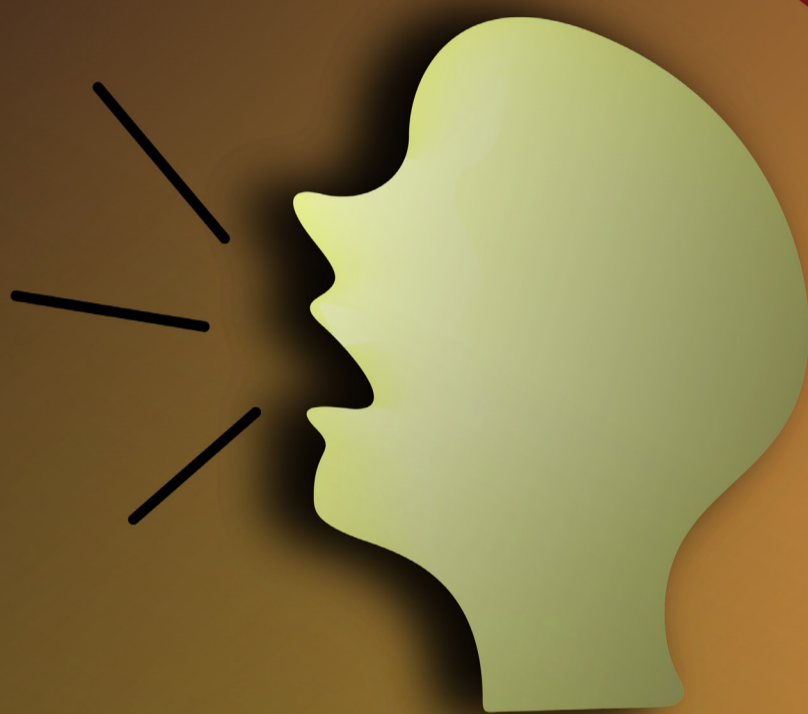


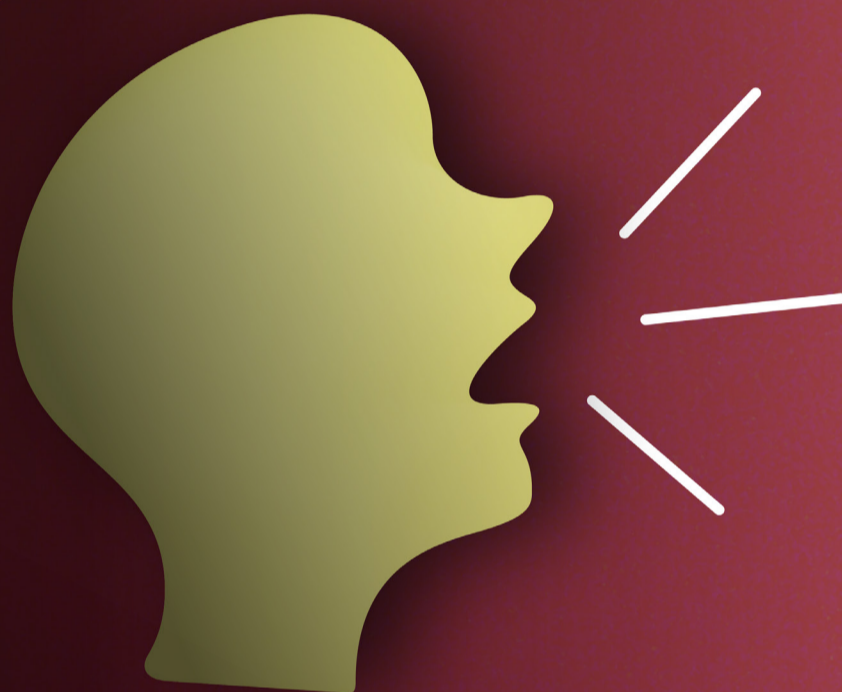
# Media Development

3/2023

WVACC



Who is  
talking  
with the  
audience?



¿Quién  
dialoga con  
el público?

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WACC is an international organization that promotes communication as a basic human right, essential to people's dignity and community. Rooted in Christian faith, WACC works with all those denied the right to communicate because of status, identity, or gender. It advocates full access to information and communication, and promotes open and diverse media. WACC strengthens networks of communicators to advance peace, understanding and justice.

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**Editor:** Philip Lee

**Assistant Editor:** Lorenzo Vargas

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## IN THE NEXT ISSUE

The theme of the 4/2023 issue of *Media Development* will be "Communication Rights and Migration".



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*Versión en español a continuación*

This issue of WACC's journal *Media Development* presents texts in English and Spanish on the theme "Who is talking with the audience? Understanding audience engagement and media literacy efforts today".

To focus on these questions, we invited contributors with technical knowledge and experience of practical applications in ways to promote communication and citizenship starting from connections and dialogue between those who produce and those who access information.

The authors research and work in a mix of different countries. Experiences have points in common such as the need for more just and balanced communication by opening channels and interactions that lead to more quantified and qualified participation.

At the same time, there are challenges that can be understood as shared by way of the social, political and technological changes that societies are undergoing in the context of today.

We begin with "Building Bridges: Harnessing Media Literacy to Navigate Social Media Echo Chambers in India", by professor Kanchan K. Malik and researcher Vamsi Krishna Pothuru, both of the University Hyderabad, India.

The article focuses on initiatives that seek to integrate media literacy into both formal education experiences and community actions. Such actions promote critical uses of technologies, above all digital media, with the aim of contributing to preventing fake news and bringing about more tolerant, informed and inclusive societies.

Renee Hobbs (University of Rhodes Island) describes the importance of media literacy today taking account of actions related to a culture of extremism and violence. For this researcher, frank debate and dialogue are fundamental to reducing or preventing violent

situations.

From Germany, Dominik Speck (researcher at TU, Dortmund, Germany) offers an archaeology of the concept of "Media Accountability" and systematizes challenges to involving the public in more productive dialogue that increases audience participation.

Raising audience participation can improve what is produced and create more commitment and preparation by the public in taking the lead not only with content, but in production processes and even the prevention of fake content on the basis of greater access, knowledge, and participation.

In "Ethics, Media Literacy and Audience Engagement in Africa", Herman Wasserman (Stellenbosch University, South Africa) relates the growth of democratic experiences with the possibilities offered by today's information technologies for more interaction and accountability on the part of the media and professionals in the face of a more proactive attitude on the part of audiences.

Similarly, connected to thinking about accountability and social responsibility, Fernando Oliveira Paulino (professor at the University of Brasilia, Brazil, and president of ALAIC – the Latin-American Association of Communication Researchers) presents concepts and experiences developed in Latin America, strengthening the role of Public Defender of

Audiovisual Communication Services (a sort of public ombudsperson dedicated to encouraging the right to communication of the audience) and Media Observatories. Such experiences have been a driving force in improving the debate, training and preparing professionals and social organizations.

Professor at the University of Avellaneda and a professional with experience as the creator of and first Public Defender of Audiovisual Communication Services, Cynthia Ottaviano (Argentina) contributes to the theme with "Gender, Audience Rights and Media: Exclusion Zone". She emphasizes the need to include reflections on gender in studies and practices that promote rights. Ottaviano

presents data that serve to understand the realities and difficulties lived by women both inside and outside Argentina.

In “Media Literacy and Audience Ombudspersons in Mexico”, Laura Martínez (Mexico) contextualises the process of creating ombudspersons in the country and the need to encourage active audiences. The article reflects her experience as a researcher and ombudswoman taking into consideration national and international reference points (for example the criteria established by UNESCO in cooperation with the Deutsche Welle Akademie) that promote understanding of the way communication media function and their responsibilities thus empowering people to know how to claim rights. Audience ombudspersons play a strategic role in the development of such skills.

Audiovisual communicator and audience ombudsman in Colombia, Mario Mantilla (Colombia) contributes the article “Communication Literacy and Peace in Colombia”, underlining the possibilities for communication media and media literacy to be instruments of peace discourse and practice with a better understanding of the role of the Truth Commission. That is to say, in this perception, a way for media and their professionals to participate in mediations that lead to shared understandings.

In summary, we hope that the experiences and analyses presented here serve to foster further conceptual and practical exchanges, strengthening media literacy work everywhere. More than a concept, it is necessary to understand the importance of media literacy as an instrument of public policies, essential to promote democracy and dialogue. ■

*Fernando Oliveira Paulion (Guest Editor), Philip Lee (Editor), Lorenzo Vargas (Assistant Editor).*

Esta edición de la Revista *Media Development* de la WACC tiene textos en inglés y en español dedicados a “¿Quién dialoga con el público? Comprender la participación del público y los esfuerzos de literacia mediática en la actualidad”.

Para tratar de esos temas, invitamos a personas con conocimiento técnico y experiencias de aplicación práctica en acciones de promoción de la comunicación y de la ciudadanía a partir de conexiones y diálogos entre quienes producen y quienes acceden la información.

Los/as autores/as investigan y actúan en variados países. Las experiencias tienen puntos en común tales como la necesidad de una comunicación más justa y equilibrada a través de la apertura de canales y de una interacción que lleve a la participación más cuantificada y calificada.

Igualmente, existen retos que pueden ser vistos como compartidos en función de los cambios sociales, políticos y tecnológicos que las sociedades pasan en el contexto actual.

Esta edición empieza con el texto “Building Bridges: Harnessing Media Literacy to Navigate Social Media Echo Chamber in India”, hecho por la profesora Kanchan K. Malik y por el investigador Vamsi Krishna Pothuru, ambos de la Universidad de Hyderabad, India.

El artículo se dedica a presentar iniciativas que buscan integrar la literacia mediática tanto en experiencias de educación formal, como en acciones comunitarias. Las acciones promueven un uso crítico de las tecnologías, sobre todo los medios digitales, con la intención de estimular la prevención de noticias falsas y estimular una sociedad más tolerante, informativa e inclusiva.

Renee Hobbs (Universidad de Rhodes Island), describe la importancia de la literacia mediática actualmente teniendo en cuenta la presencia de acciones relacionadas a la cultura de extremismo y violencia. Para la investigadora, debates y diálogo francos son fundamentales para reducir o prevenir situaciones violentas.

Desde Alemania, Dominik Speck (investigador de la TU Dortmund, Alemania) hace una arqueología del concepto de rendición de cuentas de los medios de comunicación (“Media Accountability”) y sistematiza retos para involucrar al público en un diálogo más productivo que eleve la participación de la audiencia.

El aumento de la participación puede calificar lo que es producido y crear más compromiso y preparación del público para lidiar no solo con contenidos, sino con procesos de producción e, inclusive, prevención a contenidos falsos a partir de más acceso, conocimiento y participación.

En el texto “Ethics, media literacy and audience engagement in Africa”, Herman Wasserman (Universidad de Stellenbosch, Sudáfrica) relaciona el crecimiento de experiencias democráticas con las posibilidades contemporáneas que las tecnologías de información y comunicación ofrecen para más interacción y rendición de cuentas por parte de los medios y profesionales delante de una actitud más proactiva por parte de las audiencias.

Igualmente, conectado a reflexiones sobre Medios, Rendición de Cuentas (“Accountability”) y Responsabilidad Social, Fernando Oliveira Paulino (profesor de la Universidad de Brasilia, Brasil, y presidente de la Asociación Latinoamericana de Investigadores de la Comunicación, ALAIC) presenta algunos conceptos y experiencias desarrolladas en América Latina, reforzando el rol de las Defensorías de las Audiencias (un iniciativa dedicada a encorajar el derecho a la comunicación del público) y de los Observatorios de Medios. Tales experiencias han sido impulsadoras de calificación del debate, formación y preparación de profesionales y organizaciones sociales.

Profesora de la Universidad de Avellaneda y profesional con experiencia como creadora y primera Defensora de las Audiencias de los Servicios Audiovisuales, Cynthia Ottaviano (Argentina) contribuye con esa edición a través del texto “Género, derechos de las audiencias y

medios: Zona de exclusión”. En el artículo, la investigadora relaciona la necesidad de inclusión de reflexiones sobre Género en estudios y prácticas de promoción de derechos. Ottaviano presenta datos que sirven para comprender la realidad y dificultades vividas por mujeres dentro y fuera de territorio argentino.

En el texto “Literacia Mediática y Defensorías de audiencias en México”, Laura Martínez (México) contextualiza el proceso de creación de las defensorías en el país y la necesidad de fomentar una audiencia activa. El texto refleja su experiencia como investigadora y defensora que tiene en consideración referencias nacionales y internacionales (a ejemplo de los criterios establecidos por la UNESCO en alianza con la DW Akademie) que promueven el entendimiento del funcionamiento de los medios de comunicación y sus responsabilidades empoderando así a las personas a que sepan reclamar derechos; las defensorías de las audiencias juegan un papel estratégico en el desarrollo de tales habilidades.

Comunicador audiovisual y defensor de audiencias en Colombia, Mario Mantilla (Colombia) hizo el texto “Alfabetización Comunicación y Paz en Colombia”, reforzando las posibilidades de que los medios de comunicación y la literacia mediática sean instrumentos de un discurso y de prácticas de paz con una mejor comprensión del papel de la Comisión de la Verdad. Es decir, a través de esa percepción, una manera de que los medios y sus profesionales participen de mediaciones que conlleven a entendimientos compartidos.

En síntesis, deseamos que las experiencias y análisis presentadas sirvan para más intercambio conceptual y práctico, fortaleciendo las acciones de literacia mediática. Más que un concepto, es necesario comprender la importancia de la literacia mediática como un instrumento de políticas públicas, esencial para la promoción de la democracia y del diálogo. ■

*Fernando Oliveira Paulino (redactor invitado), Philip Lee (redactor), Lorenzo Vargas (redactor adjunto).*

# Harnessing media literacy to navigate social media echo chambers in India

Kanchan K. Malik and Vamsi Krishna Pothuru

*Several initiatives in India are endeavouring to integrate media literacy into formal education curricula and promote it through community initiatives. These initiatives aim to develop skills and expertise among citizens/netizens of India to enable them to critically navigate the digital media landscape. This is being looked upon as a step toward countering echo chambers, combatting fake news, debunking misinformation, and contributing to a more tolerant, well-informed, and inclusive society in the country.*

**E**cho chambers are groups or platforms where individuals are exposed to information and views that align with their existing belief systems, reinforcing and amplifying their prevailing ideologies while rejecting or disregarding contradictory viewpoints.

As in several countries worldwide, in India, there are echo chambers facilitated by social media and online communities that curate content utilising algorithms on users' preferences. Such sites tend to create filter bubbles that perpetuate political polarisation, dominant religious narratives, nationalistic jingoism, caste-based prejudices, linguistic biases, or other misguid-

ed upheavals. Even though everyone may not participate in echo chambers and may seek alternative perspectives to engage in constructive dialogue, the spread of misinformation in such platforms is rampant enough to cause what is recognised in many parts of the globe as an information epidemic (infodemic) phenomenon.

A notable example of political echo chambers in India is the rise of online groups with strongly biased ideologies prone to quick and easy stereotyping, reducing their identities to either “liberals” and “woke libtards” or “right wings” and “fascists”. In India, the predictable labelling for the former is “urban Naxals” and “anti-nationals”; for the latter, it is “bhakts” and “sanghis”. The term “bhakts” and “sanghis” are terms regularly associated with Hindu nationalism or Hindutva in India and are often used to refer to the vehement supporters of Prime Minister Narendra Modi and his Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP).<sup>1</sup>

On social networking sites such as Twitter and Facebook, numerous pages have emerged that feature a strong pro-government bias and tend to dismiss or vilify dissenting voices and opposing viewpoints of the liberals and vice versa. Echo chambers exist across the political spectrum in India, and supporters of other political parties have also developed their own biased, tailored media structures to reinforce their respective ideologies. According to a BBC report titled “Duty, Identity and Credibility: Fake News and Ordinary Citizen in India”, there is a stark political polarisation among Twitter users in India, with conservative and left ideological groups at opposite ends of the map. Polarisation results in echo chambers and epistemic bubbles, where fake news thrives undying and reinforces biases and prejudices.

