Media Literacy and Civic Cultures

Manuel Pita*, Maria José Brites**, Célia Quico***, Carla Sousa****

* Universidade Lusófona, CICANT (manuel.pita@ulusofona.pt)
** Universidade Lusófona, CICANT (maria.jose.brites@ulusofona.pt)
*** Universidade Lusófona, CICANT (celia.quico@ulusofona.pt)
**** Universidade Lusófona, CICANT (carla.patricia.sousa@ulusofona.pt)

The search for solutions to complex problems in the information ecosystem – such as collective disinformation, hate speech and political polarisation – puts increasing pressure on leveraging the pedagogies and practices in media literacy (ML). In Paul Mihailidis's (2018, p. 1) words, "As new media tools and technologies further disrupt the core relationship among media, citizens, and society, media literacy is in a fight for civic relevance". Indeed, growing evidence supports ML's role in improving civic participation and engagement (Frau-Meigs et al., 2017; McDougall & Pollard, 2019; Mihailidis, 2014).

Orthogonally, for individuals, a sense of identity and belonging (Osler & Starkey, 2003) also plays a role in the emergence of citizenship and civic cultures (Dahlgren, 2009). However, expressing identity or aligning actions to maximise a sense of belonging does not mean that people act for the common good or according to expectations. Instead, people enact their identity and create a sense of belonging in different ways: "To neglect the personal and cultural aspects of citizenship is to ignore the issue of belonging" (Osler & Starkey, 2003, p. 252).

Considering the space of possible motivations for civic action, Banaji (2008, p. 556) claims that it "can be traced in the contours of young people's life experiences, the ideologies they encounter and abide by, their social contexts and neighbourhoods, their political encounters, as well as their emotional commitments and loyalties, be these to race or religion, football, music, nation or local neighbourhood".

Furthermore, Lister (1998, pp. 324) pointed out the need to reflect on the tension between universal ideas about citizenship and the vast space of relevant individual differences. In this regard, Bakardjieva (2009, pp. 102-103) considers that the best option is to mix different perspectives of acting and give a chance to the personal: "Perhaps movement activists and issue activists should start by recalling the wisdom of the brilliant short essay that put the phrase 'the personal is political' on the conceptual map—just replace 'women' by 'citizens'" (Bakardjieva, 2009, pp. 102-103). Indeed, the individual and collective are intertwined (Brites, 2015).

Some authors caution that the dream of online deliberation spaces, where such a mixture of perspectives could happen, does not fulfil its promise and considers that, indeed, "extensive exclusions from online forums occur as a result of social inequality" (see e.g. Dahlberg, 2001, p. 623). Dahlberg points out that online deliberation may be following the bourgeois public sphere described by Habermas. In Dahlberg's words, "A lack of full inclusion and discursive equality within online public spheres will remain as long as there are inequalities in the distribution of social resources, including telecommunications infrastructures, money to pay Internet costs, computing skills, cultural expectations, free time and community support" (Dahlberg, 2001, p. 628).

In addition, there are other actors online: algorithms, digital footprints, and echo chambers can lead to "data loops" (Mathieu & Pruulmann-Vengerfeldt, 2020, p. 117), making content and data circulate over and over between audiences and media. These new contexts of mediatization pose questions to the democratic realm and intensify the questions about democracy at diverse levels. This includes what Milan and Trére call "data poor" (2020, p. n/a), especially with the Covid-19 pandemic, putting in perspective the recurrent universalization of western narratives (Milan & Trére, 2019).

Media studies need to consider the ethics and integrity of the research and innovative methodologies that better address current challenges. This means mixing new and traditional methods and qualitative and datafied research approaches in a needed yet unusual combination (Lê & Schmid, 2020). In doing this, we also must distinguish between making ethical choices and implementing ethical solutions, understand how to make ethical and pedagogical choices, and be accountable for the constant possibility of observing unintended consequences.

In the first article in this special issue, Lara Burton analyses the space of youth political participation. She concludes that ML needs methodological advances that account for the diversity of collective participation – ranging from disengaged to activist communities. These new methods, according to Burton, should shift from a focus on individuals to a focus on collectives. In the second article, Roman Gerodimos and colleagues report on an empirical study that further supports the claim that the space of youth civic and political participation is becoming more complex and diverse. This study focuses specifically on globalisation. In the third, Julian McDougall and colleagues expand on the need for methodological diversity to overcome the possible dangers of looking at ML and civic cultures' emergent landscapes from a single-lens, solutionist perspective. In the fourth article, Ana Oliveira reports on a study of how young people describe what citizenship and participation mean to them. Her results provide further evidence of the complexification of the ML and civic participation landscape.

The main subject of the fifth article, by Katherine Reilly and colleagues, concerns empowering people to understand their data in the information ecosystem. Specifically, the authors provide a critical view of data literacy interventions for the Latin American case. In the sixth article, Joana Martins and colleagues look at media students' perceptions of fake news. They draw attention to the need to address misconceptions regarding the use of the term fake news to refer to the intentional creation and diffusion of false information or the unintentional propagation of fake news by media outlets.

The seventh article by Camila Lamartine and Carla Cerqueira reports the results of their netnographic study of cyberfeminist participation in a strike that took place in Portugal on 8 March 2021. Finally, the eighth article, by Sana Zainab and colleagues, explores senior adults' ML and civic participation practices and challenges, showing that while they are active online, their limited skills hinder their meaningful interactions. Both the breadth and coherence of the different subjects tackled by the papers in this special issue resulted from the first autumn school of the Media Literacy and Civic Cultures Lab (MelCi) Lab, Universidade Lusófona, CICANT) in 2021. The school attracted PhD students and researchers with a common goal: to reflect critically on the current methods used to explore pressing problems in this domain.

The crucial outcome of these explorations is that there are no universal solutions to the emergent problems in media literacy and civic cultures. Indeed, before committing to methodological approaches and theoretical frameworks, it is essential to understand the context and complexity of the specific problems under investigation. Finally, we would like to thank all the participants, tutors and keynote speakers of the first

edition of the MeLCi Lab Autumn School. Looking at the different articles in this special issue brings to the MeLCi Lab a feeling of accomplishment. Through these approaches it is possible to raise new voices, questions and concerns regarding media literacy's civic relevance, with an intersectional focus, that includes youth perspectives, but also other underrepresented communities, through diverse methodological lenses. Overall, this chapter offers a collective vision for the study of digital citizenship through media literacy, to foster ethics and integrity in research and intervention.

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