

The Urgency of Media Literacy for Exercising Citizenship and Its Contribution to Guaranteeing Information Integrity - EducaMídia Case Study

La urgencia de la alfabetización mediática para el ejercicio de la ciudadanía y su contribución para garantizar la integridad de la información - Caso de estudio EducaMídia

A Urgência da Alfabetização Midiática para o Exercício da Cidadania e sua Contribuição para a Garantia da Integridade da Informação - Estudo de Caso EducaMídia

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Abstract: The digitalization of society and the democratization of technology provide vast opportunities for access to information and diverse voices, but they also bring challenges such as misinformation and manipulation. Furthermore, algorithms and artificial intelligence impact information integrity by creating biased content and limiting plurality. A lack of knowledge about digital tools excludes many from critical knowledge construction, leading to inequality. Media literacy emerges as a solution, empowering citizens to understand the informational environment, critically analyze content, and produce information ethically. This article aims to show how the EducaMídia program, created in 2019 by the Palavra Aberta Institute, has been working to strengthen media literacy in Brazil by training educators and contributing to the development of public policies in the country.

Keywords:

Media Literacy, Citizenship, Social Inclusion, Information Integrity, Educator Training, Brazilian Media Literacy Strategy

Resumen: La digitalización de la sociedad y la democratización de la tecnología brindan

amplias oportunidades de acceso a la información y a voces diversas, pero también traen consigo desafíos como la desinformación y la manipulación. Además, los algoritmos y la inteligencia artificial impactan en la integridad de la información al crear contenido sesgado y limitar la pluralidad. La falta de conocimiento sobre las herramientas digitales excluye a muchos de la construcción crítica del conocimiento, lo que conduce a la desigualdad. La alfabetización mediática surge como una solución, que empodera a los ciudadanos para comprender el entorno informativo, analizar críticamente el contenido y producir información de manera ética. Este artículo tiene como objetivo mostrar cómo el programa EducaMídia, creado en 2019 por el Instituto Palavra Aberta, viene trabajando para fortalecer la alfabetización mediática en Brasil, mediante la formación de educadores y la contribución al desarrollo de políticas públicas en el país.

Palabras clave:

Alfabetización mediática, Ciudadanía, inclusión social, Integridad de la información, Formación de educadores, Estrategia Brasileña de Alfabetización Mediática

Resumo: A digitalização da sociedade e a democratização da tecnologia oferecem amplas oportunidades de acesso à informação e a vozes diversas, mas também trazem desafios como a desinformação e a manipulação. Além disso, os algoritmos e a inteligência artificial impactam a integridade da informação ao criar conteúdo tendencioso e limitar a pluralidade. A falta de conhecimento sobre ferramentas digitais exclui muitos da construção crítica do conhecimento, o que gera desigualdade. A alfabetização midiática surge como uma solução que empodera os cidadãos para compreender o ambiente informativo, analisar criticamente o conteúdo e produzir informação de maneira ética. Este artigo tem como objetivo mostrar como o programa EducaMídia, criado em 2019 pelo Instituto Palavra Aberta, vem trabalhando para fortalecer a alfabetização midiática no Brasil, por meio da formação de educadores e da contribuição para o desenvolvimento de políticas públicas no país.

Palavras-chave:

Alfabetização midiática, Cidadania, Inclusão social, Integridade da informação, Formação de educadores, Estratégia Brasileira de Alfabetização Midiática

1. Introduction

The digitalization of society and the democratization of information production and dissemination technologies offer an unprecedented opportunity to access content on any topic and give space to diverse voices. On the other hand, the challenges to knowledge construction are immense. The proliferation of authors in digital environments, often acting with diverse and hidden purposes, exposes everyone to misinformation, rumors, biased or fabricated information, messages intended to manipulate, convince, or sell, hate speech, prejudice, and many other obstacles. Adding to this challenge are algorithms that personalize the information each person receives, offering fragments of reality that can guide behaviors, along with the introduction of generative artificial intelligence tools, which further affect information integrity, increasing the spread of manipulated, homogenized, and less diverse content.

Beyond the lack of access, the lack of understanding of the structure behind digital environments excludes entire groups from the ability to assess information or construct their own narratives. It also represents a significant factor of segregation between those who understand the mechanics driving the internet and can critically analyze available tools, and those who lack basic competencies for using these technologies.

It is always important to remember that communication is a fundamental human right, which encompasses the right to access accurate, reliable, and quality information — characteristics that are part of the concept of information integrity — making it possible to learn and make decisions that affect both the public and private lives of all citizens, as well as how society engages in discussions and makes decisions.

To achieve this, it is not enough to ensure internet access alone; it is necessary to support the development of skills that enable empowering use of the communication and informational environment and the ability for positive participation and ethical self-expression. This is the proposal of media literacy.