The social media echo chambers in India are based not only on political affiliations and religious beliefs but also on regional identities and several other factors. The Kashmir conflict, for example, has engendered many echo chambers that advocate for the independence of Kashmir from India. These attract individuals who may fanatically identify Kashmir's historical, cultur-

al, and political distinctiveness and assert the right to self-determination and aspirations for political autonomy. The discrimination based on the caste system in India has led to online social forums that raise awareness about Dalits (treated as “untouchables” in the past), challenge caste-based hierarchies and prejudices, and seek to advocate for social justice and equality for oppressed caste groups.

While the professed purpose of such platforms is societal reform and empowerment of the marginalised, as they cater specifically to a particular section, it could inadvertently generate an echo chamber effect and perpetuate identity-based divisions that hinder integration with the larger social fabric of the country.

Online forums around shared religious beliefs, cultural practices, ideologies, interests, and socio-political concerns can foster a sense of community, allowing individuals to connect with others with a shared identity and similar lived experiences. However, when they become confined and closed to conflicting views, dismiss a wide range of ideas, or restrain engagement with diverse social and political issues, they convert to echo chambers (also referred to as filter or epistemic bubbles). All echo chambers have the unique quality to polarise, reject dialogue, and drown out alternative perspectives that compel members to hold conservative and orthodox ideologies and affiliations.

### **The interplay between fake news and echo chambers**

Echo chambers spawn in India through multiple platforms such as social media, internet forums, websites, and online discussion boards. But, the messaging apps such as WhatsApp are the clear winners because of their private and closed environment, the chat and forward feature, and the admin’s authority to selectively add or remove participants from groups.

There are several offline methods also that feed echo chambers. Partisan media organisations, television channels, newspapers, and radio stations associated with distinctive political or

ideological leanings promote echo chambers through biased reporting or selective coverage. Echo chambers fuelled by misinformation, inflammatory content, conspiracy theories, false narratives, hate speech, and divisive perspectives have not only led to political polarisation but also to incidents of violence in India.

The combination of echo chambers and fake news has been a fertile ground for communal tensions, violent clashes, and social unrest in the global south. Social media platforms like WhatsApp, Facebook, and Twitter have also become breeding grounds for echo chambers in India. Fake news thrives in these echo chambers and flourishes unchecked by boosting the confirmation bias of members through content that aligns with their preconceived notions, ideological or cultural beliefs, and worldview. During elections, especially, misinformation that revolves around political ideologies and religion has the potential to influence voting behaviour and undermine the democratic process.

In these echo chambers, false stories, doctored images, and misleading videos are circulated to advance biased agendas and target vulnerable members by manipulating sentiments and inciting hatred. The echo chambers are amenable to disinformation campaigns often deployed to manipulate public opinion, discredit opponents, or create interfaith disharmony in India.

### **India grapples with the challenge of echo chambers**

The communal violence that erupted in February 2020 in India’s capital, Delhi, between the Anti-Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA) and pro-CAA protestors, which resulted in significant loss of life and property, was influenced, in part, by social media echo chambers formed around political affiliations and religious divides. During the COVID-19 pandemic, online echo chambers spread misinformation and conspiracy theories related to the virus and its treatments. False assertions about unscientific remedies and vaccine side effects circulated through internet forums resulted in confusion, unsafe practices,



and vaccine hesitancy that undermined public health efforts. Fake news also turned communal in certain parts of the country, where minority communities were targeted based on misinformation, attributing them to be virus carriers.

India has witnessed several incidents of mob lynching triggered by false rumours and videos circulated on platforms that led to the targeting of migrant workers and brutal attacks on innocent nomadic communities and travelling through villages on suspicions of child kidnapping, organ harvesting and cow smuggling. According to data from IndiaSpend, more than 33 cases of murder and over 99 cases of attacks were triggered by rumours of child abduction alone between 2017-18.<sup>2</sup> Similarly, when the process for updating the NRC (National Register of Citizens) was initiated in the north eastern state of Assam, false rumours about mass deportations, loss of citizenship, and discrimination created panic and anxiety among marginalised communities leading to unrest within the state.

During the farmers' protests of 2021 in the north Indian states of Punjab, Haryana and western Uttar Pradesh, misinformation was circulated using social media echo chambers. According to the study by BoomLive,<sup>3</sup> a fact-checking initiative in India, around 57% of the fake news around farmers' protests was to demonise protesting farmers across political, nationalistic, and religious identities. There was also a misrepresentation of the nature of the farm bills and divisive narratives that hindered constructive dialogue between stakeholders. A farmer leader went on record to say that the children of the farmers should teach their protesting parents how to use social media so that they can post true information to counter fake news.<sup>4</sup>

### **Media literacy in India: From echo chambers to critical thinking**

By equipping individuals with critical thinking skills, promoting information verification, encouraging diverse media consumption, and cultivating empathy, media literacy education can effectively address the issue of echo chambers.

Media literacy is emerging as a powerful tool to mitigate the impact of social media filter bubbles by promoting critical thinking that makes media consumers question the credibility of the information they encounter. It enables them to evaluate media content and identify propaganda or misinformation. Media literacy emphasises the importance of verifying information before accepting it and seeking multiple sources of information ahead of forming opinions or sharing content.

By urging diversity of media content intake, including those with differing perspectives or ideologies, media literacy helps counter the tendency to rely solely on echo chambers and broadens the understanding of complex issues. Media literacy empowers citizens to recognise biases and manipulation tactics media outlets employ. Additionally, it encourages individuals to become active media producers to create ethical content that promotes dialogue, plurality, empathy, and respect for diverse viewpoints.

Several non-governmental organisations (NGOs), media houses, and academic institutions in India actively undertake research, advocacy, and capacity-building related to media literacy, digital citizenship and rights, and fact-checking ecosystems. These initiatives organise workshops, training programmes, and awareness campaigns and develop educational resources to enhance media literacy skills, support critical media analysis, and endorse ethical journalism among divergent demographic segments of social media users and other citizens. Brief profiles follow of some of the organisations that run grassroots initiatives in collaboration with schools, colleges, community centres, and other stakeholders to encourage responsible media consumption and engagement to combat echo chambers.

**Internet Saathi:** Internet Saathi was launched by the Tata Trusts in 2016 in collaboration with Google to promote digital literacy among rural communities through rural women. This programme initially creates a cadre of digitally trained rural women called '*saathis*' (friends or partners) in villages. The *saathis* train other

women from the community, eventually building a network of trainers who impart digital literacy among the rural communities. Internet Saathi has a network of 60,000 *saathis*, who have imparted digital literacy to 20 million women across 200,000 villages in India. The *saathis* also help spread critical information about weather and natural disasters among villagers.<sup>5</sup>

**Teen Fact-checking Network:** The Teen Fact-Checking Network (TFCN) is project of MediaWise in partnership with the Boom Live, an Indian fact-checking website, to train teenagers in fact-checking. TFCN trains middle and high school children in identifying misinformation, research, digital verification, video production and writing fact checks. TFCN runs in English and Hindi and trains teenagers between 13 to 19 years.<sup>6</sup>

**Sach ke Saathi:** Vishwas News, a fact-checking initiative of Jagran News Media, rolled out a *Sach ke Saathi* (Companions of Truth) to empower the digitally vulnerable to identify and verify information online by conducting on-ground training workshops.<sup>7</sup>

**FactShala:** FactShala, a media literacy initiative by InterNews in collaboration with Google, trains communities in rural India. It employs a multi-stakeholder approach by collaborating with fact-checkers, journalists, and community radio stations to empower rural communities with media literacy and critical information skills.<sup>8</sup>

**DEF:** Digital Empowerment Foundation (DEF) has recently developed a grassroots project to create rural hyper-local fact-checking networks with the participation of community radio stations to fight fake news in villages. This programme produced tools such as a WhatsApp tip line for community radio stations to receive potential misinformation reported by users.

**Birdwatch:** This is a pilot initiative by Twitter in the USA, which allows users to label potentially misleading tweets. An organic discourse by a pool of informed social media users on a particular piece of information can lead to the flagging of potential misinformation.

## Recent issues of *Media Development*

2/2023 Archival Justice: Unfinished Business

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**Verify Kiya Kya:** WebQoof, a fact-checking initiative of Quint media house, rolled out *Verify Kiya Kya*, which offers video courses about fake news and fact-checking on their official YouTube channel.

**Sathyameva Jayathe:** The Kerala state government launched *Sathyameva Jayathe* to teach digital media literacy in schools. So far, this programme has trained 20 lakh students in the fundamentals of identifying and verifying misinformation on social media.<sup>9</sup>

**Google News Initiative India Training Network:** The Google News Initiative India Training Network started in 2018 with the collaboration of Google, DataLEADS, and Internews aims to support fact-checkers, media educators and journalists in addressing misinformation problems in India. So far, the Google News Initiative has trained 35,000 people across ten languages. This training network made a significant contribution to the fact-checking ecosystem in India.

**Video Volunteers:** Video Volunteers has been undertaking video journalism projects since 2003 with a mission to empower the world's poorest citizens with a voice to address poverty, inequality and injustice. By amplifying voices that are often unheard, their Community Video Units (CVUs) create platforms for marginalised communities to share their own stories, initiate dialogues, encourage bridging divides, and take action on local issues. Video Volunteers provides media literacy training to community members, enabling them to use media tools effectively to share their perspectives and build their communities into places where they would like to live.<sup>10</sup>

## Conclusion

Challenging the dominance and harmful effects of echo chambers and misinformation necessitates collective efforts that promote fact-checking, responsible platform guidelines and fostering critical thinking among citizens through media literacy in India. By incorporating media literacy into formal education curricula, forging partnerships for harnessing media literacy, and implementing grassroots initiatives, there are numerous endeavours in India seeking to break down echo chambers, foster an informed citizenry, and build a more inclusive society.

To realise the full potential of media literacy, collaboration among educational institutions, research and policy think tanks, digital advocacy outfits, media houses, NGOs, community organisations, and technology companies are crucial. There is a need to focus on the intersection of technology, policy, and society and concerted

efforts across sectors to integrate media literacy into formal education, public discourses, and community communication. Promoting dialogue, values, and citizen empowerment to foster a more diverse culture foregrounds the importance of connective partnerships and shared knowledge creation and dissemination in the digital age.

All ventures to harness media literacy can benefit by forging a “community of practice” where stakeholders can pool their resources and expertise to reach a wider audience, create more sustainable media literacy strategies, promulgate comprehensive policies, and develop effective tools that counter the echo chamber effect and mitigate its negative consequences. By forging a community of practice around media literacy and a participatory approach to debunking misinformation, India can take significant strides towards combating echo chambers and nurturing a more pluralistic and democratic society. ■

## Notes

1. <https://theprint.in/pageturner/excerpt/bhakts-or-liberals-friendship-changed-in-modis-india-tech-will-make-it-worse-for-genz/585570/>
2. <https://www.indiaspend.com/child-lifting-rumours-33-killed-in-69-mob-attacks-since-jan-2017-before-that-only-1-attack-in-2012-2012/>
3. <https://www.boomlive.in/fact-file/boom-study-farmers-protest-rihanna-adani-ambani-fake-news-12139>
4. <https://www.tribuneindia.com/news/nation/protesting-farmers-to-use-social-media-to-counter-fake-news-213669>
5. <https://www.tatatrusters.org/our-work/digital-transformation/digital-literacy/internet-saathi>
6. <https://tfcnboomlive.in/>
7. <https://www.vishvasnews.com/english/fact-check-media-literacy-drive-english/>
8. <https://internews.org/story/person-person-internews-factshala-program-combats-misinformation/>
9. <https://frontline.thehindu.com/news/sathyameva-jayathe-kerala-initiative-aims-to-educate-students-in-spotting-fake-news/article66056748.ece>
10. [https://issuu.com/videovolunteers/docs/manifesto\\_for\\_media\\_literacy\\_vivo](https://issuu.com/videovolunteers/docs/manifesto_for_media_literacy_vivo)

Kanchan K. Malik is Professor, Department of Communication, SN School of Arts & Communication, University of Hyderabad, Hyderabad, India.

Vamsi Krishna Pothuru is a PhD Scholar, Department of Communication, SN School of Arts & Communication, University of Hyderabad, Hyderabad, India.

# The importance of media literacy in a culture of extremist violence

Renee Hobbs

*The United States is now experiencing significant levels of political extremism, rage, and anti-government activism that is associated with targeted violence and domestic terrorism (Bergengruen, 2022). Domestic terrorism is intended to inflict injuries beyond the direct victims by threatening and intimidating entire communities.*

All around the world, those who perpetuate extremist violence are motivated by ideologies, specific issues, or political causes and use social media and online forums to influence public opinion and spread violent extremist narratives and activity (Patel & Koushik, 2017). Some individuals have attacked demonstrators and have targeted houses of worship and crowded commercial facilities or gatherings. Others have promoted a race war, justifying civil disorder that provides opportunities to engage in violence in furtherance of ideological objectives.

Protests and political rallies have been co-opted by both far-left and far-right extremists. Violent extremists have also targeted government, military, and police as well as private individuals based on race, gender, and other factors. Media coverage of mass shootings play a significant role in shaping public opinion about racially-targeted extremist violence (Hellmüller, Hase, & Lindner, 2022). In the United States, data from three surveys before and after the 2022 mass shootings in Buffalo (NY) and Uvalde (TX) revealed how

media coverage of racially-targeted extremist violence creates feelings of dread and irrational fear among the general public (Dalafave & Viscusi, 2023).

Democracies are at risk when violence is used as a political tool to promote fear and hate. But the people who commit targeted violence and violent extremism are also our neighbours, our friends, and our family members. When they encounter conspiracy theories, propaganda, and disinformation that simplifies the world into in-groups and out-groups, they discover the pleasures of a simple and satisfying worldview where villains are harming humanity (Druckman & Levendusky, 2019).

Survey research with young adults in six countries shows that social media is among the most common settings where young people encounter hate speech. Researchers found that acceptance of online hate is culturally situated and influenced by cultural background (Celuch et al, 2022). Over time, participation in communities of online hate can lead people to believe that committing violence against their enemies enables them to rise to the level of hero. For example, on January 6<sup>th</sup>, many members of militia groups who participated in violent insurrection thought of their actions as patriotic (Feuer & Montague, 2022).

Many people around the world are concerned about the general rise of intolerance that is fuelling the threat of extremist violence. Evidence of hateful ideologies and violence can be found in our communities and online. In the U.S., Neo-Nazi and KKK recruitment messages can be found on traffic signs. Online, people post and share forms of digital media that arouse strong emotions, including anger, hatred, and fear. Anti-government activists have harassed politicians, public officials, educators, and even librarians at public gatherings. But because of the wide scope of domestic extremism today, approaches that focus only on law enforcement and public safety are insufficient, especially because of the growing public disregard for law enforcement that has proliferated (Bell, 2017).

Effective prevention requires cooperation and coordination between relevant community stakeholders — this is known as a “whole-of-society” approach (Martin, 2018). Community leaders can promote a culture of tolerance and open dialogue to demonstrate the importance of rejecting violent ideologies by supporting the most vulnerable community members. Other key civil society actors include people from the fields of information communications technology, social media, and journalism.

