and genre; and the ability to construct a visual narrative, taking into consideration the rules of visual language. According to the data obtained, we verified that 77% of the Pre-school children correctly answered the questions. 60.90% of Primary School children answered successfully. In the ESO, 61.20% recognize media language, but only 30.50% were able, for example, to note that close-ups are used to show emotional states. Around 65% of the students in Baccalaurate reach adequate levels on this scale, where the most important aspect is recognizing the different languages in a fragment of a film.

The Technology dimension refers to the knowledge of the inner workings of the tools used in audio-visual and digital communication, and the ability to use them for communicating, and understanding how these messages are created. In this sense, the results show that even though pre-school-aged children habitually use technology-based machines, their use for educational purposes is limited to the family sphere, as only 48.90% said they used them in the classroom. In Primary School, we observed that 47.65% of the student body have working notions of technology, and 39.02% possess partial knowledge of them. In the case of Baccalaurate students, 79.10% use an adequate criterion for the selection of a browser, but only 22.30% were able to perform a search with a previous strategy, and only 1.80% employed adequate terms for performing it. 12.50% of the Baccalaurate students possess a broad knowledge of technological aspects related to the creation of a Wiki, uploading of videos to YouTube, writing a blog, publishing photos in Picasa, and accessing RSS services, but only 3.40% were able to successfully relate different terms such as firewall, podcast, or android to their definitions.

The Reception and interaction dimension refers to the ability to identify audiences that are targeted by the communication media, as well as the ability to recognize themselves as an active audience; to the ability to critically evaluate emotional, rational and contextual elements that intervene in the reception and evaluation of

audio-visual messages; as well as the knowledge of social joint-responsibility found in the content that reaches the audiences (responsible organisms), and to show favorable attitudes by using these organisms.

The data obtained show that in Pre-school, the number of correct answers surpasses half of the sample. The students in Primary school find themselves correctly answering 50.60% of the questions. Between 50 and 60% of the students in ESO, depending on the aspect analyzed, achieve an adequate competency level, with the lowest levels notably found in aspects such as the analysis of a web page according to valid criteria (16.80%). The Baccalaurate students correctly answered 35% of the questions, but it is noteworthy that only 8.90% would go to the cinema, watch a film or an audio-visual program according to a media criterion.

The Production and diffusion dimension is related to the knowledge of the functions and tasks of those responsible for the production of messages; knowledge of the different phases of the production and programming processes of audio-visual products; the ability to take advantage of technological resources to elaborate audio-visual messages, and to participate in the communications sphere, generating a participative culture and a responsible attitude; and to the ability to identify the different audiences targeted by the media.

The results obtained indicate that in Pre-school, most (74%) of the students are able to identify the different receptive audience. We can interpret this by stating that they correctly master the knowledge and attitudes tied to this dimension, even though the technological manipulation for the production of new messages shows less satisfactory results. As for the results of the Primary School students, 45.18% of them possess complete notions of this dimension's aspects, while 27% possess only partial notions. The ESO students are not able to reach an adequate level of media competency in this dimension, with the aspects related to composing a story that is visually well told (0.60%), active participation in social topics through the web (27.50%) or the different steps needed for the creation of a video (33.50%), being the ones that had the lowest percentages. The Baccalaurate students also place themselves in inadequate levels of media competency. For example, only 14.30% would be able to create a correctly-sequenced video, and only 11.60% use the TICs to improve their surroundings.

The Ideology and values dimension is related to the capacity for comprehensive and critical reading of the audio-visual messages and of the ethical, ideological and esthetic values that they transmit, as representations of reality. We discovered that in Preschool, the number of correct answers to questions related to the recognizing of the sexist content of advertisements came only from about a quarter of those surveyed. The Primary School children, for their part, correctly answered about 53.35% of the questions that were implicated in the identification of values and the distinctions among them. A similar percentage was reached by ESO students (53.50%), and we noted their ability in identifying the message transmitted by an advertisement. However, only 35.60% of the Baccalaurate students were able to differentiate between arguments and emotions.