Recognizing media and information literacy as a pillar of inclusion and social justice reveals its importance in sustaining democracy and fostering an information environment that is both secure and integral. This competency helps citizens understand the significance of the plurality of voices circulating in society through media and the value of otherness, which forms citizens capable of relating to differences and recognizing their legitimacy.

Media literacy creates a new type of reader, more attuned to the nuances of information

circulating in society and the complexities of the informational environment — including reflecting on the impacts of communication technologies themselves, not just their content. Similarly, it prepares content producers to better evaluate the reliability of the information they retransmit and to consider how their narrative choices (including the selection of sources, words, or even images) can perpetuate prejudice, xenophobia, or injustice. This more attentive approach to the complexity of media discourses and environments is essential for democratic life because, through it, citizens can exercise their fundamental rights to communication and freedom of expression more responsibly, becoming more aware and committed to human dignity when accessing, producing, and disseminating messages and content in any medium.

It was from this understanding that the Palavra Aberta Institute created, in 2019, **EducaMídia**, a media literacy program aimed at training formal and non-formal educators to apply media and information literacy in various contexts and scenarios, contributing to the development of public policies and to the dissemination of this increasingly crucial concept in modern society.

2. Why Media Literacy Matters?

The concept of media literacy, as advocated by Palavra Aberta Institute within the EducaMídia program, is the development of a set of skills to access, analyze, create, and critically engage with the informational and media environment in all its formats, from print to digital. It is a fundamental requirement for the formation of citizens and the strengthening of democracy in the 21st century, as well as a right that serves as the foundation for maintaining a democratic society, as it promotes:

- a. Equity in access to information:** By understanding technology as a language and the internet as a territory, it advocates for the appropriation of digital resources to ensure inclusive communication, plural in formats, with accessible information for different contexts and realities, open to the representation of diverse voices in society.

- b. Social justice:** Media education recognizes and contributes to addressing systemic inequities present in society, as its processes can highlight stereotypes, prejudices, hate speech, silencing, and other rights violations perpetrated by both new and traditional media.

- c. **Digital inclusion and citizenship:** Through media literacy, citizens understand how information can contribute to knowledge building and participation in social processes. Passive and compulsive content consumption gives way to reflective and critical use, as well as responsible and ethical information production.

- d. **Transformation of pedagogical practice:** Instead of merely exposing students to content, media education encourages autonomous knowledge construction, valuing investigation, documentation through media resources, and the systematization of learning and dissemination of discoveries to real audiences on social media and other digital publication platforms.

Media literacy also plays a crucial role in combating the strong wave of disinformation that erodes democratic institutions, attacking their importance and credibility within society. In the face of an overwhelming abundance of circulating messages, particularly on the internet, citizens from all walks of life struggle to easily discern between what is reliable and what is not, leading society into constant conflict, with the construction of biased worldviews or even those lacking a foundation in factual reality. In this context, media education becomes an essential tool for developing critical autonomy, forming citizens capable of critically evaluating media messages, identifying, and exposing false, misleading, and manipulated content.

With a holistic approach, media education should be integrated into any educational practice, formal or non-formal. Its goal is to develop citizens who are more critical and responsible about the content they receive, disseminate, and produce in their daily lives as media users and consumers of digital resources in social contexts. This approach can be incorporated into educational processes focused on citizenship formation and human rights, as well as into basic education, crossing all curricular areas. "This means integrating it into any content or subject on a daily basis. All teachers, in principle, can add this layer to their curriculum by using reflective reading and media creation to activate learning about the planned content" (Ferrari et al., 2020).

The EducaMídia proposal aligns with the concepts of educommunication, media and information literacy, and international initiatives in media literacy, with a common goal:

deepening society's understanding of media processes and the production and reception of information through media. It contributes to the development of three core competencies:

- **READ:** Critical media analysis and media information literacy, teaching citizens to filter, read critically, and make sense of the vast flow of information around us, accessed through digital, print, and analog media (images, videos, news, posts, games, packaging, advertising, memes, charts, maps, etc.). It also teaches how to understand the intentions behind each media message, distinguish fact from opinion and propaganda, and recognize disinformation and other types of false, inaccurate, or biased content.
- **WRITE:** Skills related to self-expression and digital fluency. Media education literacy amplifies the voices of citizens, especially young people, promoting the skills needed to publish responsibly to real audiences, engage with issues relevant to their communities, and engage in dialogue with society. Writing in the age of multimedia platforms and generative artificial intelligence also means exploring the narrative potential of various media formats, aligning form and function while reflecting on technical and creative choices.
- **PARTICIPATE:** Focus on digital citizenship skills and civic engagement through media. Media education encourages the use of technology to promote empathy and broaden political awareness, recognizing and respecting diverse voices. It teaches children and young people to engage in dialogue, disagree, and respond on social media in a balanced, non-violent manner, standing up against hate and discrimination. The goal is to encourage citizens to use media to transform their communities and realities, inspiring them to create and publish content ethically and engagingly.