All social media users can use the power of counterspeech in reacting to online hate – and researchers have found that Twitter users who got exposed to an empathy-based counterspeech message were more likely to delete their own xenophobic hate speech and produce less hate speech in the future (Hangartner et al, 2021). Empathetic feedback from online peers can help people resist the allure of hateful media messages. For all these reasons, the broader public must be partners in preventing and countering terrorism. Community-based media literacy education may be important in preventing the hate that leads to violence.

### **How media literacy community-based interventions prevent extremist violence**

Media literacy has long been an educational intervention used in the practice of public health (Hobbs, 2010). But with propaganda and disinformation becoming increasingly disruptive and affecting all Americans, a whole-of-society education initiative is needed. Media literacy education cannot be confined to schools and students in elementary and secondary schools – it is something that adults of all ages now urgently need.

The media representation of the 2020 U.S. election and its dramatic aftermath – along with topics including immigration, racial justice, the coronavirus pandemic, and vaccination – only added to the ongoing concerns about so-called “fake news” and “cancel culture.” Questions are being raised about the appropriate role of government in addressing the problem of disinforma-

tion, but some of our most visible politicians are also functioning as “conflict entrepreneurs,” the term used to describe those who seek to exploit or profit from us-vs-them conflict (Ripley, 2021). Even among those who do not have direct contact with members of neo-Nazi, alt-right, Antifa, or militia groups, many families have experienced interpersonal tensions and even violence because of increased political polarization. These disruptions have been felt in the workplace, the community, the school, and in family life, exacerbated by the systematic and widespread dissemination of falsehoods and inflammatory propaganda. But many Americans feel helpless to address the situation, leading people towards an avoid-and-deny stance which may provide temporary respite but also interferes with the building of the social consensus that is essential for human flourishing.

Even as most people rely on access to a mobile phone and internet, the digital ecosystem has become more and more challenging for people of all ages to navigate. Every day, people access information, entertainment, and persuasion online, where the line between fact-based evidence and opinion can be blurry. Emotionally compelling content can be so eye-popping that it can compel people to share it. A host of websites that look like news offer false and inflammatory rhetoric on a wide range of controversial topics. With the rise of algorithmic personalization, people’s information ecosystems have narrowed, making it less likely for them to encounter unfamiliar or new ideas (Hobbs 2020). In addition, when hateful propaganda and disinformation are delivered through forms of entertainment like memes, pop music, and videos, its appeal can lead people to bypass critical thinking (Hawden et al, 2019).

Media literacy (ML) education aims to improve how participants consume, create, and share information, entertainment, and persuasion. The term is often used as a shorthand for critical thinking about media, but it is fundamentally part of an expanded conceptualization of literacy that includes both “reading” and “writing” practices that are now essential for work, life, and cit-

izenship (NAMLE, 2023). As people learn how to critically analyze communications, ideas, and forms of indoctrination, they are better able to recognize and resist the persuasive force of these messages.

ML interventions can also facilitate an individual's natural growth track toward valuing pluralism by helping them recognize the prevalence of extreme ideas in which "we and them" and "good and evil" are easily distinguished. ML interventions shift the focus "away from safeguarding children from radical ideologies and toward giving them the tools and information that help them think critically about their own beliefs, connections with others and society, and their options for taking action" (Amit, & Kafy, 2022, p. 10).

In a systematic review of the literature, the RAND Corporation recommended that policymakers and practitioners increase participation from diverse constituencies in scaling ML efforts. According to RAND, ML is made up of several specific competencies, such as the ability to access, analyze, evaluate, and communicate media messages in a variety of forms. ML education teaches participants to consider the implications of message construction from numerous angles, such as how the motivations of those disseminating information could influence content selection (Huguet et al, 2019).

Dialogue and discussion are key features of media literacy education, with common use of terms like "critical discussion", "difficult dialogue", "frank and candid talk", and "non-judgmental discussion". In such environments, people may express their worries about the current state of public affairs. When a space is established where people can feel safe to express ideas without fear of condemnation, this type of discourse fosters new ways for individuals to interpret their identity and critically assess and reorganize their assumptions and viewpoints (Amit, & Kafy, 2022).

### **Courageous conversations**

Over the past 20 years, the Media Education Lab has become the premiere provider of media

literacy training and educational services in the world, reaching more than 20,000 people in 2021 with programs and services on four continents. One program, Courageous Rhode Island, a state-wide model for using media literacy and active listening to address the threat of violent extremism, is funded by the U.S. Department of Homeland Security's Center for Prevention Programs and Partnerships (CP3). Based on our experience in implementing this program, we believe that media literacy competencies are increasing public safety by bringing communities together to develop their critical thinking and communication skills in ways that promote compassion, understanding, and intellectual curiosity.

In the Spring of 2023, we hosted Courageous Conversations, a 10-session online webinar series that used a combination of media literacy lessons and deep listening strategies to mobilize a coalition of diverse stakeholders, including young people, parents and grandparents, educators and librarians, and people in faith communities, veterans' groups, and other community members. In sessions that are part informational and part conversational, participants learned how to recognize and resist harmful propaganda, conspiracy theories, and disinformation that may take the form of memes, news, activism, websites, videos, and social media posts. Participants came from across Rhode Island, the USA, and internationally.

By combining media literacy education with facilitated small-group dialogue and discussion, we helped people build the cognitive, social, and affective skills necessary to navigate their media environments. After only six months, the fully online, synchronous, and highly interactive small group discussion program has already reached more than 865 people. From a preliminary investigation of people who participated in the program, we found that participants gained knowledge about how to prevent violent extremism, increased their ability to critically analyze media messages, and applied active empathic listening strategies in their own lives for conflict reduction (Courageous RI, 2023).

While media literacy education is often conceptualized within the context of a program for children and teens (Bulger & Davison, 2018), it has considerable practical utility for adults, who also benefit from structured, social opportunities to critically analyze media messages using active listening, dialogue, and discussion. As people develop their critical thinking about media and self-expression through dialogue and discussion, they gain respect for diverse perspectives. They become more aware of harmful propaganda, conspiracy theories, and disinformation.

True resilience, which can be defined as tolerance, active listening, emotional self-regulation, intellectual curiosity, and humility may emerge from media literacy education that meets the needs of adults in our communities. Media literacy discussion programs for adults may be a productive approach to peacebuilding as a societal enterprise, helping people refresh their senses about the local practice of genuinely democratic self-governance. ■

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Renee Hobbs is Professor of Communication Studies at the Harrington School of Communication and Media at the University of Rhode Island. She is Founder and Director of the Media Education Lab, whose mission is to improve the quality of media literacy education through research and community service. She is also the founding co-editor of the Journal for Media Literacy Education, an open-access peer reviewed journal that advances scholarship in the field.

# Media literacy and media accountability

**Dominik Speck**

*One Tuesday afternoon in November 2022, fears of a further dramatic, even nuclear escalation of the Russo-Ukrainian war rose. That day, a missile had struck a village in Poland, close to the Ukrainian border, killing two people. A report by The Associated Press (AP), one of the world's most renowned news agencies, indicated that it had been a Russian missile, based on information from a single US intelligence source that spoke on the condition of anonymity.*

That information proved wrong only shortly later, with NATO and Polish officials stating that the missile was most likely Russian-made, but fired by Ukrainian air defense forces and then went off course. AP corrected its article the next day, and later on sacked a reporter, a seasoned military expert and investigative journalist, who got the information from the unnamed source in the first place. The news agency also said that its standards had been violated.

According to [an article from \*The Daily Beast\*](#), the AP had “scared much of the world” with its report. Many media outlets repeated the information on the missile being Russian, as the news agency is a trusted source, that had built its story on an apparently knowledgeable insider, an – albeit anonymous – official, even though the report mentioned that the Polish government had not yet confirmed the information.

Despite being an extreme example, the AP missile report case illustrates the enormous power the news media still hold. The case further demonstrates the importance of journalists and

the news media investigating errors, rendering an account of what has gone wrong, and taking over responsibility for their actions and practices – even though the sacking of the reporter had not [gone unchallenged](#), as the decision to break the story apparently included other editors as well. At any rate, the case also provides an example of how important discussions about media accountability are.

The concept of media accountability roots firmly in a social responsibility approach to the role of journalism and media in society: By observing actors, events, and developments in a variety of societal fields, journalists fulfil an essential role, at best contributing to the well-being of society at large. However, it is equally significant to observe the observers, holding them to account according to ethical principles and other norms, and providing spaces for constant discussions on and advancement of what good journalistic practice actually means. As the late communication scholar Denis McQuail argued, “accountable communication exists where authors (originators, sources, or gatekeepers) take responsibility for the quality and consequences of their publication, orient themselves to audiences and others affected, and respond to their expectations and those of the wider society.”<sup>1</sup>

Too often, though, journalists may fail to respond to input and feedback from their audiences properly – not necessarily purposefully, but rather caused by a variety of constraints. In many places around the world, newsrooms struggle with limited resources. Maintaining a constant and meaningful dialogue with the public though requires funding. At the same time, members of the public may lack awareness of the possibilities they have to hold the news media to account. Efforts to increase media literacy are thus crucial for effective media accountability. This article sets out to explore the linkages between media literacy and accountability in more detail.

## **Media accountability instruments**

Modern democracies – having been described as “monitory democracies” by political scientist



John Keane<sup>2</sup> – may provide a variety of forums in which the media may be asked to explain their practices, apologize for mistakes, reply to complaints and, ultimately, to use the words of McQuail, take responsibility for the quality and consequences of their publication. A variety of *media accountability instruments* have emerged, i.e., means and mechanisms to achieve (greater) accountability of the news media – or, to say the least, trying to do so. These instruments include institutionalized efforts to hold the media to account, such as press councils or media observatories established at universities.

However, media accountability does also comprise less institutionalized instruments, such as media criticism by individual users on social media, or ad-hoc protest groups reacting to wrongdoings of one particular news media outlet by providing a short-lived watch blog. Media accountability thus relates to concepts of modern (media) governance which emphasize that policymaking, regulation, and industry standard-setting are not only conducted through formal and government-driven mechanisms, but in a large variety of formal and less formal settings and by stakeholders on different levels.

While media ethics as well as the relationship of the news media and their public have always been topics of interest for practitioners and theorists of the media alike, roughly at the beginning of the 21st century, research on media accountability and transparency became an emerging field in international media and communication research. One of its pioneers, Claude-Jean Bertrand, described as media accountability “any non-state means of making the media responsible towards the public”.<sup>3</sup> Inherent to this concept is thus an understanding of the *direction* of accountability measures: The news media should turn their attention to publicly explaining their work to society.

We may distinguish different *actors* who provide forums to hold the media to account, or, in other words, operate media accountability instruments. Press councils, for example, are usually self-regulatory bodies. Even though some of

them are set up by law, it is mostly the profession of journalists and representatives of the publishing industry that run these councils and deliberate on complaints. As a result of this embeddedness within the media industry and their often poor opportunities (or willingness) to effectively sanction misconduct, press councils in many places around the world have been criticized as “toothless tigers” that barely help to make news media coverage more responsible.

Even though this is certainly not true in all cases, it demonstrates the importance of widening the concept of media accountability from self-regulatory efforts on the level of profession-wide bodies to a greater variety of actors and instruments. According to the 2022 *Global Handbook of Media Accountability* edited by Susanne Fengler, Tobias Eberwein and Matthias Karmasin,<sup>4</sup> in countries with – for whichever reasons – rather weak accountability opportunities at the level of the media profession, other actors may step in. In many Latin American countries, civil society actors are highly involved in holding the media to account, for instance through university-run journalism observatories. In the US, where efforts to set obligatory standards on the profession-wide level have historically rather been condemned as interferences with the free market principle, individual newsrooms are important drivers of media accountability efforts, for example through employing public editors or paying greater attention to editorial guidelines at the company level.

Further, while one should avoid an overly naïve “techno-optimism” that expects digital technologies to ultimately “liberate” the media sphere, it is fair to say that the emergence of social networks, to name but one effect of digitization, has increased both the number and scope of forums available to discuss (mal-) practice of the news media. In this vein, a holistic approach to media accountability involves a variety of forums, actors, and instruments participating in the discussion of journalistic (mal-)practice and negotiation of consequences, including members of the audience.

Not least, efforts to bring in “ordinary” citizens to media accountability may help to balance the misuse of established instruments as hidden (or sometimes only barely disguised) tools of governmental interference in the media field: In an effort to tame the media, press councils or similar bodies may be captured by representatives of the state or their allies.

Public accountability of the media though requires knowledge on the part of the citizens. On the one hand, this quite obviously includes knowledge about the existence of media accountability instruments and how to make use of them. Establishing press councils in emerging democracies with their typically mushrooming number of news outlets is fine, but the efficiency of these bodies may be easily challenged if only a handful of people know how to use its complaints’ mechanism. A formal complaints’ procedure at a public broadcasting company may only rarely be used if the broadcaster does not advertise this opportunity for audience feedback too much, or if its editorial standards remain opaque.

On the other hand, to make use of even the most well-designed media accountability instruments, citizens would need to understand the basic functions and roles of the news media in society – or, to be more specific, their particular society. To return to our two previous examples, the press council in an emerging democracy may be operating with efficient sanctioning mechanisms, but members of the public may not be able to use it if they do not recognize breaches of journalism ethics in the first place. The complaints’ mechanism of the public broadcaster may fail to set standards efficiently if larger parts of the audience lack an understanding of what public broadcasting is, and the legal and social principles that underlay its operation in their respective society.

### **Media literacy and audience engagement**

This is where media literacy and audience engagement enter the field. Given the often-derogatory tone of social media debates on media performance, journalists may – and perhaps understand-

ably so – be tempted to perceive efforts to intensify dialogue with the public as useless. Members of complaints commissions at press councils or ombudsman offices may feel disenchanted by the fact that it is often activists from the radical sites of the political spectrum that make use of these mechanisms. Striving for greater media literacy is no cure-all but may help to stimulate awareness for media accountability at least.

Efforts to increase media literacy – whether at schools, in community projects, or through dedicated events that foster dialogues between journalists and their public – should consequently factor in the concept. While increasing knowledge on media accountability is a task for any actor engaged in media literacy training, the news media themselves do bear a responsibility to increase public awareness about the variety of instruments that serve to hold them to account. Increasing media literacy is even more crucial in times when potentially any citizen can raise their feedback or complaints about news media coverage to a larger public through social media.

The widespread perception of a dramatic drop in public trust in the news media – which, globally seen, proves true in some countries but wrong in others – may also be caused by the heated debates on news media performance that take place not only, but in particular on social networks. Disgruntled media users may easily and rapidly spread their criticism online, joined by a potentially large crowd of peers, whereas in yesterday’s media landscape only a few had the will, energy, or time to send a letter to the editor or call in to a TV or radio show.

As outlined, this does not need to be a negative development; it may, quite contrarily, have exposed and opened up debates about media performance and journalistic practices to larger and more pluriform audiences compared to, say, merely self-regulatory settings, in which often birds of a feather flock together. However, the shifting shape of media criticism would require a better-informed public, in turn enabling an informed and constructive dialogue on media ethics and accountability.

