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The culture of participation

La cultura de la participación

Abstract

The culture of participation involves horizontal models of communication where relations of power give individuals the possibility to exchange points of view, express ideas, comments, and experiences as well as work together collaboratively. This culture of participation involves the thinking and development of a culture of communication that overcomes traditional models established in functionalist theories. Web 2.0 in general, and social networks, in particular, are suitable scenarios for participation that promote the principles of collective intelligence, interactivity, and an architecture of participation. In the scenario of Web 2.0 an info-communicative ecosystem is constructed which modifies all traditional rules of audiences. Which type of publics are publics of participation? What types of interactions are established among them? How do they participate and what quality of participation is established? Citizenship, according to Manuel Castells (1998), is a great interactive mind, or as in the terms of Pisani and Piotet (2009) a webactor, with the capacity to create within a digital space one's own information and communicative style. This digital citizenship in virtual scenarios leaves traces and footprints in the form of a digital identity. The culture of participation involves relations that allow sharing, problem solving, the performance of tasks, the construction of collaborative knowledge, and the development of dynamic channels of communication. This culture of participation applied in educative contexts allows the creation of learning opportunities and the diversification of social media as an increased power toward citizenship for digital users.

Resumen

La cultura de la participación implica modelos de comunicación horizontales donde las relaciones de poder proporcionan a cada individuo la posibilidad de intercambiar puntos de vista, expresar ideas, comentarios, experiencias así como trabajar colaborativamente. Esta cultura de la participación implica pensar y desarrollar una cultura de la comunicación que supere los modelos heredados de las teorías funcionalistas. La Web 2.0, en general, y las redes sociales, en particular, son los escenarios adecuados para la participación que ponen en juego los principios de la inteligencia colectiva, la intercreatividad y la arquitectura de la participación. En este escenario de la Web 2.0 se construye un ecosistema infocomunicativo que modifica todas las reglas tradicionales sobre audiencias. ¿Qué tipo de público son los públicos de la participación? ¿Qué tipo de interacciones establecen entre sí? ¿Cómo se participa y qué calidad de participación se establece?. La ciudadanía, para Manuel Castells (1998) es una gran mente interactuante o una webactora en términos de Pisani y Piotet (2009) con capacidad para crear dentro del espacio digital su propia información y su propio estilo comunicativo. Esta ciudadanía digital participa en los escenarios virtuales dejando su huella y su rastro a modo de identidad digital. La cultura de la participación implica relaciones que permiten compartir, resolver problemas, desarrollar tareas, construir conjuntamente conocimiento y desarrollar canales de comunicación dinámicos. Esta cultura de la participación aplicada a contextos educativos permite crear oportunidades de aprendizaje y diversificar en los social media un mayor poder de la ciudadanía como usuaria digital.

Keywords

Digital culture; Digital identity; Privacy, Positioning; Reputation.

Palabras clave

Cultura digital; Identidad digital; Posicionamiento; Privacidad; Reputación.

1. Introduction

The culture of participation is one of the characteristics of the first decades of the 21st century. The culture of participation is one that has no barriers to citizen expression, that supports creativity and the sharing of own and collective creations. Individuals believe in the importance of their contributions and feel a connection between what others say and their own contributions.

Participating implies being part, collaborating with others and forming the consensus group to achieve common goals. Actually, participation is a right of citizenship and should be exercised freely, critically and responsibly in all sectors of life. Participation, as a fundamental right recognized in any democratic system, requires regulatory development and policies that support the right of citizens. Otherwise, citizen participation will not occur to the desired extent since the social structure itself, hierarchical and bureaucratized, would allow little margin for it.

