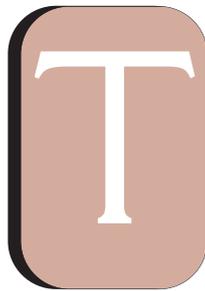# Introduction

Citizenship and Social Empowerment in the emerging Cybersociety

Ciudadanía crítica y empoderamiento social en la emergente cibersociedad

Guest-edited special issue:
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The dismantling of Maastricht's Europe, with the arrival of the macro crisis, whose trace will un-fortunately be noticeable for some time, together with the immigration of almost two million social and political migrants, has created a new Europe. In this new situation of the anti-establishment movements such as 15M in Spain, the Chilean student protests, the Arab Spring…. social networks have become a tool and vehicle of the interactive social communication process for education. This context was the driving factor behind the decision of the Education Research Group at the Pablo de Olavide University (GEDUPO) to submit this monograph to Comunicar. The goal of this monograph is to reflect and analyse, from an educational and social media standpoint, how to progress towards a new e-generation of more critical citizens which brings about empowerment through education with social and political actions that are capable of bringing society towards greater levels of social equality and balance.

In this issue, we take three mutual points of reference for the monograph beginning with the proposal by Novoa (2000), which suggested changing structures and relationships in education: a) Cybersociety, the digital era, and the economic crisis and its consequences (Jones, 2003; Pirela, 2006; Lombardero, 2015); b) The generation of a critical citizenship via mass media (Ribble & Baily, 2016); and c) The political empowerment of that critical citizenship by means of the motivation of various social groups and their political presence in public representative bodies (Chaparro, 2009; Gozálvez & Contreras, 2014; Tufte, 2015).

The first reference point is cybersociety (a blend word of cybernetics and society) as a socioeconomic and cultural context that has given rise to a space for communication and socialisation, applied to everyday activities, endowing them with a social dimension by means of mass media and social networks, as Jones (2003) describes, completed by the so-called 'Digital Era' of Pirela (2006) and its relationship with the generation of information. As Lombardero (2015) notes, we can already talk of a Third Industrial Revolution, being, as we are, on the cusp of the 'fourth' (Industry 4.0) with the digitalisation of all services and production. All of this has resulted in the appearance of a multitude of new concepts, such as cyber education, cyberculture, cyber organisations, and more.

The growth in the use of these social networks in the last decade has focussed on the socio-political aspect, with two immediate consequences: a) The generation of a massive critical citizenship (Gerbaudo, 2017); and b) The capability of these groups to be empowered by means of mass mobilisation (Chaparro, 2009; Gozálvez & Contreras, 2014; Álvarez Ruiz & Núñez Gómez, 2016, among others) beyond the reach of censure, countries, and continents. This situation is making it necessary to be educated in digital skills (Caldeiro & Aguaded, 2015), taking advantage of informal spaces that enable citizens, people with less education socially and culturally, to be empowered to fight for their rights and interests.

For this reason, when this monograph was suggested, we placed particular emphasis on the emergence of the economic crisis since 2008 (second point of reference), the collapse of Maastricht's Europe of social welfare, and

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the social consequences entailed by the segregation and division of social classes, migratory movements, plurality of cultures, and class-based society, which are approaching levels last seen three decades ago with respect to issues of social injustice and the dearth of basic needs experienced by a very significant segment of the population. All of this elicited the third point of reference, focussing on the social movements and policies of the so-called 'indignados' (Castells, 2012; Phillippi & Avendaño, 2011; De-la-Porta & Danni, 2015; Álvarez Ruiz & Núñez-Gómez, 2016).

Within this context, we frame the need for this monograph in order to consider and analyse the consequences of cybersociety via mass media and the rise of social networks for the generation of a critical citizenship as a new e-generation, capable of training itself in digital skills in order to be able to mobilise disadvantaged social groups and fight inequality and the social divide, as well as corruption, violence, and drug trafficking, the main problems in other countries and continents with different cultures and religions, shared on social networks with a global reach, such as Twitter.

As we shall see, the five contributions share these three reference points: The use of social networks to create critical awareness and social mobilisation that culminates in institutional empowerment via political parties or protest organisations. All the contributions begin with significant milestones, such as the beginning of the 2008 economic crisis (Castell, 2012), the 15M movement in Spain and the 'Green march' to protest education (Alvarez-Ruiz & Núñez-Gómez, 2016), the Chilean student protests (Cabalin, 2014), the fight against drug trafficking and political corruption in Mexico and Central America (Moreno-Candil & al., 2016), and the 2011 Arab Spring (Álvarez-Osorio, 2015).

We believe that reading this issue will raise awareness that mass media was not originally made for educational purposes but is now a key instrument in cyber education and it is necessary to acknowledge the battle against digital illiteracy as one of the key factors in the creation of a powerful critical citizenship, one that is capable of driving and fighting for its own change, being empowered to secure social transformation, emancipation, and stem the social divide that could further stimulate the application and consequences of cybersociety. In order to do this, education must focus less on its own segmentation and embrace its social aspect as the basis for this entire process.