What is needed then for a greater public awareness of media accountability and its instruments? The following measures could help to increase the literacy of audiences about the existing landscapes of media accountability instruments in national media systems, which, as global research has shown, differ somewhat considerably from country to country:<sup>5</sup>

- \* Increasing *access*: Actors involved in media literacy efforts (scholars, teachers, ...) and audience engagement (newsrooms, media CSOs, ...) should provide information about the most significant media accountability instruments, and how to make use of them in an informed and constructive way. Organizations providing media accountability instruments – i.e., press councils, newsrooms, media CSOs, ... – should factor in awareness campaigns to their activities.
- \* Increasing *knowledge*: Stipulating awareness about the production processes of media content, the ethical and professional rules and norms involved, and not to forget the structures of the media system is crucial for media users to draw solid conclusions on journalistic performance and thus make proper use of media accountability instruments, such as complaints procedures by press councils or broadcasting commissions, or to raise an informed voice about media (mal-)practice in social networks.
- \* Increasing *participation*: This demand addresses less the media literacy field and more those institutions and individuals running media accountability instruments. Increasing opportunities for participation, such as through audience inclusion into newsroom deliberations, may, in turn, increase the knowledge of the participating users about the processes that shape journalism. While accountability is, in principle, possible without user participation, the latter provides additional insights for an interested audience. In itself, participation is neither a panacea for the ills of journalism nor a guarantee for more efficient media accountability. However,

dialogue is a crucial element of standard-setting procedures. Often, media accountability though only includes dialogue between journalism practitioners, not considering audience feedback too much.

Summing up, it is time to bring media literacy, audience engagement and media accountability closer together, as they can benefit from each other. Cases of media accountability, such as the example of the AP alert on an allegedly Russian missile striking Poland, are regularly well-suited to illustrate the causes and consequences of journalistic behaviour and may help to make media users more literate about the processes and routines of news-making. These are, after all, not as easy as it may seem at first glance, particularly in a delicate breaking news context. In the said case, one could have a look into the [AP Statement on News Values and Principles](#), which elaborates that the agency's reports require more than one source when sourcing is anonymous.

Further, according to the guidelines, such stories should be held while reaching out to additional sources for confirmation. However, no rule comes without an exception: The same paragraph states that in rare cases, just one source might suffice: “when material comes from an authoritative figure who provides information so detailed that there is no question of its accuracy”. Easy to judge? Let's have an informed discussion! ■

#### Notes

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Dominik Speck is a researcher at the Institute of Journalism and the Erich Brost Institute for International Journalism at TU Dortmund University. He also has several years of experience as a freelance journalist specialized on covering media issues, working mostly for the German trade journal *epd medien*. He studied journalism and political science at TU Dortmund University, Ruhr University Bochum and Istanbul Bilgi University, Turkey.

# Ethics, media literacy and audience engagement in Africa

Herman Wasserman

*The contemporary media landscape in Africa is characterised simultaneously by disruptions brought about by new digital technologies, such as shifting journalistic practices and media consumer habits and preferences, and structural limitations and pressures on the media that often have a much longer history. This confluence of a rapid media development on the one hand, and the persistence of older legacies on the other, poses challenges for ethics, media literacy and audience engagement on the continent.*

It is important, however, that these different tensions are navigated, as a free, independent and robust media on the continent is increasingly important as a bulwark against authoritarian creep, disinformation and populist polarisation. On the African continent, democratisation has often taken the form of cycles which includes democratic regression and lapses to authoritarianism, or the combination of different forms of government resulting in a hybrid system of governance, rather than a linear path leading to the inevitable end goal of a Western-style liberal democracy. The result has often been hybrid regimes where democratic institutions and procedures combined with continued authoritarian tendencies in government.

When considering the role of a democratic media on the continent, it is assumed that such

media would not only be free and independent, but also ethical. Since the wave of democratisation that has swept the continent in the 1990s, there have been substantial efforts to set up structures and processes to ensure the accountability of African media. Media councils have been established in several countries across the continent, some of them more self-regulatory and professionally-minded than others, which instead took the form of statutory councils. These councils play an important role to administer media ethical codes on the continent. While codes provide important guidelines to journalists to make ethical decisions, these codes also have an important function of establishing relations of trust between the media and audiences. Media ethical codes send a signal to the public that journalists take their ethical responsibilities seriously and are willing to defend their ethical choices publicly.

While media ethical codes, working optimally within systems of self-regulation, can provide support for media to assert their independence against government interference in editorial processes, media ethics can also be contested terrain, where the media and government are at loggerheads about what the ideal role for the media should be in African societies – for instance, should the media take on the role of watchdog, as in established democracies, where the monitorial function over power is the media's first and foremost responsibility, or should it play a more “developmental” role, as a collaborative partner to support government in attaining its social development goals?

How should the African media incorporate cultural values such as the communitarian principle of ubuntu, or Francis Kasoma's notion of Afriethics into its normative frameworks? Can African media subscribe to global media ethical frameworks, or should it follow contextually specific guidelines? These issues have not only been vehemently debated in media ethical scholarship over the years, but also have real implications for journalism practice and policymaking.

The idea of “media accountability” is also

sometimes used as an excuse for governments to repress or control media which are critical of them. This repression takes place by means of enacting insult laws or criminalizing criticism of government officials. Journalists are still imprisoned in African countries under this form of libel legislation, despite condemnation by the World Association of Newspapers (WAN) in the form of the “Table Mountain Declaration” issued in 2007 to call for the abolition of insult laws. In Rwanda, the government of president Paul Kagame has outlawed any reference to ethnicity in an attempt to defuse any lingering tensions between Hutus and Tutsis that might be fomented through ethnic stereotyping. While ostensibly aimed at avoiding conflict and ensuring that journalism serves peace-building, this ruling has strengthened the positions of those in power and has led to the closure of several Rwandan newspapers and the imprisonment of journalists in that country.

Increasingly, governments are also using the threat of disinformation to suppress media freedom. They do this through an increasing array of “fake news” laws, which in countries like Benin and Burkina Faso carry prison sentences or heavy fines. In this regard, we see how African governments’ relationship with media and freedom of expression still shows similarities with authoritarian tendencies that go back to post-colonial times, even if this authoritarianism now presents itself in the guise of a policy response to new digital threats of disinformation.

### **Formal and informal practices**

Digital technologies have however also facilitated greater participation of African audiences in ensuring media accountability. These practices are in line with similar trends internationally. With the rise of new digital technologies that make greater participation by audiences possible, new, more informal ways of keeping media to account have been emerging. These include peripheral journalistic actors such as media bloggers that use online platforms to critique media. A well-known example of this practice is the Kenyan

online community Kenyans on Twitter, or #KOT, which have on occasion criticised global media outlets such as CNN for misrepresenting their country. Another well-established online site for media criticism, commentary and debate, is the website Africa is a Country, which works to present a fuller picture of the continent’s culture, politics and media.

Despite the widespread existence of formal and informal accountability measures as outlined above, ethical lapses sometimes occur among African media, that erode the public’s trust and provides ammunition to governments that seek to find ways to criticise the media. An example of this is the serious ethical crises that have dogged South African media in recent years. One of the country’s major newspapers, the *Sunday Times*, suffered a blow to its credibility when it transpired that it published false stories which were planted by factions within the ruling party which were intent on undermining state institutions such as the Revenue Service. Although the newspaper apologized, the country’s body of editors, the South African National Editors’ Forum, commissioned a report by a retired judge, Kathleen Satchwell, to head an independent investigation into the state of media ethics in the country.

Just like media ethics and accountability has become more open and participatory in Africa as a result of the increasing access and availability of digital technologies, there have also been attempts to empower African audiences to acquire the skills to counter disinformation. Media and information literacy has been a part of academic curricula from primary to tertiary education in many parts of the world, some African countries. More recently, the rise of misinformation on the continent has emphasised the importance of including misinformation literacy skills in such curricula. Misinformation literacy skills include being able to differentiate between different types of inaccurate content in the media, employing a range of strategies to authenticate content found online, or using technology to verify the accuracy of images and videos.

In many African countries, where there is low trust in media, governments, and public institutions, one of the challenges is how to raise critical awareness of misinformation among young people, while resisting a tendency towards general cynicism and mistrust in the media. In these efforts to create more critical awareness of, and engagement with, media and information, it remains important that the particular African contexts within which (mis)information circulates, are taken seriously. Media literacy campaigns which are imported from elsewhere, without due attention to the specifics of African audience needs, their particular motivations for misinformation and the challenges attendant upon media literacy campaigns – such as long-standing social inequalities, gendered hierarchies and unequal access to digital media – are set to fail.

Both in the area of media ethics and misinformation literacy, it is important that African media users are engaged not as passive recipients of information, but as active agents in the public sphere. This public sphere is characterised by continued structural inequalities and power relations that have their roots in the continent's colonial and postcolonial history, but increasingly have to navigate a rapidly changing digital media landscape. In this digital landscape, audiences are simultaneously interpellated as media users operating within the structural constraints of global technology platforms, while positioned as subjects within local political, social and economic power relations.

African media users have demonstrated creativity, conviviality and criticality when navigating the dual imperatives of asserting their voices within global digital spaces on the one hand and the structural, historical and political factors in African localities. On the terrain of ethics, resistance to disinformation and countering global stereotypes, African audiences are actively reconstructing narratives about the continent and speaking back to global centres of cultural production. ■

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Herman Wasserman is Professor of Journalism and Chair of the Department of Journalism at Stellenbosch University, South Africa. He earned his doctorate from Stellenbosch University and worked as a journalist before starting his academic career. He has taught at the universities of Newcastle and Sheffield (UK), Rhodes University and the University of Cape Town, and has been a visiting professor at the universities of Houston, Munich and Tsinghua.

# Medios y rendición de cuentas en América Latina

**Fernando Oliveira Paulino**

*Como parte de su misión fundamental, a lo largo de los años, los medios de comunicación se especializaron en el monitoreo de acciones de personas y entidades que producen efectos en la vida en sociedad. Nada más necesario para las democracias, que las acciones de los propios medios sean seguidas y que esas instituciones y sus profesionales rindan cuentas de las decisiones que toman continuamente.*

**P**or un lado, la reflexión sobre maneras y parámetros para tales acciones involucran ética, procedimientos y formación de profesionales y gestores de los medios.

Por otro, ha sido fundamental desarrollar y fomentar acciones de literacia mediática, preparando y fortaleciendo la relación y el diálogo con el público para disminuir asimetrías comunicacionales y contribuir para que las audiencias tengan más condiciones de ser un público que interactúe, efectivamente, participe de decisiones editoriales y, aún, tengan autonomía para producir, distribuir y acceder contenidos.

Con eso, habrá más condiciones para que las personas no sean sólo vistas como receptoras o comentadoras de contenidos publicados.

En sociedades con indicadores sociales bien desarrollados, con un sistema público de comunicación y medidas formales e informales de interacción entre comunicación y educación, hay más condiciones de polifonía, de isegoría y de conocimiento compartido.

Desafortunadamente, tal escenario no hace parte de la mayoría de las regiones del llamado Sur Global, especialmente, en países latinoamericanos con indicadores que enseñan bajo grado de deontología profesional y un alto grado de concentración mediática.

## **La concentración de la propiedad**

En América Latina existe un panorama histórico de concentración de la propiedad (no solo mediática) y un importante uso político de los medios de comunicación.

Sin perjuicio de otras cuestiones como la politización del sector mediático, la desactualización de las leyes de medios, la desigualdad social, las amenazas a la libertad de prensa y la falta de seguridad de los periodistas en el ejercicio de su profesión, que se observan en varios países latinoamericanos, la concentración de la propiedad sigue siendo un factor clave que afecta a la diversidad de contenidos (y opiniones) y a las iniciativas de rendición de cuentas (“accountability”) de los medios.

En este escenario, se destacan los esfuerzos de la sociedad civil e instituciones y personas desde las instituciones educacionales, por democratización de la comunicación, incluyendo movilizaciones por la creación o consolidación de servicios públicos de comunicación, acceso a la información, transparencia, monitoreos, observatorios y defensorías públicas de las audiencias (instituciones que mezclan y/o se basan funciones similares a las defensorías del pueblo y servicios de ombudsman).

En el campo académico, merecen referencia los estudios desarrollados en Chile (por Constanza Hormazábal y Fernando Gutiérrez), Argentina (Cynthia Ottaviano), Brasil (Fernando Oliveira Paulino, Mariella Bastian y Renata Gomes), México (Lenin Martell y Laura Martínez Aguila), Costa Rica (Patrícia Vega Jiménez, Giselle Boza Solano, Liliana Solís Solís, Luisa Ochoa-Chaves y Lidieth Garro-Rojas) y Colombia (Diego García Ramírez, María Patricia Téllez y Edgar Allán Niño Prato) que hacen parte del “Global Handbook of Media Accountability”, organi-

zado por Susanne Fengler y Tobias Eberwein.

Un resumen de las contribuciones de las/os investigadores está disponible en los enlaces Se puede acceder al acto en español a través de dos enlaces: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=\\_V9LUcMg794&t=5503s](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_V9LUcMg794&t=5503s) y <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cg1EDZ0sVRA>

En los videos, las/os expertas/os tratan de evaluar como los instrumentos tradicionales de responsabilidad de los medios de comunicación a las circunstancias de los respectivos países.

En México, la creación de instrumentos de rendición de cuentas de los medios, como los defensores de la audiencia, está directamente relacionada con las reformas de los últimos años y la creación de la Ley de Comunicación y Acceso a la Información. Ellos son los encargados de recibir y mediar en las quejas y sugerencias de la audiencia sobre los contenidos y procedimientos desarrollados por las televisoras y radiodifusoras.

Por consiguiente, otros elementos de la responsabilidad de los medios de comunicación desempeñan un papel especial en los países latinoamericanos.

Entre ellos se encuentran los órganos de regulación y fiscalización de los medios de comunicación, que desempeñan un papel importante al establecer parámetros para estimular los debates sobre el papel de los medios de comunicación.

En países como Brasil, Argentina y Chile, las empresas de comunicación de propiedad familiar están presentes en el mercado de la comunicación y controlan la mayor parte de la oferta mediática, lo que se traduce en una oferta de contenidos a menudo influenciada política y personalmente y plantea mayores dificultades a los periodistas para seguir los principios éticos frente a las presiones del mercado.

En Costa Rica y Colombia, la concentración de la propiedad en el sector de la radio es especialmente pronunciada.

En el muy politizado sector de los medios de comunicación de Argentina, que se caracteriza por la fuerte influencia de los actores políticos, se creó el cargo de “defensor de las audiencias”

(defensor público de los servicios de comunicación audiovisual). Otro ejemplo son las “defensorías de las audiencias”, que se organizan de forma descentralizada en el sistema de medios de comunicación mexicano.

### **Canales para promover el diálogo**

Tales experiencias tienen una importante responsabilidad en la recepción y mediación de quejas y sugerencias, y son canales para promover el diálogo sobre contenidos y animar a la gente a participar más activamente en los medios. Además, estas experiencias se han incorporado a las actividades de alfabetización mediática, permitiendo una voz activa de las comunidades y sus miembros.

Especialmente en Brasil, donde académicos e instituciones académicas trabajan activamente en este campo, los observadores de los medios han participado en debates y contribuido a la formación profesional en las escuelas de comunicación. Además, las herramientas de transparencia, como los códigos deontológicos o la divulgación de la propiedad, pueden contribuir significativamente al funcionamiento de una infraestructura de rendición de cuentas de los medios de comunicación y mejorar la capacidad de la audiencia para comprometerse e interactuar con las redacciones.

La baja convergencia deontológica entre empresarios, periodistas y profesionales de la comunicación es un rasgo típico de los países latinoamericanos y puede ilustrarse con la realidad chilena.