2. Culture of participation and roles of citizens

The road to building a culture of participation is long, very complex and laborious. One of the keys is found in the communication model established for such participation. Horizontal communication is the basis for establishing a collaborative relationship based on consensus and mutual trust. This consensus-trust pairing can be the key to success in achieving a true culture of participation. In a digital society that aims to be truly democratic, transparency and participation in the decisions of the society itself is a fundamental aspect to consider. Participation is not an end in itself but rather a means. Participation is what allows taking part and intervening in social life and manifests itself as a tool at the service of citizens and must not remain only on an ideological plane of banal discourse.

Therefore, participation is an actively democratic and effective form of action that positively affects public life. Participation is a responsibility that implies a commitment, a solidarity and critical commitment to society as a whole, when making decisions and collective actions. Clearly, in and with participation, the individual commits and believes in social justice and respect for others with the idea of transforming the society in which he lives in a better place, in accordance with human rights in the digital context that is being built and created day by day.

Associated to the conception of the concept of participation there is another fundamental term, interactivity. The difference between them is that while interactivity is a property provided by technology, participation is a property provided by culture. Both, interactivity and participation, are related terms and depend on the training of the people who carry them out.

Along with the concepts of interactivity and participation, the term convergence arises, which radically changes the idiosyncrasy of our time. The digital convergence that is taking place right now involves both technological changes and communicative, cultural and social changes. We should not stay with the idea that digital convergence implies only great advances in technological supports. In parallel to the changes derived from the fact that from any mobile medium we can carry out any action in cyberspace, new associated communicative and cultural manifestations appear.

Firstly, Osuna and Busón (2007) affirm that we are conditioned by the fact that technologies constantly accompany individuals 24 hours a day, 365 days a year. This makes the ways of communicating change and are increasingly characterized by the immediacy of response. On the other hand, access to information anywhere and at any time allows us to attend a time when citizens have greater power to participate in the culture of their time than they have had at no other time in history of the humanity. The city is beginning to perceive its own communication potential on a local and global scale, to the point that they are creating parallel and, often independent, information networks established by the major media and culture industries. The stories are no longer only in the hands of large companies and large corporations, but also depend on the citizens themselves, who have the ability to take control of social media and tell their own theories differently and in their corresponding contexts. Jenkins (2008) states that:

> "the term "participatory culture" contrasts with older options of the passive media viewer. Rather than talking about media producers and consumers as playing separate roles, we might see them today as interacting participants according to a new set of rules that none of us fully understand. Not all participants are equally created. Corporations, and even individuals within the corporate media, still wield power greater than that of any individual consumer or even that of the consumer as a whole. And some consumers have greater capacities than others to participate in this emerging culture" (p. 15).

Although technological supports are highly developed, they are not capable of creating the phenomenon of media convergence on their own. It is necessary for people to appropriate this technology and interact socially through it, so we can affirm that convergence occurs in the brain of citizens at the time they act collectively. When Pierre Lévy (2004) alludes to the concept of collective intelligence, he tells us that no person is capable of knowing everything, but everyone knows something and, if we put together what belongs to each other and combine it, we can create a common intellect that becomes a great alternative of power in the new participation scenarios. The collective intelligence that Lévy proposes must be understood as an alternative source of media power.

Collective intelligence is much more than the sum of individualities. Collective intelligence does not appear because there is a technological configuration or another, but rather it is something that conforms to the extent that we act together. The culture of participation encompasses new forms of co-creation in cyberspace, hence Berners Lee, cited by Osuna (2010), when referring to the concept of intercreativity says that:

> "the term refers to the ability of individuals to express and create their ideas, knowledge, etc. in an original and unpublished way through digital environments and generating collective knowledge. This author states that intercreativity facilitates the mechanisms for the individuals interact creating community. Digital convergence occurs not only in our heads, but also in our social interactions within cyberspace "(p. 140 - 141)."

In this sense, Lessig goes one step further when he talks about remix culture, defining it as the concept by which society uses all kinds of existing elements to create new things. This author states that the media remix "succeeds when it shows something new to others and fails when it is hackneyed and unoriginal. Like a good essay or a good joke, a remix is inspired by the work of others to create a new one" (Lessig, 2013: 117).

