Media and Information Literacy in Latin America and the Caribbean: Introduction and Reflections

Alfabetización Mediática e Informacional en América Latina y el Caribe: Introducción y Reflexiones

Alfabetização midiática e informacional na América Latina e no Caribe: Introdução e Reflexões

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Abstract: This monograph is part of a special issue co-organized by the Latin American Journal of Communication - Chasqui and the Journal of Latin American Communication Research, dedicated to Media and Information Literacy (MIL) in Latin America and the Caribbean. This is the result of a strategic alliance between CIESPAL, ALAIC, the Latin American and Caribbean Regional Representation of the Global Alliance for MIL promoted by UNESCO, Las Otras Voces - Communication for Democracy, and UNIMINUTO. Their common goal is to identify, highlight, and articulate initiatives from Latin America in a context of accelerated

transformations in a region marked by inequality. The issue brings together research conducted in Argentina, Brazil, Mexico, Paraguay, Cuba, and other countries to showcase the diversity of experiences and approaches on the topic. MIL is addressed as a multidimensional field that combines critical media education, technological appropriation, disinformation prevention, citizenship empowerment, and public policy development. The text offers a cross-sectional reading of the articles, placing them in dialogue with international literature and highlighting their contributions in areas such as democracy, health, youth, and pedagogical innovation. Based on these experiences, it recognizes both the progress and the challenges the region faces in consolidating a robust, articulated, and sustainable MIL ecosystem. The special issue thus aims to make a significant contribution to Ibero-American academic cooperation and to the design of educational and social strategies that respond to the challenges of the 21st century.

Keywords:
Media and information literacy, critical citizenship, public policies, disinformation, Latin America, education, digital technologies

Resumen: Este monográfico es parte de un número especial organizado conjuntamente por la Revista Latinoamericana de Comunicación - Chasqui y el Journal of Latin American Communication Research, dedicado a la Alfabetización Mediática e Informacional (AMI) en América Latina y el Caribe, como resultado de la alianza estratégica entre CIESPAL, ALAIC, la Representación Regional de América Latina y el Caribe de la Alianza Global para la AMI impulsada por UNESCO, Las Otras Voces - Comunicación para la democracia y UNIMINUTO cuyo fin común consiste en identificar, visibilizar y articular iniciativas de nuestra América en un entorno de aceleradas transformaciones en una región marcada por la desigualdad. El número reúne investigaciones desarrolladas en Argentina, Brasil, México, Paraguay, Cuba y otros países, con el fin de mostrar la diversidad de experiencias y enfoques sobre el tema. Se aborda la AMI como un campo multidimensional que combina educación crítica en medios, apropiación tecnológica, prevención de la desinformación, fortalecimiento de la ciudadanía y desarrollo de políticas públicas. El texto ofrece una lectura transversal de los artículos, situándolos en diálogo con la literatura internacional y destacando sus contribuciones en ámbitos como la democracia, la salud, la juventud y la innovación pedagógica. A partir de estas experiencias, se reconocen tanto

los avances como los desafíos que enfrenta la región para consolidar un ecosistema de AMI robusto, articulado y sostenible. El número especial se propone, así, como un aporte significativo para la cooperación académica iberoamericana y para el diseño de estrategias educativas y sociales que respondan a los retos del siglo XXI.

Palabras clave:
Alfabetización mediática e informacional, ciudadanía crítica, políticas públicas, desinformación, América Latina, educación, tecnologías digitales