El actual sistema chileno cuenta con una estructura que apunta a la autorregulación, pero al ser voluntaria tanto para los profesionales como para los medios, no se convierte en un órgano efectivo de responsabilidad social (“accountability”), ya que sus recomendaciones no son necesariamente seguidas por los medios.

Teniendo en cuenta la realidad descrita arriba, ha habido esfuerzos compartidos, con la participación de investigadores/as de distintos países para un intercambio más fluido de experiencias a través de canales científicos y profesionales.



Que las experiencias crezcan y, por medio de ellas, que haya más condiciones de participación del público, sean fomentadas nuevas posibilidades de alfabetización mediática, ejercicio del acceso a la información y del derecho a la comunicación. ■

Fernando Oliveira Paulino es profesor de la Universidad de Brasilia y presidente de la Asociación Latinoamericana de Investigadores de la Comunicación (ALAIC)

## Género, derechos de las audiencias y medios: Zona de exclusión

Cynthia Ottaviano

*El término “techo de cristal” fue acuñado hace casi medio siglo. Sin embargo, muchas de las razones que llevaron a su autora, Marilyn Loden, a definir las desigualdades por género en el mundo laboral con esas palabras, siguen vigentes, incluso en el ámbito comunicacional. ¿Cómo detectarlo? ¿Cómo transformarlo? De eso se trata este artículo.*

Hacia 1978, Loden era experta en Recursos Humanos en una empresa de Telecomunicaciones. “Sonríe más”, le ordenaba su jefe, luego de terminar una reunión; “qué linda estás”, le decían al comenzar, en un ámbito en el que nada se observaba sobre la estética masculina; los aumentos eran para ellos, por ser el “único sostén familiar”; y a las mujeres no se las ascendía porque “degradaban” el puesto.

Estas discriminaciones alcanzaban también al imaginario que se creaba en torno de los géneros: mientras que a los varones los consideraba “líderes natos” y no los veían como padres, aunque lo fueran; a ellas las criticaban

por ser “emocionales” y, si decidían maternar, las postergaban o echaban por falta de compromiso con la carrera laboral.

Así, el acoso sexual no era considerado un problema y las asignaciones de tarea por cuestiones de género, algo normal y natural.

Cinco décadas más tarde, reconocemos el techo de cristal o “glass ceiling barriers”, como una de las consecuencias del patriarcado, donde algunos varones tienen privilegios por el hecho de ser varones y conforman un sistema jerárquico de relaciones, a través de determinadas pedagogías de la exclusión por cuestiones de género.

Si bien es cierto que el tiempo ha pasado, las prácticas machistas parecen no haber caducado tanto. Aún en el siglo XXI, la forma de ordenamiento social, político, económico, jurídico y hasta estatal, tiene sus manifestaciones en el ámbito cultural y comunicacional, de manera de institucionalizar el dominio y la superioridad masculina a partir de la distribución de tareas, remuneraciones, profesiones y roles sociales.

Como consecuencia, las mujeres destinan entre 2 y hasta 10 veces más de tiempo a las tareas de cuidado no remuneradas y “por cada hora trabajada, reciben ingresos laborales que son, en promedio, el 17% inferiores a los de los hombres con la misma edad, educación, presencia de niños en sus hogares y tipo de trabajo”.<sup>1</sup>

La falta de autonomía económica y física, con precariedad o ausencia de ingresos e inequidad en las tareas productivas y reproductivas genera mayores niveles de dependencia, reconocido como “suelo pegajoso”, por las dificultades que acarrea dejar el ámbito privado, doméstico, para pasar a la esfera pública.

En el campo comunicacional, estas desigualdades se evidencian en múltiples aspectos que van desde la propia estructura de la “empresa” periodística, hasta las formas de representación de las subjetividades y la producción de contenidos.

En la Argentina, durante la pandemia por Covid-19, sólo 2 de cada 10 fuentes de información fueron mujeres, cuando en realidad la mitad de las personas que trabajan en el ámbito sanitario lo son, según estableció un

relevamiento realizado por el Observatorio de Medios de la Universidad Nacional de Cuyo.

A la hora de analizar el contenido, a las pocas mujeres convocadas se les pedía opiniones de carácter personal, testimonial, pero no información científica o sanitaria, es decir que, en términos de legitimación y socialización de información y conocimiento como fuentes de información, las mujeres continúan siendo subestimadas, subalternizadas y silenciadas.

Según la misma investigación, el 70 por ciento de las notas escritas durante la pandemia fueron firmadas por varones, al igual que el 100 por ciento de los editoriales. Ni un solo pensamiento editorial estuvo en manos de las mujeres.

En los noticieros de la televisión abierta no se está mucho mejor. El 70,8% de los periodistas especializados son varones y la presencia de otras identidades de género es casi nula. En cuanto a los móviles, son realizados un 57% por varones, de acuerdo con la precisión establecida en el Monitoreo de noticias de canales abiertos de la Ciudad de Buenos Aires, realizado por la Defensoría del Público de Servicios de Comunicación Audiovisual, durante el año 2021.

La subrepresentación descripta, también alcanza al diseño de la conducción y dirección empresaria comunicacional, ya que las mujeres “son menos de un tercio en los altos cargos de dirección periodística”, sumado al “acceso moderado a todos los niveles jerárquicos de las redacciones y ausencia de mujeres entre las y los accionistas” (Chaher y Pedraza, 2018).

Las trabajadoras, en total, es decir en todas las áreas, también son menos que los varones: en promedio ascienden al 37%, y padecen desigualdad salarial, incluso a pesar de tener mayor nivel de formación, ya que el 61,5% de quienes egresan de carreras de comunicación o afines son mujeres.

Estas discriminaciones por cuestiones de género en los medios de comunicación son percibidas por las propias audiencias. En la Defensoría del Público, fundada para recibir los reclamos de las personas, a título individual o colectivo, cuando se vulnera el derecho humano a

la comunicación, durante el año 2022, el 58% de las presentaciones fueron por discriminaciones por razones de género.

Teniendo en cuenta ese dato, puede decirse que las audiencias rechazan la falta de mujeres en la conducción de programas, por lo menos en tres aspectos: la falta de paridad, al señalar que “hay discriminación de género porque son todos hombres” (Actuación 116/2021); el machismo, por la inclusión de varones “conocidos por transmitir mensajes de odio a las diversidades y de misoginia en particular” (Actuación 60/2021); y por los contenidos, porque son “sumamente machistas” (Actuación 116/2021), hechos que califican de “¡Terrible!” (Actuación 58/2020).

En las audiencias públicas que se realizan por todo el país, de manera sistemática desde 2013 esas voces se multiplican. Durante el año pasado y el anterior, se sumaron reclamos que señalan la necesidad de “paridad” en los medios de comunicación, para que redunde en “una mejor democracia” y se traduzca en una modificación en el otorgamiento de la publicidad oficial.

Es que en junio de 2021, en la Argentina, se sancionó la Ley de Equidad en la Representación de los Géneros en los Servicios de Comunicación, para lograr la inclusión de mujeres, a partir de distintas acciones, entre ellas, la redistribución de la pauta publicitaria, en función de la contratación de mujeres y diversidades.

El conflicto es que, a casi dos años de la sanción, aún no se reglamentó y, como consecuencia, se argumenta que no puede ponerse en marcha su efectivo cumplimiento. De manera reciente, se ha publicado el libro *Equidad de géneros en medios: desafíos de un nuevo paradigma comunicacional*, en el que participan esta autora y más de 20 mujeres de múltiples espacios, para amplificar las voces de reclamo ante las dilaciones gubernamentales.

### **Preguntas emancipatorias**

Como consecuencia de la asimetría descripta, urge transformar esta realidad de desigualdades estructurales y de representación de géneros, como parte de los conflictos persistentes en el periodismo y la comunicación en la era digital,



*La presencia de las mujeres en las noticias y el papel de las mujeres en las empresas mediáticas, como ejes centrales de la agenda de medios de comunicación y género, fueron debatidos en el foro “Una foto sobre la equidad en los medios”. Se realizó en octubre del 2022 en la Ciudad Autónoma de Buenos Aires (CABA), donde expertas de la Defensoría del Público de Argentina y CIMAC compartieron sus experiencias.*

en una sociedad atravesada por violencias físicas, psicológicas, sexual, patrimonial, mediática y simbólica (Ottaviano, 2021).

Un análisis pormenorizado en cuatro dimensiones, relacionadas entre sí, podría ofrecer un diagnóstico oportuno. Por un lado, se trata de reconocer cómo es la estructura de la “empresa” periodística y comunicacional, por otro lado, cuáles son las condiciones laborales de las trabajadoras; cómo son los contenidos y, por último, cuáles son los niveles de participación de la ciudadanía comunicacional, intercultural y diversa.

Todos estos ejes, además, pueden observarse interrelacionados en un escenario mayor en el que la centralidad de la escena la ocupe la comunicación como derecho humano, desplazando a la mercantilización, es decir, el objetivo de ganar dinero poniendo a la venta un bien social.

En ese orden de ideas, el camino hacia la despatriarcalización parece inescindible de la desmercantilización. La construcción de un nuevo paradigma, a partir de la consagración de la comunicación comprendida como derecho humano y las audiencias como sujetos plenos de derecho, requiere jerarquizar esta conceptualización jurídica, política, social y comunicacional.

Si la comunicación es un derecho humano,

el Estado tiene un rol de garante, impulsor activo de políticas públicas para la vivencia y pleno goce de ese derecho. Desde esa perspectiva puede comprenderse que toda comunicación es pública, luego podrá ser de gestión estatal, indígena, privada, con fines de lucro, universitaria, comunitaria, alternativa y popular.

La reconfiguración del paradigma analítico exige, además, crear pedagogías de la inclusión y la solidaridad, como parte integrante de un ideario emancipatorio, guiado por nuevas preguntas que delineen el camino interdisciplinario necesario para despatriarcalizar y desmercantilizar los servicios de comunicación gráficos, audiovisuales y digitales en las cuatro dimensiones señaladas (Ottaviano, 2022).

En la estructura directiva resulta fundamental indagar sobre la existencia de paridad en la integración del Directorio o del esquema corporativo para la toma de decisiones de lo que se conoce como la “empresa periodística”.

Preguntarse, además si existe un enfoque de género en el accionar, si se cuenta con procedimientos y un código de ética feministas para regir la labor. Si los procesos de selección de personal, ascensos y promociones siguen lineamientos o se incluyen cuestionarios diferentes para hombres, mujeres, y colectivo LGTTTBIQ+,

así como requisitos diferenciales para el ascenso. También si se realizan capacitaciones periódicas, jornadas de sensibilización, campañas de concientización endógenas y exógenas.

En la redacción se puede observar si hay paridad en todas las áreas, incluidas la periodística, tecnológicas, de distribución, administración y comercialización. A su vez, si hay paridad en los puestos de decisión, si se realizan asambleas o encuentros que promuevan la participación activa de quienes integran la “empresa” y si todas las personas ganan el mismo sueldo por igual tarea o a hay distinción por géneros.

Por otra parte, la estructura física debe concebir la infraestructura adecuada, desde baños y vestuarios, hasta lactarios, espacios de cuidado de primeras infancias, o medidas para acceder a ellos, así como permisos y licencias filiales, protocolos para casos de violencias contra las mujeres y el colectivo LGTTTBIQ+, con sus respectivas licencias, y si existen áreas de género, Defensoría de las Audiencias o alguna figura como Observatorios y Editora o Editor de Género.

En cuanto a los contenidos resulta ineludible clarificar si la línea editorial, las agendas, enfoques son con perspectiva de géneros, si hay paridad en las fuentes de información y opinión, si se consideran recomendaciones para las coberturas de violencias contra las mujeres y el colectivo LGTTTBIQ+ y si se usa lenguaje no sexista o lenguaje inclusivo. Se trata de transversalizar las perspectivas de géneros y de derechos humanos.

Sobre la ciudadanía comunicacional se recomienda considerar si hay espacios para que las audiencias hagan aportes y reclamos, se expresen y difundan sus miradas, si existe un Código de Ética que determine el compromiso establecido por la redacción con ellas, y mecanismos de aplicación y control, si hay políticas de rectificación, respuesta y reparación del daño ante la vulneración del derecho humano a la comunicación y ámbitos de capacitación y alfabetización comunicacional.

Para concluir, se propone que esta radiografía plena sobre cada una de las dimen-

siones y las intersecciones posibles contemple en qué campo se inscribe la emergencia de una ciudadanía comunicacional, con rasgos todavía presentes de colonialidad, eurocentrismo, comunicación concentrada y patriarcado, entramado aún con fuertes resistencias no sólo entre las audiencias sino entre periodistas y comunicadoras y comunicadores.

Desde esos caminos que reconocen exclusiones y ausencias, se puede promover la erradicación de las violencias por cuestiones de géneros, en encuentros constantes y activos con las audiencias como horizonte posible para el desarrollo de un periodismo responsable y democrático, con una comunicación inclusiva y la construcción colectiva de una ciudadanía comunicacional, actora decisiva de las democracias interculturales.

Esta mirada no es utópica. En la Radio y la Televisión pública de la Argentina se ha propuesto desde 2020 y hoy, casi cuatro años después se demuestra que es posible. Primero se creó la Dirección de Género y Diversidad, desde donde se articuló el Protocolo de Prevención e Intervención ante situaciones de violencia y acoso laboral y/o en razón de género.

Desde allí se concretaron capacitaciones obligatorias en género para todo el personal, se impulsó la incorporación de mujeres en espacios de toma de decisiones y en lugares donde nunca antes habían desarrollado su tarea profesional, por ejemplo, en la Dirección de Administración y Finanzas y en la Carpintería.

En la radio se alcanzó la paridad en las contrataciones artísticas, mientras que en el año 2019 había un 33,8% de mujeres, en 2020 se subió al 43,33% y en 2022 a un 48,61% y a un 1,74% de personas trans, por primera vez en la historia de los medios públicos.

También por primera vez se estableció un Código de Ética y Carta compromiso, de creación colectiva, así como se creó un Observatorio para darle cumplimiento, con integración de tres comisiones, una de las Autoridades, otra de trabajadoras y trabajadores y otra de las audiencias, que toman decisiones por unanimidad.

Allí se establece que la labor deberá ser

siempre “decolonial, despatriarcal y respetuosa de la diversidad” (Art.1); “se considerará como portadoras de información y opinión a mujeres y colectivo LGTTTBIQ+” (art.4) y “el lenguaje deberá ser correcto, preciso, incluyente y no sexista” (Art.5).

En definitiva, tanto en los medios públicos, como en los de gestión privada, con y sin fines de lucro, de gestión pública universitaria, escolar e indígena, el objetivo debe seguir siendo el mismo: que el techo de cristal se desvanezca, el suelo deje de ser tan pegajoso y el patriarcado ceda ante una cultura de la equidad, el respeto y la solidaridad, con justicia social, plena vivencia de los derechos humanos y verdadera soberanía comunicacional.

#### Nota

1. Ver <https://www.clacso.org/segun-la-oit-las-mujeres-ganan-un-17-menos-que-los-varones-por-hora-trabajada-en-america-latina-y-el-caribe/>

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Cynthia Ottaviano es Doctora en Comunicación (UNLP), Licenciada en Periodismo con Diploma de Honor (USAL), egresada de la Maestría en Periodismo de Investigación. Docente de grado y posgrado desde hace 20 años (UNLP-UNDAV-UNQ), Directora del posgrado Comunicación y Derechos Humanos (UNDAV). Periodista de gráfica, radio y televisión.