Lastly, the Aesthetics dimension, which brings together the ability to analyze, evaluate, and enjoy the formal and topical innovations and the education in the aesthetic sense of the messages; the ability to formulate aesthetic judgments, of

evaluating an audio-visual product not only for the story it tells and presents, but also for the manner in which it is told or presented, and the ability to establish comparisons with other artistic manifestations: painting, literature, music, etc. The results indicate that in Preschool, the students have not yet reached the intellectual capacity to analyze the aesthetic value of the images, even if they correctly answered some of the questions given to them. This, however, shows their interest and ability to enjoy aesthetics. Primary school students are characterized by their having a «non-aesthetic» focus before the media (79.95%), as opposed to the 20.05% that are able to establish a criterion before the selection of an advertisement and identification of its aesthetic aspects. The percentage increases in ESO students, who succeed in identifying 90% of the aesthetic criteria. However, these percentages decrease to 49% in the case of the Baccalaureate students.

4. Discussion and conclusions

The results obtained in the research study allow us to conclude that the level of media competency of Spanish children and young people has not yet reached an optimum level, making it necessary to continue working so that the school curriculum caters to media literacy as a fundamental element in the shaping of prosumer citizens that could lead to active participation in the media, with a marked critical-constructive character.

Being conscious of the convenience of knowing the starting point of media competency of the student body, the work developed in the research study allows us to evaluate the methodology currently used in the project, as well as making available valid and trustworthy data-gathering tools to the scientific community, that could be used to replicate the study in other educational contexts. The samples used, without trying to be representative, indicate that the levels of media competency of Spanish students are low, this being true of all the educational levels studied. After establishing the competency levels in each schooling stage, we can determine which dimensions are most inadequate, and therefore, the ones that require a greater curricular intervention to reach the media literacy objectives. In this way, the results demonstrate that the dimension related to Audio-visual languages is the one receiving higher scores, in all the school stages, although the number of correct answers decreases when a more profound analysis of the dimension's content is required. With respect to the Technology dimension, we verified that the number of correct answers was greater in ESO and Baccalaureate as compared to the lower stages. However, when the questions delve into topics related to greater proficiency in the use of technology, we see that the percentage of correct answers decreases in all of the school stages. We can interpret the results as showing that the use of machines or technological devices does not guarantee their adequate use, as far as that required to be media proficient. The dimensions related to Reception and Production indicate that the highest correct answer percentages are found in the earlier school stages, as the rest of the students do not show an adequate level of understanding. In the Aesthetic dimension, we find the opposite, as the ESO and Baccalaureate students are the ones that show greater proficiency. Lastly, as for the Ideology and Values dimension, we find that a basic

level exists in all the school stages, even if greater training is needed as far as the moral behavior characteristics of prosumers is concerned.

The results of the research study allow us to establish that even though the samples used belong to the generation defined as «digital natives» (Bennet, Maton & Kervin, 2008; Prensky, 2011), it is necessary to plan a process of improvement for media literacy, starting with knowing their media competency. In this sense, this research study becomes very revealing. When starting with the hypothesis that the students would show a limited level of competency with respect to their relationship with the media, the results show that we find ourselves in a privileged situation, as far as the opportunity given to us by technology is concerned, and the educational possibilities that we find in them, to undertake the pressing task of introducing media education in the school curriculum. For this, we find ourselves in an opportune moment to start to work in the classroom for reaching an optimum level of media competency that could provide the students with the necessary tools to become media prosumers, in agreement with the conclusions reached by Ferrés, Aguaded and García (2011).

The conclusions extracted in this pioneering research study encourage us to continue working on the subject. For this, we hope to establish new lines of work, where we will try to count with the representation of the levels of media competency in the context of Latin American schools. This work will try to complement the research performed in other seven countries, where their respective projects have already started, and whose results will give us a global view of media literacy, which could be used to establish lines of action that could allow citizens to acquire an adequate level of media literacy, which is needed in this new prosumer society.

Notes

¹ For Pre-school (<http://goo.gl/VhnrqM>), for Primary School (<http://goo.gl/26dVNI>), for Compulsory Secondary Education (ESO) (<http://goo.gl/mZsgma>) and for Spanish Baccalaureate (Bachillerato) (<http://goo.gl/cTp9I6>).

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