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## Cultural Interactivity in the Digital Age

By Sebastián Urrutia Delgado

*University of Chile*

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It describes some conceptual approaches that deserve some attention due to their relevance to the debate and their daily manifestation in social life. Finally, it warns of certain risks, particularly associated with some principles that may be threatened in this process of rearranging the media ecosystem.

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# Cultural Interactivity in the Digital Age

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## I. INTRODUCTION

Reviewing modern history, it's possible to identify some technological innovations that have resulted in paradigmatic transformations on how to scale the supply of information and symbolic content. The invention of the printing press, the development of cinematographic projection, the introduction of satellite television or fiber optics are some contributions to a phenomenon whose main consequence has been a rearrangement of space and time.

In recent years there has been a legitimate concern about the quality of the content that circulates through interactive platforms, search engines, and digital media. Episodes such as the Cambridge Analytica scandal or the 2016 US presidential election have opened an area of concern regarding false information, civil society misinformation, and its effects on the democratic system.

In Chile a series of forest fires that affected the central and southern areas in 2017, led to one of the first episodes of large-scale circulation of false information that linked its origin to the Mapuche community members or non-existent electrical outages. During the social outbreak of October 2019, false news was spread regarding specific events of confrontations, murders, and burned buses; and in the current health crisis resulting from the global pandemic, wrong information has been spread about side effects of some vaccines or remedies that mitigate the possibility of contagion, and home self-diagnostic tests.

**Author:** MPA and MBA, University of Chile. Degree in Social communication, Diego Portales University, Chile.  
e-mail: seba.urrutia@gmail.com

However, this transformation also has positive effects; digital platforms, and social media “lower the cost of maintaining relationships that are rooted in real-world interactions, so in fact, they promote heterogeneity within social circles” (Valenzuela and Rojas, 2019). The old public sphere described by Habermas (1989), where citizens and authorities discussed issues of social interest, expands and acquires hybrid characteristics as a result of interactive platforms whose operation gives unusual capacity of interpellation to those who are part of that old construct called the mass audience.

In this context of digital convergence, this essay seeks to analyze the tensions generated in terms of exchange and cultural participation of the communications ecosystem. The hypothesis is that this transformation has awakened a renewed interest in audiences and their ability to understand, propagate and even rework content that is symbolic, and at the same time, interactive.

## II. ACCESS TO INFORMATION SOURCES

The overwhelming alternatives of the content offered by interactive platforms and the media have increased the competition for users' attention. The mobility of reception devices has generated an “abundant” and “environment” media ecosystem. Abundant, since never in history, we've seen a volume of information like today; and environment, because it is not necessary to search for information since it reaches us constantly through social networks, portals, and traditional media (Boczkowski, 2019). This oversupply of information fuels consumption habits that often become incidental, non-hierarchical, and detached.

The evidence regarding these differential diffusion dynamics shows “that users are more likely to pay attention and distribute news that is novel, emotionally arousing and/or have practical value” (Valenzuela and Rojas, 2019). Novelty attracts human attention, contributes to decision-making, and fosters the exchange of information by updating our understanding of the world. Likewise, it has a social value since it transmits status due to exclusive knowledge (Vosoughi *et al.*, 2018). However, novelty loses value if that information is not accurate or verifiable.

In emotions, their manifestation can occur in different forms such as anger, anxiety, sadness, optimism, and happiness. According to Valenzuela and Arriagada (2016), “news that attracts attention are those that are emotionally charged and the greater the

*emotionality, the more impact they have on people's memory and behavior."*

These new terms of participation have fragmented and atomized the old mass audience. As McQuail (2010) suggests: "*More options for audience formation based on shared interests are available to more people, and there could be greater freedom and choice.*" Today, that old massive scale can only be seen in media events that require prior planning. They are broadcast live or interrupt the normal flow of daily life (such as the results of national elections or sporting and cultural events).

On the other hand, this fragmentation has resulted in a growing migration of advertising investment to digital platforms such as Google and Facebook. They become more effective intermediaries for advertisers in terms of influence and massiveness. Consequently, the traditional media have been challenged to seek strategies that convince the audience to start paying for digital content that historically has been for free. It's key to study audiences in small groups, using methodologies that integrate multiple platforms and establishing segmentation different and complementary from the conventional sociodemographic profiles.

### III. DIGITAL INTERACTIVITY

The new dynamics of the digital ecosystem have opened opportunities for the formation of small audiences based on common objectives and identities, which serves dispersed groups and propose a model of participation where users become consumers and producers of messages that are "*shaping, sharing, reformulating and mixing in an unprecedented way*" (Jenkins *et al.*, 2013). This is manifested in practices of cultural participation where individuals and/or groups of agents appropriate, modify and disseminate content "*such as memes, remixes of songs or collective writings*" (Rodríguez, 2020).

However, economic valuation systems remain anchored in aggregated measurements (such as sales, reading surveys, clicks, and ratings) instead of focusing on the degree of impact and the potential effect of the message. In the digital age, this business model has been consolidated under the "attention economy" (Davenport and Beck, 2001), which monetizes the permanence of users through data collection. The more information obtained from the audience, the easier it is to anticipate consumer tastes and preferences to capture advertising revenue. In the words of Zuboff (2019): "*The person is the mine of digital wealth.*" In her book "*Surveillance Capitalism*," she develops the concept of "*behavioral surplus*," the capital gain that derives from the commercialization of personal data resulting from its free capture, storage, and finally processing in predictive products or profiles.

The 2016 US presidential election represents the milestone that marked the greatest global concern and skepticism towards interactive platforms and social media. The incessant search to capture the data of the audiences unveiled unscrupulous practices of production of fake content that is circulated by intelligent algorithms and sophisticated statistical methods based on our past behavior (scores, ratings, recommendations, and images shared) or voluntarily when someone signs the terms and conditions that are rarely read.

These systems tend to reinforce pre-existing beliefs by transmitting information and symbolic content that is consistent with our preferences. Still, they risk reducing the perceptions of the world around us by skewing our opinions through misleading confirmations. This phenomenon has been called "*filter bubbles*" or "*echo chambers*," since in practice, they are semi-closed systems where divergent views appear little or nothing.

### IV. CONCLUSION

The influence of interactive platforms in the nature and extent of cultural participation is a phenomenon in full development. In times of catastrophe such as the current global pandemic, the need to share experiences, understand other people's perceptions and make sense of uncertain realities acquires enormous relevance.

The new production, storage, and dissemination logics that arise from this digital convergence have ramifications beyond the communications sector and its business model, affecting areas of public interest such as intellectual property, privacy, and political-democratic systems. The preceding evidence shows a phenomenon that is in full development. However, the enigma of the gaps that can be generated in access to quality information, the privatization of knowledge and the management of subjectivity strongly emerges.

In this scenario, it becomes imperative to create awareness of the costs, and benefits (not only economic) of adopting these platforms, moving from a user logic to digital citizenship where higher levels of transparency are discussed, questioned, and demanded.

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