# Literacia mediática y defensorías de audiencias en México

Laura Martínez Aguila

*Las defensorías de las audiencias en México reciben comunicaciones de las audiencias a través de las cuales pueden identificar y procesar necesidades específicas enfocadas al diseño e implementación de herramientas de Alfabetización Mediática e Informacional (AMI) en español, Literacia Mediática en portugués.*

Las defensorías de audiencias en México, que comenzaron a existir desde 2007 en un modelo autorregulatorio, además de heterogéneo entre los medios públicos mexicanos (entonces permisionados), han fortalecido sus funciones junto a su institucionalidad a partir del marco regulatorio vigente hace 10 años gracias a la reforma constitucional en materia de telecomunicaciones y radiodifusión en 2013, con su respectiva Ley Federal de Telecomunicaciones y Radiodifusión (LFTR) 2014.

Dicha ley establece en sus artículos 259 y 261 la principal labor a desempeñar por parte de las personas defensoras de las audiencias en los distintos medios de comunicación. Cabe mencionar que estas funciones si bien son obligación por ley, no son limitantes al rol o incidencia para el trabajo de defensoras y defensores:

“El defensor de la audiencia será el responsable recibir, documentar, procesar y dar seguimiento a las observaciones, quejas, sugerencias, peticiones o señalamientos de las personas que

componen la audiencia [...] El defensor de la audiencia atenderá las reclamaciones, sugerencias y quejas de las audiencias sobre contenidos y programación, implementando mecanismos para que las audiencias con discapacidad tengan accesibilidad.”

### ¿Cuál es el contexto las defensorías de audiencias en México?

Las defensorías de audiencias en México, tras su reconocimiento en la LFTR de 2014 se transformaron en una obligación para todos los concesionarios de la radiodifusión como resultado de las modificaciones hechas al artículo 6° constitucional en 2013, el cual consagra el derecho humano a la información para ser garantizado por el Estado y donde los derechos de las audiencias contribuyen a la progresividad de este derecho humano en su dimensión colectiva, identificando a las audiencias como todas las personas receptoras y consumidoras de contenidos audiovisuales; estos derechos de las audiencias al igual que sus defensorías se acompañan con la creación de un órgano autónomo regulador en la materia: el Instituto Federal de Telecomunicaciones (IFT).

De 2014 hasta 2019, según el Registro Público de Concesiones (RPC) contaba con una lista de 1,321 registros de defensorías de las audiencias en México, para agosto de 2021 la lista era de 1,913, datos obtenidos la investigadora y doctoranda Rose Santana. Sin embargo, la propia investigadora señala que, de acuerdo con sus fuentes consultadas, los especialistas Beatriz Solís y Alfredo Díaz, los resultados a tales búsquedas corresponden a unidades de registro por concesionario o frecuencia, no propiamente de personas defensoras de audiencias actualmente en activo, atendiendo a televidentes y radioescuchas.

Es decir, en términos cuantitativos existe un sobrerregistro poco confiable, desactualizado, acerca de la cantidad de defensorías desempeñando funciones. Informaciones de análisis cualitativo que contrastan con otra información importante: la cantidad de concesionarios ha-

Tabla 2. Estaciones de radiodifusión a nivel nacional, por servicio y tipo de uso.

Servicio	Estaciones Concesionadas	Tipo de uso				
		Comercial	Pública	Social	Social Comunitaria	Social Indígena
AM	387	278	62	39	5	3
FM	1,700	1,088	281	216	99	16
TDT	841	536	274	29	2	0
Total:	2,928	1,902	617	284	106	19

Fuente: *El estudio de Cobertura de los Servicios de Radiodifusión en México, 2022 (IFT)*

El Instituto reportó en agosto de 2022 que para 2021 el espectro de la radiodifusión, con el que contempla los siguientes tres rubros: estaciones de radio de Amplitud Modulada (AM), Frecuencia Modulada (FM) y Televisión Digital Terrestre (TDT) se distribuía de la siguiente manera para AM, FM y TDT: 1,902 concesiones de uso comercial; 617 concesiones de uso público; 284 concesiones de uso social; 106 de uso social comunitaria y 19 de uso social indígena.

Las defensorías de audiencias actualmente funcionan dentro de un modelo corregulatorio en el país, donde las audiencias son sujetos de derecho. Un principio que la Asociación Mexicana de Defensorías de Audiencias (AMDA) ha hecho parte de sus principios fundacionales desde 2014, para convocar a defensoras y defensores en activo a integrarse y trabajar en colectivo por los derechos de las audiencias.

Ante ese escenario, las defensorías de audiencias de los principales medios públicos federales mexicanos: Canal Once, Canal 22, Canal 14 del Sistema Público de Radiodifusión del Estado Mexicano (SPREM), Radio Educación (RE) e Instituto Mexicano de la Radio (IMER) continúan siendo una pauta para el conocimiento, al igual que el rastreo de sus acciones, publicación de informes de trabajo y, especialmente, el conocimiento del perfil de un segmento de las audiencias, sean televidentes o radioescuchas.

En dichos informes, con temporalidades variadas entre reportes semestrales o anuales, las defensorías sistematizan el registro de los mensajes recibidos por parte de radioescuchas o

televidentes del medio de comunicación al cual se encuentran adscritas. Los informes proveen datos, por ejemplo: cuántos mensajes recibieron en ese periodo, el género de las audiencias, a veces el rango de edad, la localidad o entidad del país desde dónde se comunican y la vía de contacto.

El dato más relevante de estas sistematizaciones radica en saber la principal razón por la cual un radioescucha recurre a la defensoría para ejercer los derechos que tienen consagrados desde 2014 en la LFTR en sus artículos 256 y 258. Con estos insumos de información las defensorías tienen la capacidad de conocer rubros específicos de acción e implementación de estrategias para fomentar la Alfabetización Mediática e Informativa (AMI), también llamada Literacia Mediática en portugués.

### **¿Cómo puede abordarse la Literacia Mediática en las defensorías de las audiencias?**

Los derechos de las audiencias, como se mencionó anteriormente, refuerzan el principio de progresividad del derecho humano de acceso a la información y libertad de expresión. La legislación mexicana es muy detallada en ese aspecto en los artículos 223, 226 de la LFTR, específicamente en el artículo 256, donde inicia el capítulo dedicado a los derechos de las audiencias; entre ellos:

“los concesionarios deben garantizar que sus audiencias reciban contenidos que reflejen la pluralidad social, política, ideológica, cultural, lingüística del país; lo mismo para el diseño de la programación, esta debe incluir diferentes géneros que respondan a la expresión de la diversidad y la pluralidad de ideas y opiniones; diferenciar entre publicidad y propaganda respecto del contenido que se presenta [...] el respeto a los derechos humanos, la igualdad de género y el interés superior de la niñez.”

Todos estos derechos de las audiencias representan principios abstractos para que televidentes y radioescuchas los identifiquen con claridad en sus consumos cotidianos en medios de

comunicación.

De hecho, una de las principales confusiones persistente de manera transversal entre las audiencias de los medios públicos federales, documentada por las defensorías, es recibir comunicaciones de las audiencias, donde el radioescucha sustenta su reclamo acerca de comentarios o contenidos transmitidos al aire “en un medio del gobierno”; es decir, un poco o nula distinción entre la comunicación pública de la gubernamental.

Si se piensa en el rol mediador que desempeñan las defensorías, conjugado con el insumo de información a su disposición a partir de los mensajes recibidos por las audiencias y se consideran los criterios establecidos por la UNESCO en alianza con la DW Akademie: fomentar el entendimiento del funcionamiento de los medios de comunicación y sus responsabilidades; empoderando así a las personas a que sepan reclamar derechos; las defensorías de las audiencias juegan un papel estratégico en el desarrollo de tales habilidades AMI o de literacia; en el caso mexicano el desafío radica en difundir, fortalecer y fomentar derechos presentes en una legislación de radiodifusión.

### **Audiencias activas en calidad ciudadana: objetivo central de la Literacia Mediática**

Algunas de las defensorías de las audiencias de los medios públicos federales han desarrollado distintas acciones con el propósito de familiarizar a las audiencias de su medio con los derechos que tienen.

La Defensoría de Audiencias en Radio Educación realizó una serie radiofónica titulada: *Introducción a los derechos de las audiencias y sus defensorías en México*, transmitida de septiembre a diciembre de 2020, con programas exclusivamente dedicados a entrevistar a especialistas de la comunicación en México, académicos, investigadores, activistas del derecho a la comunicación antiguos y actuales defensores de audiencias. Su objetivo fue la difusión, comprensión, análisis, discusión y exigencia de los derechos de las audiencias.

Los capítulos de la serie radiofónica se con-

virtieron en capítulos de libro, para difundirse como publicación impresa y digital, editada por la Comisión Nacional de Derechos Humanos (CNDH) en colaboración con la Cátedra Unesco en Comunicación y Sociedad, entre otras organizaciones.

En el caso del Instituto Mexicano de la Radio, la Defensoría de Audiencias IMER ha implementado cinco ediciones del taller online *¿Cómo leer a los medios?* entre 2021 y 2022 diseñado en puntos específicos para la formación de audiencias críticas, a partir del trabajo con ejemplos de contenidos en medios donde puedan vulnerarse sus derechos; de la mano con pláticas con especialistas de América Latina en las sesiones.

El taller se ha compuesto en general de cuatro ejes emanados de necesidades comunicativas de las audiencias detectadas entre los mensajes procesados por la defensoría: diferenciar a la radio pública de un medio gubernamental; sensibilizar a las audiencias en perspectiva de género para prevenir la reproducción de violencia machista en sus comunicaciones contra mujeres colaboradoras de la radio; identificar formas de

discriminación naturalizadas y finalmente resaltar la importancia de su participación para mejorar la labor ética del IMER, mediante la elaboración de recomendaciones.

Entre las cinco ediciones del taller se han emitido 65 constancias de participación para asistentes que completaran el mínimo de asistencia en las sesiones, de acuerdo con el informe anual de la defensoría del IMER en 2022. En ese mismo informe se relata que el 69% de las personas participantes cuentan con licenciatura y un 19% con maestría, situando así la formación en derechos de las audiencias como un tema de especialización en comunicación desde la perspectiva de los derechos humanos.

En ese sentido, la AMDA y sus integrantes parten del principio que las audiencias son ciudadanía, razón por la cual poseen el derecho a reclamar derechos y hacerlos valer. Dos aspectos que constituyen pilares de la participación ciudadana, resaltando así el derecho humano a la información como derecho llave para una vida en democracia.

Pensar en la Literacia Mediática desde las defensorías de las audiencias, tal como lo dem-

Sesiones	Tema	Especialistas
1. Medios públicos no son medios de gobierno	Fortalecer la distinción entre comunicación pública de la gubernamental	Patricia Ortega Ramírez, Universidad Autónoma Metropolitana – Unidad Xochimilco
2. Hablemos de discriminación	Distinguir los tipos de discriminación, según la normatividad existente en México	Laura Martínez Águila, IMER
3. ¿Cómo identificar la violencia de género y violencia contra mujeres y niñas?	Reconocer formas de violencia machista naturalizadas y reproducidas en los medios de comunicación	Rocío Alorda, Colegio de Periodistas de Chile
4. En la libertad de expresión, ¿todo se vale? Frenemos el discurso de odio	Reflexionar ¿en qué consiste el discurso de odio? Así como los principales límites a la libertad de expresión en el marco internacional de DDHH.	Horacio Lutzky, Defensoría del Público de Medios Audiovisuales de la Argentina

Fuente: elaboración propia.



uestran los ejemplos aquí citados, requiere que las personas defensoras cuenten además de la institucionalización estipulada en la regulación, con el apoyo de las estructuras internas de dirección y toma de decisiones colegiadas en sus medios de comunicación, sean Mesas Editoriales, Consejos de Programación, al igual que el trabajo conjunto con los Consejos Ciudadanos, con el fin de fomentar la participación ciudadana desde las necesidades comunicativas de televidentes y radioescuchas. ■

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Laura Martínez Aguila, licenciada y maestra en Comunicación por la Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México (UNAM). Actualmente defensora de las audiencias en el Instituto Mexicano de la Radio (IMER). Co-autora del capítulo sobre México en el *Global Handbook of Media Accountability* y autora del capítulo “El camino hacia la comunicación pública”, dedicado a la Dra. Patricia Ortega Ramírez en el libro *Mujeres de la Comunicación en México*. Coordinadora del Comité de Investigación en la Asociación Mexicana de Defensorías de Audiencias (AMDA).

# Alfabetización y paz en Colombia ¿Cómo entender la Comisión de la Verdad?

Mario Mantilla

*El 28 de junio de 2022 la Comisión para el Esclarecimiento de la Verdad, la Convivencia y la No Repetición, culminó el trabajo realizado durante 4 años para determinar los patrones y causas explicativas del conflicto armado interno de Colombia desde 1958 hasta 2016. La Comisión de la Verdad es una entidad de carácter temporal y extrajudicial que hace parte del Sistema Integral de Verdad, Justicia, Reparación y No Repetición – SIVJRNR, surgido en el Acuerdo de la Paz entre el Estado colombiano y las Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia FARC–EP, firmado en el año 2016.*

Es se día, en un acto oficial en el teatro Jorge Eliecer Gaitán de la ciudad de Bogotá, transmitido por los canales de televisión y plataformas digitales, el Sacerdote jesuita Francisco de Roux, presidente de la Comisión de la Verdad entregó el Informe Final al gobierno nacional y a la sociedad en general.

“Traemos una palabra que viene de escuchar y sentir a las víctimas en gran parte del territorio y en el exilio; de oír a quienes luchan por mantener la memoria y resistir al negacionismo, y a quienes han aceptado responsabilidades éticas, políticas y penales. Un mensaje de la verdad para detener la tragedia intolerable de un



conflicto en el que el ochenta por ciento de las víctimas han sido civiles no combatientes y en el que menos del dos por ciento de las muertes ha sido en combates.” Apartes del discurso de Francisco de Roux

La idea es que, a partir de esta investigación y diálogo plural, el país comience una era de reconciliación y respeto en medio de las diferencias, asegurando la búsqueda de cambios políticos y sociales que permitan vivir en armonía.

Sin embargo, acceder a toda la información no es tarea fácil, pues el trabajo está consignado en 11 tomos y 24 libros. Estos incluyen entrevistas individuales y colectivas a cerca de 15 mil actores del conflicto entre víctimas y victimarios realizadas tanto en el país como fuera de él. Así mismo, hay análisis de los diferentes tipos de violencia registrados en esos años y líneas de tiempo para comprender esta tragedia considerada una de las de mayor duración en la historia moderna.

Karim Ganen Maloof, Coordinador Editorial de la Comisión de la Verdad, nos comentó que necesitaron un equipo editorial igual de voluminoso, con escritores, editores, correctores, personas que hicieran verificación de datos y de

cifras “entonces fue una labor gigantesca para llevar al mayor refinamiento esos textos en todo sentido, y así lograr el cometido de la Comisión.”

### **Estrategia nacional de comunicaciones**

Para entender la magnitud de la tarea hay que recordar que se escucharon aproximadamente a 30.000 personas, entre campesinos, comunidades étnicas, mujeres, adultos mayores, niños, niñas, adolescentes, comunidad LGBTIQ+, expresidentes, empresarios y miembros de la Fuerza Pública.

Jazmín Rodríguez, magister en ciencia política y coordinadora de comunicaciones territoriales de la Comisión de la Verdad nos contó que el trabajo que hicieron estaba enlazado con la labor de los investigadores, profesionales en diálogo social responsables del acercamiento a las personas afectadas y los victimarios:

“Entonces el trabajo de Comunicaciones en las regiones consistía en recoger todo esto y empezar a contar a los territorios esos hallazgos, esos factores de persistencia y a su vez darle a conocer al país lo que estaba sucediendo en los territorios, teniendo como prioridad las vícti-

mas y por supuesto esos reconocimientos de verdad por parte de los responsables.”