3. EducaMídia Multipliers Training: Critical Reading and Citizenship in Schools

Since its beginning, the media education program from the Instituto Palavra Aberta has supported the dissemination of this approach in Brazil through various initiatives, including the production of resources and materials, programs and partnerships with civil society organizations, teacher training programs for public school networks, and the offering of its “EducaMídia Multipliers” training course. This course has been meeting the growing demand for

educators' digital and informational literacy, especially since the National Common Core Curriculum (BNCC) mandates the development of competencies related to communication, digital culture, argumentation, and scientific, critical, and creative thinking.

Since 2019, the program has impacted more than 190,000 teachers from 1,128 Brazilian municipalities across all states and the Federal District. Additionally, it has certified 2,200 educators, teachers, managers, and other education professionals as EducaMídia Multipliers, enabling them to implement media education across their subjects and grade levels.

The EducaMídia Multipliers Course is a 30-hour facilitated course offered twice a year in the form of a Massive Open Online Course (MOOC). Its primary objective is to train both formal and informal educators to integrate media education into their daily teaching practices, promoting critical and conscious media engagement skills among their students. Delivered on a large scale and accessible to participants across the country, the course aims to spread the concept of media education and foster educational practices that include access, critical analysis, creation, and participation in media environments—skills applicable to any subject area or field of knowledge.

By providing a structured and accessible professional development program in this format, EducaMídia has had the opportunity, through its nine course editions (from 2020 to 2024), to offer method, coherence, and continuity in media education training. It has also established a curriculum framework that aligns with BNCC requirements. By training educators to adapt their practices to their specific contexts, the program seeks to integrate media education flexibly and sustainably, addressing the diverse needs of the Brazilian educational landscape.

In an effort to evaluate the course's impact, an analysis of the participants' projects has been conducted since the second semester of 2020. The goal has been to understand the contribution of media education to these educators' practices and professional development. The analysis revealed that 58.6% of the presented projects aimed at addressing basic education, while 21.8% focused on teacher training. Nearly half of the projects (47.5%) emphasized critical media literacy, and many covered sensitive topics such as anti-racist education, feminism, and gender identity.

From these and other findings, it became clear that the transversal media education proposal is indeed a concrete and successful way for teachers to connect curricular learning with the development of the skills and values necessary for living in a democratic society. Thus, the

EducaMídia program has helped support teachers in implementing new teaching methodologies that are aligned with the challenges of the 21st century, based on the understanding of media education as a mediator and promoter of active and civic learning.

4. Impacts and Results

Pre- and post-course surveys conducted across all editions have provided insights into participant profiles, showing that key objectives such as reach, diversity, and impact on public education are being met. The vast majority of participants are basic education teachers, though the course also attracts higher education faculty, managers, non-formal educators, members of civil society organizations, journalists, and researchers. Aggregated data from 2020 to 2023 reveals that 56% of participants were involved in public education, 60% accessed the course from regions outside the Southeast, and 70% reported having no prior experience with media education. This demonstrates that the course has been successful in reaching diverse regions and engaging new audiences.

In terms of territorial reach, in the first 2024 edition, the 1,030 selected participants represented 355 municipalities from 26 states and the Federal District, a typical level of geographic coverage seen across all course editions.

While there is a significant drop in participant numbers between registration and completion—a common occurrence in free online courses, which often prove more demanding than participants expect—around 30% of enrollees complete the training and receive certification as EducaMídia Multipliers, a strong result for this type of program. In 2022, however, a drop in certification rates was symptomatic of post-pandemic fatigue and an increased workload for teachers dealing with the challenges of disrupted schooling during isolation. In response, EducaMídia adapted the course by offering two certification options: one for those who wished only to complete the content, and another for those who wanted to create and implement a media education initiative in their professional contexts. This adjustment appears to have been effective, with certification rates returning to previous levels.

5. Conclusion

After five years since the launch of EducaMídia, we can observe the positive progress in understanding the need, importance, and urgency of media and information literacy in the

education of children and adolescents, especially within formal learning environments. This progress has been supported by the development of public policies at the governmental level, exemplified by the launch of the first version of the Brazilian Media Education Strategy in October 2023, which was drafted after a public consultation with over 400 contributions from experts, academics, education professionals, and civil society representatives.

The numbers achieved by EducaMídia, through its various resources and the Multipliers training course, also demonstrate a growing interest in the topic, as well as in programs offering continuous teacher education.

The outlook becomes even more positive with the inclusion of the Information Integrity agenda—characterized by accuracy, consistency, and reliability—within the G20 framework, as a countermeasure to disinformation and a way to protect fundamental rights to information access and freedom of expression.

In a forward-looking perspective, it is essential to implement consistent and long-term actions aimed at empowering citizens through public policies on media education, digital literacy, the amplification of diverse voices, and ensuring access to information. This will help create a safe informational environment that enables the full exercise of freedom of expression, respect for human rights, and the full practice of citizenship.

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