

Thematic Session 11: The Social Impact of Media Literacy

(Organized with the Asian Institute of Journalism and Communication)

At this session, the social importance of media literacy was addressed by the panelists from a multi stakeholder perspective. Media literacy was identified as an empowerment tool that facilitates the active participation of citizens in the political process of contemporary societies. This process is linked to the Latin-American tradition of alternative communication systems advocated by the pedagogue Paulo Freire. Several Brazilian media literacy projects currently implemented include the participation of young people in the process of media production and self expression, initiatives that develop citizenship education through team work and the collaboration with others in the creative process. However, although Brazil has successful media literacy projects in development, they have not yet become part of the public education policy.

An elaboration of the overall notion of media literacy as a platform for social inclusion, especially in the new digital environment, noted the extensive interactions made possible by social media that challenge youngsters to become even more involved as participants in their communities. This is a new environment that develops digital narratives, facilitating self-representation and the visibility of "the other." Participatory Culture, a new concept emerging from the media environment evolving from Web 2.0 technologies and systems of communication, was identified as promoting a more active partaking of citizens in democratic societies, enabling them to engage in social discourse and deeper dialogue with their communities.

PANELISTS

Dr. Mira Feuerstein, Head of the Media Studies Department at Oranim Academic Educational College, Israel

Mr. Ignacio Hernaiz, Director of Canal Encuentro and Director General of Educ.ar, Argentina

Dr. Ramon Tuazon, President of the Asian Institute of Journalism and Communication (AIJC), Philippines; Chairman of the Commission on Higher Education, Technical Panel for Journalism, Broadcasting and Communication, Philippines

Dr. Ismar Soares, Director of the Communication and Education Department of the School of Communication and Arts, University of Sao Paulo, Brazil; Vice-president of the World Council for Media Education

Dr. Mogens Schmidt, Deputy Assistant Director General, Communication and Information Sector, UNESCO, Moderator

Mr. Jordi Torrent, Media Literacy, UNAOC Secretariat, Rapporteur

The example of Canal Encuentro, Argentina's leading educational public TV broadcaster, was presented at the session. Encuentro promotes cultural diversity, democratic access to knowledge and a unique multi-platform convergence of television, internet and Argentina's public school system. This necessitates the importance of addressing television audiences as citizens, and not as consumers, offering quality content that stimulates reflection, debate and the development of critical thinking skills applied to media messages. Identifying youth-produced media is an important component of media literacy. Encuentro provides tools for self expression by enabling young people to create their own media messages by using their free of charge web-based editing programs.

UNESCO's Teacher Training Curricula for media and information literacy was also highlighted as a new resource that clearly identifies the core competencies and areas of general education associated with Media and Information Literacy. The Curricula has been produced in consultation with stakeholders from around the world (the UNAOC included) and will be made available to Ministries of Education interested in including media and information literacy programs in their educational systems. This resource

is meant to facilitate the integration of media literacy within the school curricula across the globe, resulting, among other things, in the critical awareness of the ethical responsibilities inherent on the more prevalent use and distribution of user-generated media messages. These responsibilities are usually not yet addressed in most educational programs but recognized as part of the core thematic areas of Media and Information Literacy. Comments from the respondents of the session, including Paolo Celot, General Secretary of the European Association of Viewer's Interest, identified the need for clear Media Literacy indicators that will support the development of Media Literacy policies and programs across different sectors of our cotemporary societies.

In conclusion, media literacy was identified as a necessary source for social inclusion as well as a platform that facilitates the development of citizenship participation in pluralistic societies. Media literacy initiatives that move beyond formal education settings, such as television programming, websites and multi-platform projects connected to school curricula, media production workshops for minorities, and training programs for citizenship inclusion and representation, were recognized as key elements for the promotion of intercultural dialogue.