Pensando entonces en la mejor manera de dar a conocer el proceso de escucha, análisis y posterior informe a la sociedad, se creó una apuesta de comunicación que dimensionara la magnitud de la tragedia y la volviera parte de una conversación pública. Ésta incluía difusión, sensibilización y movilización social a través de la pedagogía, con una participación ciudadana pluralista y equilibrada.

No obstante, la Estrategia Nacional de Comunicaciones se encontró de frente con la pandemia por la Covid-19. Gran parte del trabajo en los años 2020 y 2021 se realizó redoblando esfuerzos logísticos en las puestas en marcha de los eventos públicos, el despliegue territorial, los productos de comunicación masiva, los atemporales, la estrategia digital y el relacionamiento con medios grandes, medianos y pequeños.

Es así como pudimos ver antes del Informe Final producciones editoriales propias de la Comisión como Futuro en Tránsito, además de novelas gráficas y cómics animados con relatos de quienes sobrevivieron el conflicto.

Las Campañas Tengo derecho, El valor de saber y Hay Futuro si hay verdad, 20 cortos que relatan el proceso, la serie de entrevistas “Hablemos de verdad”, especiales periodísticos como Comisiones de la verdad: paso clave hacia la reconciliación y Especial La Comisión de la Verdad de Colombia .

Las emisoras comunitarias y universitarias abrieron espacios para escuchar cómo iba el proceso de escucha, análisis y sistematización de las historias. De manera permanente circularon los Boletines de prensa: El Newsletter y “De verdad verdá”.

Se contactaron figuras públicas y tomadores de decisión para ayudar a la conversación mediática. La estrategia digital se reforzó buscando desafiar los públicos convencionales e incentivar la reflexión entre los jóvenes asiduos a las redes sociales. Así mismo, se hicieron 2 transmisiones audiovisuales por año para la Rendición

de cuentas semestral.

Se creó un programa para la televisión nacional llamado [Frente al Espejo](#) presentado por el destacado actor Santiago Alarcón. Con un lenguaje coloquial Alarcón reflexionaba desde lo que piensa y siente el ciudadano del común para luego dar paso directamente a los comisionados o profesionales de la Comisión.

Y todo confluía en la página web, la cual sirvió como repositorio con más de 2000 historias contando el proceso de esclarecimiento. También se realizaron Especiales multimedia que dieron cuenta de los procesos misionales, de diálogo social y no repetición. [web.comisiondelaverdad.co](http://web.comisiondelaverdad.co)

El reto era atraer y conmovir audiencias sin banalizar las historias, transgrediendo la solemnidad en redes sociales. Comentaron varios miembros del grupo de comunicaciones en la página [archivo.comisiondelaverdad.co](http://archivo.comisiondelaverdad.co)

En el capítulo 42 del programa Frente al espejo, el profesor de la Universidad Libre de Cúcuta, Kenny Sanguino afirmó que es importante consolidar los años de investigación en el Informe Final, y dejó una pregunta que nos permite avanzar en este artículo sobre alfabetización mediática y proceso de paz:

“¿Cómo hacemos para que la sociedad sienta que ese informe les está hablando sobre los mismos problemas que ellos vivieron y que les será útil para el siguiente paso que pretende una sociedad en transformación de paz?”

### **El legado**

“El Informe Final” se entregó en físico al gobierno, a las cortes de justicia, al archivo general de la nación y a la comunidad en general en la Plataforma [Digital de la Comisión de la Verdad](#). Hay que tener en cuenta que este informe no es un relato único sobre el conflicto, sino un conjunto de ellos, una recopilación de historias y análisis de las causas de las violencias sufridas en 6 décadas en Colombia por causas políticas (con las guerrillas), el paramilitarismo y el narcotráfico entre otras, las cuales derivan en un documento escrito, pero también en múltiples productos comunica-

tivos en diferentes soportes.

Este legado, también deja una serie de activaciones académicas, culturales y artísticas, el archivo del esclarecimiento y el Comité de Seguimiento y Monitoreo que velará durante siete años para que se hagan efectivas las recomendaciones del Informe Final.

### **Todo en la plataforma digital**

La Plataforma Digital, es una transmedia web de libre acceso donde se encuentra el proceso de la Comisión, los testimonios, el material del esclarecimiento, las activaciones académicas, culturales, artísticas y el archivo del esclarecimiento, disponibles en diversos formatos. [www.comisiondelaverdad.co](http://www.comisiondelaverdad.co)

El Informe Final de la Comisión está incluido en esta plataforma como un libro electrónico descargable para que pueda ser llevado a zonas rurales y urbanas sin internet. Así mismo, presenta diversas narrativas expandidas que abordan de forma ilustrada los contenidos de los capítulos, las publicaciones, registros de las experiencias vividas, herramientas pedagógicas y producciones artísticas que evidencian los aprendizajes.

La mayoría de los productos de esta página son inclusivos, es decir están adaptados para que puedan ser consultados por población con algún grado de discapacidad visual y sonora. Además, la plataforma garantiza que el 35% de contenidos clasificados como fundamentales, sean traducidos a lenguas indígenas y raizales.

Olga Lucía Lozano, directora de la Plataforma Digital, afirma que esta apuesta de la Comisión de la Verdad: “es una invitación al diálogo para entender, desde un punto de vista más humano y una postura más emocional, lo que nos sucedió en este conflicto”.

La Plataforma Digital está dividida por pestañas o secciones que se deslizan de izquierda a derecha:

Hay futuro si hay verdad (Volúmenes del Informe Final) - Analítica de datos (información y recursos) - Convocatoria a la paz grande

(Declaración de la Comisión) - Hallazgos y recomendaciones (Síntesis del conflicto) - No Matarás (Relato histórico) - Hasta la guerra tiene límites (Violaciones de derechos humanos) - Colombia adentro (relatos territoriales) - Impactos, afrontamientos y resistencias (Sufrir la guerra y rehacer la vida) - Sonido y memoria (Narrativa sonora Testimonial) - Pueblos étnicos - Mujeres y personas LGBTIQ+ (Vidas en re-existencia) - Niños, niñas y adolescentes (No es un mal menor) Exilio - Diálogo social - Pedagogía - Activaciones artísticas y culturales - Cómo lo hicimos - A viva voz - Con quién lo hicimos - Lo que sigue - Archivo del esclarecimiento de la verdad y Prensa.

### **Pedagogía**

Para acceder a estos contenidos existen un conjunto de recursos didácticos, dispositivos pedagógicos y artísticos que buscan posicionar La Verdad en Colombia. Hay una sección llamada Pedagogía para navegar la Plataforma digital la cual se despliega en otra pestaña o se puede descargar [www.comisiondelaverdad.co/pedagogia](http://www.comisiondelaverdad.co/pedagogia)

Va dirigida a docentes, líderes, colectivos y ciudadanos en general para que planeen escenarios que contribuyan a la apropiación del Legado de la Comisión de la Verdad.

Allí el enfermero del ejército Raúl Estupiñán herido por una mina, nos guía en el recorrido virtual. Él pregunta si necesitamos saber sobre determinado tema y ofrece el link para hacerlo. Recuerda que en todas las secciones o componentes, hay una botonera que indica el contenido adicional como: guías pedagógicas, acceso a los anexos y/o casos, y contenido audiovisual complementario, entre otros.

En la pestaña Vidas en re-existencia se encuentra una reseña de su vida llamada El hombre que sana donde nos cuentan que era enfermero del Ejército cuando fue víctima de minas anti-persona. Tras dejar la institución, inició un proceso de reconciliación a través del teatro y el cine.

“Yo tengo una amiga excombatiente a la que le digo que si ella y yo nos hubiéramos encontrado antes, hace unos años, nos habríamos



matado ¿Cuántas oportunidades perdimos de conocer otras personas porque eran enemigos que nos habían impuesto?”, dice el ahora guía en la reseña.

En la segunda parte es el colibrí Elco quien nos hace el recorrido para que no nos perdamos y al final Viviana una lideresa quien fue testigo de los procesos de reclutamiento de las guerrillas, ofrece pautas básicas para realizar un taller pedagógico con los recursos que ofrece la plataforma digital de la Comisión.

Esta estrategia fue creada a partir de una noción de textualidad amplia, que vincula formatos audiovisuales, sonoros, textuales, fotográficos, interactivos, entre otros, de tal manera que se pueda acercarse mediante una pluridimensionalidad expresiva, que tiene como líneas guía, frases destacadas en cada sección.

“La transmedia pretende llevar el mensaje de la Comisión a diferentes públicos especialmente jóvenes en lenguajes amigables, enfocados en historias y relatos de las mismas víctimas y responsables. Tiene bibliotecas sonoras de las 10 macro territoriales en las que se dividió el país, libros, documentos, videos, novelas gráficas y no tiene ningún costo,” nos precisa la comunicadora Jazmín Rodríguez.

Uno de los objetivos de la Comisión de la Verdad es que los hallazgos y recomendaciones contribuyan a la dignificación de las víctimas y que además tengan un impacto concreto en las

políticas públicas y en la sociedad. De nada sirve si no se divulga o se queda guardado en un archivo del estado.

“Yo creo que el informe de la Comisión es muy importante para la formación cívica o ciudadana de la población colombiana, es decir, que en los colegios y en las universidades prácticamente se vuelva una asignatura obligatoria, conocer la esencia de este informe, que haya un conocimiento profundo de la declaración final, de los hallazgos y las recomendaciones y luego que se pueda ver según los intereses de los estudiantes y los profesores qué tomos de ese informe se enfatizan,” comenta Rodrigo Uprimny consejero Asesor de la Comisión de la Verdad.

Para ello existe un Comité de Seguimiento, monitoreo y vigilancia, una Red de Aliados, el Sistema integral para la paz, la Exposición en el Museo Nacional de la Memoria de Colombia y el Archivo Comisión de la Verdad que es la entidad depositaria. Pero de nada sirve si la población no se apropia de la experiencia que nos ha tocado vivir como colombianos y se concientiza que independiente de las posturas políticas de izquierdas o derechas lo que realmente importa es la convivencia pacífica.

“El ejercicio de réplica que se hace en los territorios es gracias a esta herramienta multimedia y me atrevo a decir que es la única Comisión a nivel mundial que tiene este componente transmedia, con material audiovisual y testimonial de

quienes vivieron el conflicto armado,” nos relata Fabián Josué Meridiano, Analista de la Comisión De La Verdad encargado de los diálogos con población Lgbtiq+.

Un ejercicio de réplica con la red de aliados son las lecturas ritualizadas de uno de esos capítulos que hace parte del informe final y recuerda Fabian que los aliados se vienen comprometiendo con obras de teatro, danza, diálogos y los jóvenes con la utilización del arte y la cultura para contar en las agendas públicas que esto no se repita.

La comunicadora Jazmín Rodríguez agrega que “La verdad repara, transforma y ayuda a construir escenarios de paz.” Y Alejandro Ramírez, Analista Líder De La Comisión De La Verdad En La Macro territorial Magdalena Medio Colombiano, concuerda con Jazmín en que “la escucha es sanadora porque incluso para algunos fue la primera vez que contaban su historia, fue una catarsis colectiva.”

José Isidro Gómez, Analista transcriptor Comisión de la verdad: “Creo que no había dimensionado el terror de lo que ha pasado en el territorio y entenderlo me permite a mí cambiar mi relación con los otros.”

Finalmente, Francisco de Roux presidente de la Comisión de la Verdad en el Capítulo 42 del programa Frente al espejo, titulado Los infaltables para la paz grande concluye con una reflexión: “Hay que lograr la reconciliación entre los colombianos, tenemos que deponer los odios, tenemos que aceptar la maravilla de pensar distinto, tenemos una riqueza cultural extraordinaria de muchas expresiones simbólicas distintas y que parte de la maravilla de Colombia es la diferencia.”

La red de aliados está conformada por 3.400 instituciones, el comité de vigilancia tiene vigencia por 7 años y la promesa de Paz de por vida. ■

Mario Mantilla Barajas es comunicador audiovisual y defensor de audiencias en Colombia.

# Digitality and people at the margin: Tasks and challenges of civil society and faith communities in Asia

Peter Singh

*Digitality is an “ontology of the age”, an epistemic reality involving networked, automated, interactive, databased hypertexts that raise fascinating and profound ontological, existential and experiential questions. Humanity exists online today and digitality changes their way of understanding and thinking about reality.*

Digitality is changing not just entertainment and leisure pursuits and time and space but, potentially, all spheres of society, such as the digitisation of social life, economic transactions, cultural transmission, political manipulation and religious exercises. Alvin Toffler’s prophecy in the 1970s on the emergence of the third wave has become a reality today. We come across the existing pattern of capital accumulation – a transformation in terms of the emergence of a new social era, that of a digital society.

The combined forces of multinational corporations and political interests succeeded in the systematic introduction of these digital platforms from web television and personal computers to robotics and data banks to and, particularly, laying an integrated national electronic grid that

altered social life in almost all aspects. Commoditized entertainment and attendant services have been pumped into individual households in a metered flow. Digital technologies have proliferated in homes to mediate the work of consumption and reproduction to facilitate the increasingly demanding and complex experience of everyday living.

These technologies influence many people and for them daily existence has become sufficiently complex, costly, and labour intensive so that some machine-assistance is not only feasible but necessary. Through digitality, capital permeates the very cracks and pores of social life.

### **Digitality – a reality**

Digitality has become an epistemic challenge today. Society is undergoing profound transformation due to the increasing adoption and effectiveness and reach of digital applications. In particular, the application of Artificial Intelligence is playing a huge part in everyday life (AI pastors, AI teachers, AI judges and AI counselors). The adoption grew from 4% to 15% during 2018-2019, according to Gartner. AI is playing a huge part in our everyday lives in health, wellness and warfare; however, there is a sore lack of understanding of what AI really is, how it shapes our future and why is it likely to alter human life. Media exaggerate or create further confusion, fuelling sci-fi-inspired imaginations of computers smarter than human beings. This is one side of the reality.

The other side of digitality is the reality of the digital divide. A number of prominent radical sociologists have been trying to offer their own critical understanding of a society that is digitalised. One important person is Manuel Castells who, by taking a political economy approach, has boldly gone where no critical sociologist has gone before, to tell us that, it actually is a globalised network society. His three-volume trilogy on the Information Age: Volume I: The Rise of the Network Society; Volume II: The Power of Identity, and Volume III: End of Millennium formulates a systematic theory of the

information society and critically examines the social economic dynamics of information age.

Another important contribution has been made by Brian. D. Loader who focused on the emergence of new information and communications technologies, such as the Internet, and the social, political and economic actors shaping their development, and their implications for social, economic, political and cultural change. His edited book *The Cyberspace Divide: Equality, Agency and Policy in the Information Society* critically considers the complex relationship between technological change, its effect upon social divisions, its consequences for social action and the emerging strategies for social inclusion in the Information Age.

In the same line, Pippa Norris' *The Digital Divide: Civic Engagement, Information Poverty & the Internet Worldwide* questions the use of "the divide" as shorthand, suggesting that there are at least three major divides: a global divide between the developed and undeveloped worlds; a social divide between the information rich and the information poor; and a democratic divide between those who do and those who do not use the new technologies to further political participation.

There is a similar analysis in Mark Warschauer's *Technology and Social Inclusion: Rethinking the Digital Divide*.