We present a brief overview below of the contributions collected in this monograph that, as we have previously noted, revolve around three key elements: Cybersociety (understood as the generation of spaces on social networks for communication), a critical citizenship, and empowerment with the aim of fighting for social and political change from various angles: 1) The need for literacy among the most vulnerable groups from the media and social perspective; 2) The correct use of and education about the mobile phone as a holistic development training aid for

complete communication; 3) The need for cyber activism using networks as a tool of critical empowerment faced with traditional political and religious forces in view of the context of the 2011 Arab Spring; 4) The importance of educating citizens in media skills as an alternative power juxtaposed with the situation of drug trafficking and violence in Mexico; and finally 5) Examined against the global backdrop that is the Twitter network, the use of this type of network to encourage critical citizenship and empower them politically and their use as a tool in the struggle against established power.

The first contribution is set in the context of the economic crisis suffered in Europe and Spain since 2008, focussing on the most socially and culturally disadvantaged groups, as well as those most vulnerable to digital culture and cybersociety. This contribution is entitled 'Meta-synthesis of Literacy for the Empowerment of Vulnerable Groups' and its authors are the professors Celia Camilli-Trujillo (Villanueva University Centre, Complutense University of Madrid, Spain) and Max Römer-Pieretti (Camilo José Cela University, Spain).

The objective of the endeavour is to analyse the characteristics of the vulnerability of groups afflicted with media and digital illiteracy with the aim of uncovering strategies to empower and liberate them from this situation of inequality, empowering them as critical citizens who are involved in and motivated for social life.

From the results of this undertaking, it is clear that this type of digital literacy training makes it possible for pupils and teachers to become critical thinkers. It empowers them to analyse and use technology without simply being passive observers who only act as consumers and who can be manipulated. In addition, the authors warn of a series of risks that may arise if these groups are not dynamically leading and continuously developing that critical citizenship. Four factors are needed for this: access, analysis, evaluation, and content creation. To these dynamic components they add citizen culture as a culture of participation in and control of this media, which feeds into the generation of self-confidence, awareness, and critical positioning with that power.

For that reason, the authors deem it fundamental that the citizenship is empowered in terms of media and, therefore, they place particular emphasis on the importance of informal contexts as part of this digital literacy that are real and authentic, drawing on awareness linked to literacy, democracy, empowerment, and social participation in life and politics in order to avoid being pushed to the sidelines of this cybersociety.

The next contribution focusses on how young people use the mobile phone and its impact as social capital, distinguishing between good use (socialisation, communication, and personal relationships) and bad use (unsocialisation and isolation with addictive practices) and what characteristics are required of an environment in order to improve the consequences of its use. This contribution is entitled 'Connected Teens: Measuring the Impact of Mobile Phones on Social Relationships Through Social Capital' and was authored by the professors María-José Vidales-Bolaños and Charo Sádaba-Chalezquer (Navarra University, Spain).

The objective of this undertaking was to understand in what way technologically mediated communication does or does not contribute to social capital among communities of adolescents and what consequences for them may result from its use. These professors begin with an analysis of the index of social capital in order to define the impact of certain elements of mobile phone-mediated communication as a resource.

Among the key results, they identify the elements of mediated communication that significantly impact the mobile phone. This claim is supported by the following conclusions: a) The social capital serves as an objective identifying and meaningful assessment of the elements of mobile phone-mediated communication; b) There is a significant difference between the indices measured by this social capital and the pupils' perception of it; c) Influential environments are significant during the year, with family relationships having a greater effect than both on- and off-line relationships; d) The sex variable does make a significant difference on the total social capital; and e) The positive influence of students who make good use of the mobile phone when they balance their activities in and out of school with their friends and their social environment.

On this basis, the authors conclude that the elements of mobile phone-mediated communication influence both scopes or types of social capital and must be brought together in a balanced manner for positive use. It is necessary to maintain and reinforce the quality of the contacts that they have offline with face-to-face time since this fosters balance and the positive impact of the mobile phone. In this context, the authors consider that the use of WhatsApp encourages the construction of a separate identify among adolescents (communication and social relationships), above all among women, as conversations, photos, etc. are exchanged.

The third contribution, entitled 'Cyberactivisim in the Process of Political and Social Change in Arab Countries', presented to us by the professors Xosé Soengas-Pérez (Santiago de Compostela University, Spain) and Mohamed Assif (University of Hassan II Casablanca, Morocco), is focussed on defining the concept of cyberactivism and

analysing its dimensions in the context of the evolution (five years) of the emergence of the 2011 Arab Spring in three countries in the Maghreb (Tunisia, Egypt, and Libya).

In spite of the fact that the piece addresses an entirely different culture and religion, as the Arab world is, constants from other parts of the world and the three pillars that we mentioned in the introduction still persist. On this basis, in the historical context of the revolution of the Arab Spring in these three countries, the authors analyse the importance of the use of social networks as a tool for political empowerment and the creation of a society and citizenship that is critical of the social and political structures of the established ideological-religious and political power.