Resumo: Esta monografia faz parte de um número especial coorganizado pela Revista Latino-Americana de Comunicação - Chasqui e pela Revista Latino- Americana de Pesquisa em Comunicação, dedicado à Alfabetização Midiática e Informacional (AMI) na América Latina e no Caribe. Este número é resultado de uma aliança estratégica entre o CIESPAL, a ALAIC, a Representação Regional Latino-Americana e Caribenha da Aliança Global para a AMI promovida pela UNESCO, Las Otras Voces - Comunicação para a Democracia e a UNIMINUTO. O objetivo comum é identificar, destacar e articular iniciativas da América Latina em um contexto de transformações aceleradas em uma região marcada pela desigualdade. O número reúne pesquisas realizadas na Argentina, Brasil, México, Paraguai, Cuba e outros países para evidenciar a diversidade de experiências e abordagens sobre o tema. A AMI é abordada como um campo multidimensional que combina educação midiática crítica, apropriação tecnológica, prevenção da desinformação, empoderamento da cidadania e desenvolvimento de políticas públicas. O texto oferece uma leitura transversal dos artigos, colocando-os em diálogo com a literatura internacional e destacando suas contribuições em áreas como democracia, saúde, juventude e inovação pedagógica. Com base nessas experiências, reconhece tanto os avanços quanto os desafios que a região enfrenta na consolidação de um ecossistema de AMI robusto, articulado e sustentável. Este número especial, portanto, pretende contribuir significativamente para a cooperação acadêmica ibero-americana e para a formulação de estratégias educacionais e sociais que respondam aos desafios do século XXI.

Palavras-chave:
Alfabetização midiática e informacional, cidadania crítica, políticas públicas, desinformação, América Latina, educação, tecnologias digitais

1. Introduction

This introductory chapter presents the special issue, jointly produced by the Latin American Journal of Communication Chasqui and the Journal of Latin American Communication Research, dedicated to Media and Information Literacy (MIL) in Latin America and the Caribbean. This issue is the result of joint work between CIESPAL, ALAIC, the Latin American and Caribbean Regional Representation of the Global Alliance for MIL promoted by UNESCO, Las Otras Voces - Communication for Democracy, and UNIMINUTO. The common goal is to identify, highlight, and articulate initiatives from Latin America in a context of accelerated transformation in a region marked by inequality. This collective work brings together recent research that analyzes, from different perspectives and methodologies, how MIL is implemented, studied, and projected in the region. The main objective of this text is to offer a cross-sectional reading that connects the findings of the articles, placing them in dialogue with international literature and highlighting their specific contributions to building critical citizenship, strengthening democracy, and combating disinformation.

2. MIL, Competencies, Analysis, and Experiences

MIL has been recognized by UNESCO (2013, 2024) as an essential set of competencies for the 21st century. Beyond the acquisition of technical skills, it is conceived as a multidimensional approach that involves media education, technological appropriation, critical thinking, and strengthening learning communities (Durán, 2016; UNESCO, 2024). Along these lines, Silvia Bacher (2025) highlights MIL as a cross-cutting response to the challenges of the information society, with the capacity to empower people as active citizens. Similarly, Paulino, Lopes, and Fontenele (2024) propose MIL as a harm reduction strategy, especially for vulnerable audiences exposed to misinformation.

These perspectives frame the reading of the special issue, showing how each article contributes to expanding the field based on experiences located in different Latin American countries. In the case of Argentina, Chachagua and Ortega conducted a study on digital literacy

using artificial intelligence in secondary schools in the province of Salta. The authors show how the introduction of AI tools in education creates tensions between pedagogical innovation and the need to educate critical learners.

On the one hand, AI appears as a resource to stimulate new forms of learning, but at the same time, it poses ethical dilemmas and risks associated with algorithmic opacity. The study provides empirical evidence on how teachers and students perceive and address these challenges, contributing to a global debate on the place of AI in critical education. This article is fundamental because it directly links the MIL debate with the contemporary technological agenda, showing that access to new tools must be accompanied by training processes that allow us to understand their logic and limitations.

In the first article of this issue, García Montero proposes the notion of Organizational Media Competence as a way of thinking about the collective in media literacy. The article, based on practices developed in Brazil and Uruguay, starts from the premise that organizations, both educational and social, also need to develop critical competencies regarding media and digital environments. Rather than conceiving MIL solely as an individual process, the study emphasizes the institutional and collective dimension, showing how organizational practices can enable or restrict individuals' critical attitudes. This perspective is especially pertinent in a regional context where universities, NGOs, and social groups play a decisive role in the circulation of information. García Montero's contribution opens a path to rethinking MIL beyond the classroom, situating it within the context of organizational cultures.