### **Digitality in Asia**

Asia boasts many of the world's top IT companies, tech entrepreneurs and digital start-ups. Yet, it is also home to nearly 50% of Asia's population, people who do not have access to the Internet. Many countries in Asia simply lack the routers, fibre optic links and servers needed to expand access. Few public Wi-Fi spots exist, and broadband connections with faster speeds require infrastructure that is rarely found in urban low-income areas, much less rural ones. Mobile Internet connections are not much better. During the lockdown due to Covid-19, studies and experiences point out that 50 to 70% of theology students are connected with online classes and

only 20% of the school students have access to online education. The rest are denied attending online classes.

Conditions of network connectivity develop conflict over access, capability, ability and distribution. These contradictions between a virtual life “on-line” and real life “off-line” must be a central concern for any analysis of how the basic conditions of access, capability and distribution of digitality affect our communities. Access to information technology is also a difficult question to be answered. Access does not mean that people should be provided with a few computers. In poor countries, access means availability for their daily needs within a reasonable distance, whereas in the rich nations it is owning a computer with all configurations. In this sense, in the poor countries, access does not apply only to individuals, but also to communities.

Exclusion reduces the capacity of individuals to contribute to and benefit from society, the economy and from information technology. Exclusion is a complex phenomenon involving many causes. We need to clarify exclusion and inequality. Exclusion is a condition of people who are at the bottom of a socio-economic distribution; inequality is a phenomenon where distribution is uneven. Unfortunately, the impact of exclusion is being left to market forces to mould and then control. Market forces create wants among the affluent in any society and the economically impoverished are simply made to adjust their wants downward to cope with new conditions.

In this way, social divisions and distinctions have remained largely untouched by information and communication technologies. They owe their existence to the desires of the rich. Thus, the digital divide is a deepening of existing forms of exclusion. As yet, digitality has failed to touch the lives of the average citizen in the rural areas. “Cybertouts and infoprophets” from Alvin Toffler to Nicholas Negroponte, Howard Rheingold to Bill Gates have promised a brave new world of equality and empowerment. But the reality is different. People are already divided on the basis of income, race/caste, education, age group, gender

and ethnicity. We consider them as people at the margins.

### **The new “margin”**

The margin has been constructed socially by several factors. Gender is a social construct in which women belonging to lower classes, lower castes, illiterate, and the poorest regions experience different levels of marginalization. The stigmatization of disability resulted in the social and economic marginalization of generations with disabilities. Structural marginalisation of Dalits suggests that they are in a state of oppression, social disability and are helpless and poor. Marginalization based on ethnicity, the Scheduled Tribes and the Scheduled Castes produces structural discrimination within Indian society. The elderly, due to an increased incidence of illness and disability but also due to their economic dependency upon other family members experience marginality. Economic dependence has an impact on their access to food, clothing, and healthcare. Children mortality and morbidity among children are caused by poverty, their sex and caste positions are determined by the society, girl child faces discrimination and differential access to nutritious food and gender-based violence. Sexual minorities such as LGBTQ communities experience exclusion. More importantly those digitally divided are those who are denied access to digital technology, capability in the use of technology and equal distribution. They are the margin.

### **The power of the “margin”**

Bell Hooks in her article “[Choosing the Margin as a Space of Radical Openness](#)”, suggests an alternative way of thinking about the margin. For Hooks, the margin is a “space of radical openness ... a profound edge”. It is in this space, she writes, “one can say no to the colonizer, no to the downpressor.” It is a “position and place of resistance ... for oppressed, exploited, and colonized people.” Seen in this way, the margin is not a place one wishes “to give up or surrender as part of moving into the center-but rather ... a site one stays in,



clings to even, because it nourishes one's capacity to resist. It offers to one the possibility of radical perspective from which to see and create, to imagine alternatives, new worlds."

Lagana stated, "margin" refers to the excess of power that people possess. McClusky views that margin is the ratio of load to power in one's life. For him margin represents the residual power available to participate in personal and professional development activities like learning. It is contrasted with the "centre," a place of hierarchy, of race, gender, and class domination, the source of oppression, definition and limitation. Marginality can be described as a state of being, a site of intense energy and a space of interaction and mobility, and at the same time a site of repression and resistance. Margin can be a place for intellectual production, possibilities, resistance and creativity. Civil society and faith communities are not at the receiving end, not the objects of digitality. Rather, they should become the subjects of digitality.

### **Tasks and challenges in Asia**

Civil society and faith communities must first reaffirm the power of solidarity, and then learn from that enormous reservoir of as-yet uncodified action which is constituted by ordinary people's everyday struggles to meet their own needs. Perhaps the starting point is finding the following ways of acting as if we might be able to build a new world.

### **Decolonise digitality**

This involves dismantling the power relations and conceptions of knowledge. Knowledge is being centralised. For this process digitality itself offers a space for decolonial activism i.e. constructing support for decolonising strategies online. Digitality still holds the scars of colonialism and therefore digitality has a scope for decolonisation of its own.

### **Decentralise digitality**

Digitality supports centralization in creating

structures. Centralization is a tendency of human and technical systems as a level of common authority. Digitality has created value through supporting centralization in areas where it is required to exist. Even in decentralized systems there is a place for centralized authority. Digitality should not exert absolute control over others, rather decentralized authority is often accompanied by decentralized responsibility and accountability.

### **Democratise digitality**

Democratization of technology refers to the process by which access to technology rapidly continues to become more accessible to more people. Democratic governments and civil society and digital industries urgently need to devise and implement rules and defend human rights online. New technologies and improved user experiences have empowered those outside of the technical industry to access and use technological products and services.

### **Development through digitality – bridging the digital divide**

Digital technologies are at the forefront of development and provide a unique opportunity for countries to accelerate economic growth and connect citizens to services and jobs. Digital technologies can also transform markets and economic opportunities. Digitalization of public sector operations and services, together with development of digital industries and jobs helps drive socio-economic development by closing the digital divide in Asia. Fostering digital inclusion is of paramount importance.

### **Digital theology**

Where is God and God's praxis in digitality? Jeff Zaleski's book, *The Soul of Cyberspace* asks does digitality essentially challenge the religions? He finds that the bodily presence of the believer is essential. God is in the connectedness, the spiritual basis of the universe is understood as creative events unfolding in time and the creative process forms the soul of cyberspace. Jenifer Cob in her

## Fribourg (Switzerland) 2023

The Ecumenical Jury, appointed by INTERFILM and SIGNIS, at the 37th Festival international du Films de Fribourg (March 17-26, 2023) awarded its Prize of CHF 5.000, donated by the Church Aid Organisations in Switzerland “Lenten Offering” and “HEKS/Brot für alle”, to the film *Abang Adik* (Malaysia, 2023) directed by Jin Ong.

*Motivation:* Two young sans-papiers try to survive in a large Malaysian city. The older, deaf-mute Abang, protects and feeds the younger Adi, who is always on the edge of illegality. We are impressed by the light-footed, fluid narration, the inspiring acting, the images full of warmth, the skillful use of sound and music: a flawless work, completely rounded.

The film is a plea for justice and human dignity, and it shows, in a universal way, strong solidarity among the marginalised of society. Their tragic life situation is illuminated by love and tenderness.

Members of the 2023 Jury: Philippe Cabrol (France), Stefan Haupt (Suisse) President, Bernadette Meier (Suisse), Florence de Tienda (France)

## Nyon (Switzerland) 2023

The prize of the Interreligious Jury at the 54th Festival Visions du Réel, Nyon (21-30 April 2023) went to *Pure Unknown* directed by Valentina Cigogna, Mattia Colombo (Italy, Switzerland, Sweden, 2023).

The film depicts the professional, empathetic and committed work of Italian forensic

book Cybergrace says that if grace is the experience of the divine flowing in our lives, then experiencing the creative process is grace and experiencing it in cyberspace is cybergrace.

Digitality is a place of process. Asian Contextual theologies provide a model to resolve this question. Not everything is in process; but to be actual is to be a process. To be fully real is to be in process, and thus, the real is not beyond change, i.e., it is not absolute or unchanging. In process, God does not coerce, rather God offers the Divine to each actuality. God changes. The EATWOT theologians assert that God is not static, rather God enters into the new realities of life.

### A reformed digital ecclesiology

The Church must accept digitality gratefully, which enables us to store information in vast human made artificial memories, thus providing wide and instant access to the knowledge which is our human heritage, to the Church’s teaching and tradition, the words of scripture, and the theologies which articulate the presence of God who brings out of His treasure new and old (Mt.13:52).

What sort of future do we aspire to? How can we live through digitality? Will digitality help life flourish or threaten the end of human race? The Gartner prediction is shocking that, “by 2025, 50 per cent of data activities will be digitalized by Artificial Intelligence (AI).” In the Fourth Industrial Era Machines can have a resemblance to human body, can perform like human but they are not real human. Brian Hayes’s analysis asks will AI create minds like machines, or will it show how much a mindless machine can do? Digitality is not the end product, it continues and thus the ongoing critical journey of civil society and faith communities must continue. ■

Rev. Dr M. Peter Singh is an ordained presbyter of the Church of North India (Kolkata Diocese) and currently serving as Professor and Head of the Department of Communication at Gurukul Lutheran Theological College (GLTC). He completed his B.D. at the United Theological College, Bengaluru, M.Th. at the Tamilnadu Theological Seminary, Madurai, and D.Th. from GLTC.

doctor Cristina Cattaneo, who has made it her duty to identify the bodies of “complete unknowns” found by the police. The camera moves with delicacy and modesty through the autopsy rooms and interviews with the relatives of the missing, highlighting the profound humanity with which the doctor invests her gestures and words.

The film is a witness to Cristina’s contacts with a member of the European Parliament and opens up in an unexpected way to the question of migration and the suffering it generates. Informing families of the death of their loved ones in the Mediterranean Sea is the last possible act of respect in a world torn apart.

The Interreligious Jury includes a representative of a member of INTERFILM and SIGNIS and a member of Jewish and Muslim faith. The 2023 jury consisted of Alain Nicolas Besson, Switzerland (President); Linda Dombrowszky, Hungary; Garance Hayat, France; Mohammad Rezaeian, Iran/Switzerland.

It awards a feature-length film from the international competition consisting of 14 films, that sheds light on existential, social or spiritual questions as well as human values. The prize of CHF 5’000 is donated by the Swiss Roman-Catholic Church (RKZ), and the Media Department Média-pro of the Reformed Churches in the French-speaking part of Switzerland (CER), and is also supported by the Swiss Protestant Church (EKS) and the Swiss Federation of Jewish Communities.

## Oberhausen (Germany) 2023

At the 69th International Short Film Festival Oberhausen (26 April to 1 May 2023), two ecumenical juries were accredited, for the International Competition and for the International Children’s and Youth Film Competition.

The prizes of both juries were endowed with € 1500 each, donated by the Protestant Church District Oberhausen and the German Bishops’

Conference.

The Ecumenical Jury of the International Competition awarded its Prize to *Let’s be friends* directed by Arno Coenen and Rodger Werkhoven (Netherlands, 2022).

*Motivation:* This year the Ecumenical Jury decided to recognize the courage and the contribution to the development of a future path for the entire film industry. Our winner movie impressed all of the team members with a relevant topic, meta ironic approach, integrity and completeness of the theme revelation. In an experimental yet persuasive way, the filmmakers managed at the same time to create a statement and argue on it also establishing a vividly impressive visual style. We greatly appreciate the brave gesture and significant input into the discussion of modern technologies (AI) that influence our everyday life more and more, while occasionally leaving us with a feeling of powerlessness.

In addition, the Ecumenical Jury awarded a Commendation to *Every Sunday, GrandMa* directed by Laure Prouvost (France, Belgium, 2022).

*Motivation:* We would like to award a Commendation to a film which left an unforgettable impression on the whole female part of our jury and both Christians, too. The representation of a woman of age in such a delightful and playful way sets a new tone for the film industry. Previously unfairly forgotten and now rising again with all the power of beauty, the aging woman becomes a new trend for the youth-obsessed male-biased world of cinema. Thank you for your inspiring masterwork, dear Laure Prouvost.

The Ecumenical Jury of the Children’s and Youth Film Competition awarded its Prize to *Le jour de gloire (A Glorious Day)* directed by Romuald Rodrigues Andrade and Ludovic Aklil Piette (France, 2022).

*Motivation:* 20-year-old Kamel and his friends have a plan: They want to make their city a place worth living in for everybody. But they are faced with the harshness of an adult world where good ideas are not enough to succeed. When they are dismissed as unimportant, they

do not lose hope and are determined to fight for a better tomorrow.

*A Glorious Day* depicts impressively an overtly relevant matter for children and youth in times of multiple crises: How to participate in society while being marginalized due to their age, their social background, or their lack of political experience? We see how family can both be helpful and destructive at the same time for young people trying to establish themselves – and how solidarity outweighs personal needs. The well-executed script, the outstanding acting, and the ability of telling a universal yet complex story through a seemingly small event convinced the jury of this film as much as young Kamel is convinced of community organizing as means towards self-efficacy.

The 2023 jury members of the International Competition were: Christian Gürtler, Germany; Polina Kundirenko, Germany/Ukraine; Christian Murer, Switzerland. The jury 2023 members of the Children's and Youth Competition were: Anna Grebe, Germany; Suzana Kokalj, Slovenia; Maxime Pouyanne, France.

## Cannes (France) 2023

The Ecumenical Jury, appointed by INTER-FILM and SIGNIS, awarded its Prize to *Perfect Days* directed by Wim Wenders (Japan, Germany, 2023).

*Perfect Days* is a masterpiece of the cinematographic arts with jewellike and poetic qualities. Through the different characters, the author communicates a powerful story of hope, grace and transfiguration in everyday life. The dignity that emerges from the pride of doing work well and the respect and care for children and adults, plants and trees, and a deep sense of awe, portrays as universal values that are lacking in contemporary society. We find that this film is pure grace.

In addition, the Jury awarded a Commendation to *The Old Oak* directed by Ken Loach (United Kingdom, France, Belgium, 2023).

*Motivation:* The film is a powerful depiction of current issues of migration, populism and solidarity in local communities. People coming together in compassion to share meals and struggle through life's challenges.

The members of the 2023 Jury: Nestor Briceño, President of the Jury (Venezuela); Katia Margerie (France); Alberto V. Ramos Ruiz (Cuba); Joel Ruml (Czech Republic); Jane Stranz (England).

## Zlín (Czech Republic) 2023

The Ecumenical Jury, appointed by INTER-FILM and SIGNIS, at the 63rd International Film Festival for Children and Youth in Zlín 2023, awarded its Prize to Juniors directed by Hugo Thomas (France, 2022).

Jordan and Patrick live in a small village in the south of France and feel pretty bored. The only thing they enjoy is Call of Duty, a popular war video game. But one day a tragedy occurs. Set up as a comedy, the film raises the themes of friendship, guilt, taking on responsibility and the search for forgiveness and life purpose. The director has displayed admirable sensitivity with regards to timing. And he has succeeded perfectly in the challenge of working with talented non-actors.

In addition, the jury awarded a Commendation to the film Sweet As directed by Jub Clerc (Australia, 2022).

Young people on a road trip through the Australian outback. Their encounter in the countryside develops into a healing situation for them all. They learn to tell their own story. The commendation also recognises the director's amazing camera work and her respect for the landscape, the culture and her own origins.

Members of the 2023 jury: Gundi Doppelhammer (Germany), President; Ida Tenglerová (Czech Republic); Théo Péporté, (Luxembourg).