And intercreative participation on an individual and collective scale is taking place at two levels, based on the production of original works and remix production. These remix productions are a rewriting not only of a particular work but usually involve interpretations of culture, politics, economics, etc. These communicative interactions between users break with a functionalist tradition that qualified them as an audience.

In the digital context, the concept of audience as a mere receiver is substantially modified. This term is limited or limited to analog media. Participatory and involved individuals emerge with the information that circulates in cyberspace with constant interaction with their peers, as "participating perceivers" (Marta Lazo, 2008). Manuel Castells (1998), as we said above, classified individuals as "interacting" and "interacted" to record the new roles assumed in the network. That is, "those capable of selecting their multidirectional communication circuits and those who are provided with a limited number of prepackaged options" (Castells, 1998: 404) respectively; different approach to the categories that Gª Canclini enunciated in 1995 of "passive consumers" and "active consumers".

In this communicational ecosystem of participation, Pisani and Piotet (2009) take on special importance when they advocate the term "webactors" in digital settings, defining them as individuals with the ability to produce, act and modify the Web. In this sense, there is talk of new interactions: from reception to empowerment, as appropriation of content, which is an autonomous process in its individuality and common in its collectivity, as indicated by Marta and Gabelas (2013).

The Internet will not discard the old analogical order or its era of web 1.0, but the renewal produced by the development of social networks will create a new participatory digital paradigm. For Jenkins, "The old media never dies, and it doesn't even fade. What die are simply the tools we use to access the content of the media […] […] Distribution technologies are obsolete and replaced; on the other hand, the media evolve " (Jenkins, 2008: 24).

From this point of view, television did not make radio disappear nor the cinema to the theater. It can be assumed that the new participatory digital stage will occupy its space with its own peculiarities and rules. In this sense, the old media never die, what dies in any case are the tools we use to access its content. Distribution technologies will die, but the media will evolve and take hold.

Already in 2005, O`Reilly enunciated the principle of the architecture of participation, which is one of the greatest qualities of Web 2.0. Since it provides many technological instruments that facilitate the collaboration and social relationships of the subjects of the network. This architecture of participation promotes a new knowledge management and O´Reilly affirmed that the Web 2.0 that is being created is not a mere technology, but an attitude of the citizenry before new digital scenarios with an implicit collaboration ethic.

The media changes, therefore, cannot be reduced depending on the technological changes. With digital convergence we have the technology that makes communication possible, on the one hand, and the social and cultural practices developed through that technology, on the other. Precisely because of the collaborative habits and practices carried out by citizens, an internal dynamic of reappropriation and resignification of information and knowledge is taking place.

In this new conception of use, social media are being the vehicles by which the culture of participation has been fostered and it is where the vast majority of new info-communication trends are observed. Movements like giving & partipate, participate and share and new figures like community manager or curator become maxims for participation.

The culture of participation in social media involves the following changes:

- fewer barriers to citizen expression

- that Web 2.0, in general, and social networks, in particular, means the support for creativity and for sharing knowledge,

- greater value for experience and value the opinions and recommendations of equals as a way to co-build a new more just and democratic society.

These precepts are being carried out spontaneously and gregariously, they are being shaped through practice itself. The forms of association of this new ecosystem are similar to the first forms of regrouping of human beings, motivated by interests, tastes, similarities, language, … It is a natural communicative practice that grows as it is carried out and that requires a process of reflection, analysis and study of what happens in the network itself. Ultimately, a digital literacy process would help participation.

This digital literacy for participation implies collective action and the creation of structures that facilitate communication, where spaces for debate and decision-making would have a leading role. Participation implies a social mobilization that cannot be done only with the intention of wanting to participate, but one must know how to participate. This means that before participating you must know why, how, in what way,… you can participate. Participation requires training that allows you to acquire the knowledge and skills necessary to communicate and relate to other people for a collective purpose. From formal, non-formal and informal education, actions must be taken in this regard. In reality it is an education in values for participation that must be present in all social spheres.