In the following article, from Mexico, Rodríguez Aguirre and Maldonado investigate how MIL contributes to strengthening the public sphere, using university students as a reference. The article reveals that, although young people have extensive exposure to digital platforms, limitations persist in their ability to critically evaluate information. The authors point out that MIL is a key tool for consolidating a deliberative public sphere, but that it requires sustained pedagogical work. The study is significant because it connects MIL with theories of deliberative democracy and demonstrates its relevance in contexts where trust in the media is declining.

From Brazil, Gomes and Aneas address political polarization and its effects on adolescents' deliberative capacities. The work examines how polarized discourses and confrontational dynamics on social media affect young people's willingness to participate in democratic debates. The findings highlight the need to strengthen MIL as a tool to confront

polarization and promote a more plural and respectful public debate. This article highlights that MIL is not limited to the acquisition of technical skills but directly impacts the quality of democratic deliberation.

In another contribution to this issue, Schaefer, Machado, and Denis analyze the media use patterns of young university students in Encarnación, Paraguay. The study shows how academic trajectories influence modes of technological appropriation and the development of critical skills. The authors highlight the heterogeneity of youth practices, which demonstrates the importance of designing contextualized MIL strategies. The article's contribution lies in highlighting a little-explored reality in the region, providing data on a university population outside of large urban centers.

From Cuba, Lamadrid, Fernández, and Benavides evaluate the Conecta Consciente program, aimed at university students. The article links digital literacy with emotional health, showing how MIL can contribute to well-being and the prevention of psychosocial risks. The authors argue that MIL is not only a cognitive resource but also a protective factor in terms of mental health, which expands the boundaries of the field and opens up new possibilities for linking media education and public health policies. Also from Cuba, in collaboration with Spain, Rodríguez Cruz, Medina González y Almansa Martínez analyzes media literacy as a key tool for combating disinformation in the context of digital transformation and the intensive use of social media and artificial intelligence. Based on a documentary analysis, the study identifies the main risks of disinformation and the social groups most vulnerable to its effects. The results underscore the need to strengthen citizens' critical, informational, and media literacy skills through comprehensive media literacy programs. Finally, the study concludes that the integration of public policies, education, legal frameworks, and digital culture is essential to protect democracy, freedom of expression, and the right to truthful information.

Martinelli, Parente, and Filizola document the construction of the Brazilian Media Education Strategy. This is a pioneering example of participatory public policy, involving multiple social actors in the design of a national MIL agenda. The article demonstrates that the institutionalization of MIL requires both political will and mechanisms for social participation. The Brazilian case offers valuable lessons for other countries in the region, demonstrating that it is possible to connect academia, civil society, and the public sector around media literacy.

An algorithmic analysis of manipulated media narratives surrounding Paulo Freire is the subject of this article by Busón Buesa, García, and Chaves. The study unravels how certain discourses seek to delegitimize the figure of the educator, and how MIL can be used as a tool for critical deconstruction in the face of manipulation. The article provides an innovative methodological perspective, using algorithmic techniques to analyze narratives, and contributes to the debate on misinformation and its impact on the public sphere. Finally, Estrada Ruiz explores how film can trigger reflective processes in young people. The article shows that film is a pedagogical resource with great potential to stimulate critical thinking and media literacy. Analyzing experiences with young people reveals that film not only entertains but also sparks meaningful discussions about citizenship, culture, and social participation.

3. Conclusions

Taken together, the texts gathered in this special issue offer a broad and diverse overview of MIL in Latin America and the Caribbean. The research agrees on the need to articulate MIL with educational systems, public policies, and community initiatives. Furthermore, the contributions show that MIL is not a homogeneous field, but rather responds to specific social, political, and cultural contexts.

This introductory chapter concludes that MIL has established itself as a growing field in the region, with the capacity to impact civic education, emotional health, harm reduction in the face of misinformation, and the building of more resilient democracies. By bringing together this research, the special issue by Chasqui and JLACR constitutes a significant contribution to Ibero-American academic cooperation and to the consolidation of a robust MIL ecosystem. Demonstrating that a commitment to a collective construction of critical thinking is possible if, from different organizations and sectors, we unite behind a common goal—in this case, to think critically about AMI and its impact on the region, viewed from the perspective of categories and parameters specific to Latin America.

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