The authors define and analyse the contributions of cyberactivism (Tascón & Quintana, 2012; González-Lizárraga & al., 2016) and its impact on the political and social changes of the 2011 Arab Spring (Álvarez-Osorio, 2015) and monitor the evolution of this cyberactivism over a five-year period since that time in 30 activist universities involved in the actions of the 2011 upheaval.

The results of the research show that, in spite of that cyberactivism and the political change effected, the previous structures of power still remain largely in place, as do fundamental cultural elements of those societies, obstructing the ground-breaking changes of 2011. This has created a dual situation in which two realities exist side by side, which cause and are in permanent conflict – between ancient traditions (extremely entrenched in certain parts of the society) and the values associated with the revolutions, more progressive, new values, and new ways of thinking, which do not entirely abandon tradition but are agents of social and political change for equality in their countries.

In this situation, the authors consider that a strategy based on cyberactivism as a process is needed, one that creates a virtual space that shakes off many controls and allows a network of critical citizens to be created, citizens who are involved in and committed to change. In the same way, it allows them to organise themselves and be in contact with the outside world in order to protect and encourage this change, flouting the official censorship of these countries and securing international support against the power structures of the previous regime.

In the fourth contribution, we are given a different backdrop and context, at a historical, as well as cultural and religious, level – The Central American and Mexican culture of violence created by drug trafficking and the corresponding corruption of political power. As in the previous example, there is once again a repeat of the reference point of social networks being able to mobilise a critical citizenship to empower itself when faced with an unjust situation. Its title is 'Social Empowerment in Mexican Violent Contexts through Media Competence' by the professors Dr. Abel-Antonio Grijalva-Verdugo (Occidente University, Mexico) and David Moreno-Candil (Occidente University, Mexico).

The objective of this undertaking is to call attention to the importance of the need for citizens to acquire media competence (digital know-how) in the ecological systems of the new cybersociety as the basis for empowering the citizenship in the Latin American context (and specifically in the northwest of Mexico, Michoacán). This work hinges on the axiological and ideological dimensions of this competence in the electoral process in the current violent environment of organised crime in this society.

Among the major results was the identification of seven factors that shape the axiological and ideological dimensions of digital skills: citizen debate, the social function of the media, citizen action, the social action of the media, social awareness, critical reading of political campaigns, and the production of participatory mechanisms. They also identified the low participation, the lowest, in fact, of digital natives. In consequence, they suggest that education in media skills is necessary for the social empowerment of these groups.

Another of the findings analysed the rejection of participation and mobilisation among this group of digital natives, in spite of their being the best-prepared group in media terms, which is due to weariness with and mistrust of established political power. Conversely, however, it is immigrants and digitally illiterate people who show less reluctance to social action and simultaneously confirm that they are the adult segment most willing to participate in social movements.

Hence the urgency for social empowerment linked to digital skills and know-how for concrete immediate action and in pursuit of a goal, that is, less violent democratic spaces. For this purpose, ethical awareness with a social perspective is needed in order to combat the situation, which is currently lacking in this area. The solution that they offer is to develop Educational-communicative strategies to empower citizens (the integration of pedagogic, technological, and discursive strategies for the freedom of expression). This need for awareness of the media must be supplemented by other factors, such as: the Rule of Law, safety of journalists, citizen security, trust-

worthy institutions, and respect of individual guarantees, among other conditions associated with democracies (media ecology).

The final article in this monographic issue returns to the Spanish context within the framework of cybersociety and the use, around the world, of social networks, in this case by means of the analysis of Twitter. The contribution is entitled 'Protesting on Twitter: Citizenship and Empowerment from Public Education' and is the work of the professors Geo Saura and José-Luís Muñoz-Moreno (Autonomous University of Barcelona, Spain), Julián Luengo-Navas (Granada University, Spain), and José-Manuel Martos (Ibero-American International University, Mexico).

This article addresses the current context of the 2008 economic crisis in Spain and its severe effect on the social divide and worsening of the social gap between social classes with the shrinking of public services in favour of their privatisation. All of this has brought about a critical response that has been mobilised, encouraged the use and development of social networks and their capability for social and political impact and, above all, given rise to the most important consequence: the irrevocable change of the political communication system, mobilisation, and collective protests. Education as a public service, alongside health, has been the most palpable examples of this deteriorating situation within this framework. To this effect, the Marea Verde (2011) and its following on Twitter is taken as a reference point.

After performing the study, they present the following findings: a) The rejection of economic considerations that involve weakening it, such as cutbacks or the lack of public monies for funding; b) A strong opposition to publicly-funded private schools due to the economic protection afforded them by the State; and c) The strong rejection of neoliberal policies focusses on the LOMCE due to its privatisation and mercantilist proposals.

Finally, this type of research underlines the influence wielded by social networks due to their capacity to disrupt the traditional role as a counterweight and response to public powers. In this new context of the cybersociety, in which the digital citizenship is endowed with particular relevance, collective protests make use of the Internet and social networks as a channel for information and communication to generate communities that are capable of rallying around their interests, constructing enough empowerment to challenge issues of mutual interest in deliberative democratic structures. For this reason, they call attention to and examine these networks, both in terms of their evolution as well as their consequences.

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