Participatory culture must be part of the hidden curriculum of educational institutions. Those who are trained in them must be in contact with this curriculum to have equal access to social opportunities and the experiences that arise for training and knowledge.

Henry Jenkins (2008) speaks of education in the 21st century as one that must address the social skills necessary for the culture of participation. This does not mean that the skills inherited from the printing culture have to be discarded, but that they should be expanded with the skills required by the digital culture. Education faces enormous problems in educating participation, including rapid changes and complex transformations that are difficult to analyze and understand. The 21st century school has new challenges and needs new answers. Nowadays,

> "People are learning to participate in these knowledge cultures outside of any formal educational environment. Much of the learning takes place in the affinity spaces that arise in popular culture. The birth of these knowledge cultures partly reflects the demands that these texts put on consumers (the complexity of transmedia entertainment, for example), But it also reflects the demands that consumers place on the media (the craving for complexity, the need for community, the desire to rewrite key stories. Many schools remain openly hostile to this kind of experience" (p. 256).

A new global scenario is presented where new forms of cultural expression, new scales of values and new structures of society emerge. It is necessary to develop communicative actions that put local and close dynamics of participation in contact with other global and distant dynamics that can be of two types:

- those that occur naturally

- the ones sought and that respond to a conscious strategy, to a deliberate connection process for creative and reflective discussion

In the latter case, participation requires the conscious construction of digital identity.

3. Digital identity

Studies such as those of Livingstone (2004), Perkel (2006) and Zhao (2008) give us an idea of the importance of digital identity. Identity 2.0 or digital identity is everything that we manifest in cyberspace and includes both our actions and the way that others perceive us online. Identity is created as we act within the digital space. All our actions are part of our identity, as well as our omissions or everything we choose not to. When we are shaping our digital identity, it is very important to know that this is what we are for all those who see us, that is, what cyberspace says we are for all those who see us. All the data such as images that we upload, comments that we write, clicks on the links through which we navigate, context where we interact and the place where our data are accessible, identify us and shape our digital profile. Digital identity management is a new skill that citizens must develop within their personal competences. Informational, communicative and media skills are applied at all levels, when we feel the need to seek information and when we want to communicate with someone, always taking into account the ethical and legal use that a correct culture of participation implies.

There is a need for achieving an Internet presence managed effectively in accordance with the evolution of the digital culture. For example, what in modern times could take place in a private conversation is now carried out with public messages on a blog or into social networks. A new public conception of communication is born through microblogs, with a more limited number of characters than blogs, where dialogue flows in small fragments and it's possible to follow other people in order to know what they do and what they write. Representative personalities from different fields of knowledge are followed by millions of individuals to find out what they are working or their opinions about current affairs.

In many instances, individuals not only have a single digital identity, but can create several different identities for themselves on the Internet. In turn, the identity that individuals create for themselves may or may not coincide with the analog identity, that is, with their personal characteristics in the physical space. Any person immersed in the digital space, in general, manages a lot of data hard to calculate, and, most of the time, uncontrollable by the same person, so the need for new literacies is required to train the individual in the new social demands. One of the necessary requirements when managing digital identity is immersion in digital culture itself, participate in it, although people who do not have easy access to cyberspace will always find a digital divide in this regard. Hence, we can state that cyberspace is going to become a medium with a high risk of social exclusion.

A well-managed digital identity following the analog identity has a direct impact in all aspects and spheres, in addition to consolidating a more coherent practice. In fact, we need to build the digital identity linked to the development of informational and communication skills through an actively, open and collaborative attitude on the web. Many aspects of a sociological, cultural and psychological nature converge in the digital identity. Wood and Smith define digital identity as a complex, personal and social construction, taking into account that this construction includes the finer points of how we want others to perceive us, and how, in reality, they perceive us. The digital identity affects the physical or analog identity and vice versa.

Digital identity is not managed in an instrumental way, but is a set of skills that need to be lifelong learned to be carried out when the individual is immersed in the cultured network society. To manage digital identity it is necessary to manage the following elements: visibility, web positioning, reputation and privacy on the Internet.

The concept of visibility is closely associated to the activity that an individual generates in the network. The person can build it from publications or messages on social networks, uploaded videos, blogs, etc. but also this visibility may also result from references or comments from other people. When installing an app on our mobile devices, we are frequently asked, for example, if we allow the application to locate our location. Visibility increases when the subjects send news to social networks or other online tools, in such a way that the information is distributed very efficiently. In fact, the visibility of a person can be measured, and social networks are a prime example. The numbers of contacts, the number of followers, the content replicated are measured. The traffic of content that moves from one space to another within the Internet constitutes an indicator of quantifiable visibility.

Web positioning or Search Engine Optimization (SEO) is closely related to the concept of visibility. Good web positioning implies increased visibility in cyberspace. It is wider concept than incorporating keywords or nmeta tagn labels on websites for search engines to find, as there are so many tags that they are no longer relevant. In addition to these keywords, Web 2.0 ranking is based on the number and strength of sites to be visited by individuals connected to the Internet who browse randomly. Here, with social networks and blogs increasing, the data traffic which applies to a given digital identity is what is going to position it better or worse in cyberspace. Any person Web positioning can be optimized in two ways: by incorporating quality accessible content and by raising awareness and follow-up of the content.

A person's reputation, understood as a reputation that defines his/her digital identity, does not lie with the person himself, but with the opinions that other people have of him/her. This does not mean that the individual himself cannot have an active part in his/her reputation. Solove (2007) states that reputation is a key element for the identity of individuals, since it defines how they interact with others. Reputation is generated under who talks about what on this site and in what way, therefore, if that opinion is displayed on a highly visible site, it will spread very quickly. Linkedin social network, for example, manages very well Internet reputation. Each user creates a profile and can communicate with other people in their professional field. A person can be recommended, and it's possible to add a comment with a brief explanation about the qualities of any professional, and it will be received by whoever is connected in their work environment.

Privacy is another item that shapes the digital identity and anyone should have sufficient capacity to know the minimum elements of privacy that should maintain on the Internet. The privacy issue is a key aspect in the digital society. When installing any application on any electronic device, a contract is being signed, a contract that allows to use the application. By accepting the conditions, the application is free to use the information that the electronic device contains from each of its users and has the power to offer it to third parties. Data such as photographs, email addresses, professional CV, likes, etc. keep often within reach of completely unknown persons, who manage all the data received on social networks. When a person enters his data, he is actually transferring all his information and, in many cases, these data will be visible even if the individual unsubscribes in this digital space. In this sense, digital literacy aims to train individuals to be aware of these aspects and acquire the necessary skills about what they can and cannot share. Everything published on the Internet is recorded for posterity, making it difficult to back down. In the physical life and in the collective memory many facts or events are lost after many years, however, in digital life, no data is lost; it is always there and always present.

In reality, the creation of a personal identity in cyberspace, is a learning experience, both personally and professionally, within the digital culture in which we are currently immersed. We can discuss a hybrid identity of individuals, between their digital and analog identity.

4. Conclusion

In this last decade we have witnessed the emergence spontaneously of the culture of participation at global level. These first years have allowed us to intuit the potential of collective intelligence and the power of communication between equals, where all spheres, from everyday aspects to political, educational or social manifestations, are made public.

Participation can be spontaneous as a tide of rich ideas in constant movement and with no clear goals, or it may have its own identity, intended degrees of visibility, reputation and self-position on the web. In the latter case, participation must develop as a cultural strategy of the different social groups to reinvent digital citizen public powers.

5. Acknowledgement

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