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## Critical media literacy from an empirical-philosophical-journalistic methodology: a structural approach for educommunication

### *Alfabetización mediática crítica desde la metodología empírico-filosófico-periodística: el enfoque estructural para la educomunicación*

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#### **Abstract**

On the basis of works such as *Educación para el mercado* (Reig, 2013), members of the Seville School of Information Structure (GREHCCO Group) undertook a study of the dynamics that condition the construction of the individual in contemporary society. One factor influencing this is mass media discourse. According to the perspective of the Political Economy of Communication (PEC), this is a transversal macro-discourse that goes beyond isolated messages and involves a common discursive line of powerful projection, screened in turn by interrelations with political and economic-corporate power. Herein we present the potential of research into the construction of individual identity based on critical philosophical approaches and their application to communication studies. We consider that this contribution, which can be incorporated into the techniques of critical discourse analysis, raises the transdisciplinary nature of CPE and represents a methodological advance with notable possibilities. Accordingly, we propose a method of analysis (structural hemerography) that encompasses a more critical and conscious media literacy, as it sheds light on the interconnectivity of the media and the nuclei of power. The main conclusion is that, during crucial periods of identity formation, media literacy needs to be even more critical and reflective of mainstream discourses. These findings can form the basis for future critical literacy proposals, which remain under construction.

#### **Keywords**

Media literacy; critical thinking; educommunication; information structure; power; critical philosophy.

#### **Resumen**

*A partir del trabajo plasmado en obras como Educación para el mercado (Reig, 2013), miembros de la escuela sevillana de Estructura de la Información (Grupo GREHCCO) pusieron en marcha el estudio de las dinámicas que condicionan la construcción del individuo en la sociedad contemporánea. Uno de los factores que incide en ello es el discurso mediático de masas; entendido, desde la óptica de la Economía Política de la Comunicación (EPC), como un macrodiscurso transversal que va más allá de los mensajes aislados y comporta una línea discursiva común y de proyección poderosa, tamizada a su vez por las interrelaciones con el poder político y económico-empresarial. En este artículo se aborda el potencial de las investigaciones acerca de la construcción de la identidad del individuo a partir de planteamientos filosóficos críticos y su aplicación a los estudios en comunicación. Consideramos que esta aportación, incorporable a las técnicas de análisis crítico del discurso, plantea el carácter transdisciplinar de la EPC y supone un avance metodológico con notables posibilidades. Así, proponemos un método de análisis (la hemerografía estructural) que permite una alfabetización mediática más crítica y consciente, pues arroja luz sobre las interconexiones de los medios con los núcleos de poder. Como principal conclusión se constata que, durante los períodos cruciales de conformación de la identidad, el aprendizaje mediático debe ser aún más crítico y reflexivo con los discursos mainstream. Los hallazgos obtenidos pueden asentar la base de las propuestas de alfabetización crítica en el futuro, pues esta se encuentra aún en construcción.*

#### **Palabras clave**

*Alfabetización mediática; pensamiento crítico; educomunicación; estructura de la información; poder; filosofía crítica.*

## 1. Introduction

From the study of critical philosophers such as Bauman (2006, 2007a, 2007b, 2009), Beck (2008, 2009), Bell (1994), Taylor (1996, 2005, 2006), Sennett (2001, 2004), Han (2014a, 2014b, 2022a, 2022b), Lipovetsky (2007, 2010) or Giddens (2003, 2005), it is possible to approach very interesting reflections on the configuration of the self with a critical approach that is enriching to incorporate into the new research on postmodern society in communication. From a philosophical perspective, there are numerous authors who have delved into the study of the configuration of identity in the current environment, and who reinforce the idea of an exacerbated individualism in the identity quality of today's society. The role of communication theorists in this analysis is also complementary to the positioning of critical philosophers, especially in relation to the effects generated by mass culture in the contemporary context. We can therefore say that, in the study of the repercussions of mediations on the construction of the social individual, communicologists and philosophers follow a two-way path. To date, their research has intersected without touching each other.

In order to approach this transdisciplinary methodology, an analysis of the forms of subjectivity is pertinent, as well as an approach to the connection of the philosophical discourse of the forms of subjectivation with the critical approach to the study of the cultural industries made explicit in the methodology of the schools of Political Economy of Communication, Information and Culture. The bibliographical review and critical analysis of texts on modernity, the shaping of contemporary society or the creation of identity in authors such as Foucault or Vattimo, in addition to those already mentioned above, is essential.

We can specify that the research consists of investigating the works of contemporary philosophers who deal with the expression of communication and the projection of the individual in society. These philosophers raise some very relevant reflections on the media projection of the individual and therefore, from the methodological approach of the EPCIC (of critical interrelation of concepts and socio-political and cultural dynamics), it is appropriate to incorporate this type of critical approaches to the research methodology in educommunication.

The main objective of the article is to develop a method of media content analysis from a structural approach that can be applied as an educational tool. In this way, the aim is to provide a model that can be used to implement critical media literacy through the analysis of media content and products. This method should enable the analysis of the creation and projection of identity through current media discourses. An analysis that we will call empirical-philosophical-journalistic, given that it will be eminently transdisciplinary.

## 2. Methodological approaches. Transdisciplinarity as a polyhedral basis.

In order to respond to these objectives, this article considers transdisciplinary documentary research as a central methodological basis, based on analysis as "an instrument for gathering information, a reading which, unlike common reading, must be carried out following the scientific method, that is, it must be systematic, objective, replicable and valid" (Abela, 2002: 2). Within the main currents in theory and methodology in contemporary research, we detect how "the emphasis is placed on the concepts of identity (social sciences), culture (arts and humanities) and on the relationship between identity and culture (cultural studies). The general trend that articulates all of the above is transdisciplinarity" (Zavala, 2001: 27). Many schools have approached communication as a profoundly multifaceted field. In the words of Martín-Barbero (1992), there is a growing awareness of the transdisciplinary status of communication as a field of study. Calvo and Vélez (1992) also stress that new theoretical and methodological fields of research are created from the analysis and critical reading of the research analysed and its products.

It is not surprising, therefore, in this context that proposals such as the present one arise, which aims to bring together conceptions and postulates from philosophy in order to approach a profound understanding of the media phenomenon. There are a multitude of thematic recurrences or methodological borrowings through appropriations: "communication works on processes and dimensions that incorporate historical, anthropological and aesthetic questions and knowledge, while history, sociology, anthropology and political science take charge of the media and the ways in which the cultural industries operate" (Martín-Barbero, 1992: 2). However, as numerous works have shown, "transdisciplinarity in communication studies does not mean the dissolution of its objects in those of the social disciplines, but the construction of the articulations -media and intertextualities- that make its specificity" (Idem).

Authors such as Pereira also point to the understanding of communication and its various specialisations more as a transdisciplinary field of knowledge than as a discipline. "A field in permanent construction that has been legitimising itself, refining its research methodologies and constructing some theoretical and methodological approaches in the process of creating new knowledge" (Pereira, 2005: 3).

Following this line, our proposal lies in taking advantage of the conceptions and articulations of another discipline, in this case philosophy, to enrich and provide critical media literacy with a larger and multidimensional corpus. The supreme objective of the scientific community is to avoid dispersion and excessive specialisation in order to build bridges of understanding and a contextual approach to the phenomena under study. It is a matter of favouring a kaleidoscopic vision of the media projection of identity through the complement of the valuable philosophical prism.

We therefore propose to bring together different philosophical perspectives with the methodology of critical analysis of media discourse through the structural approach. The scientific-methodological foundation is based, as we have said, on the structural approach and, within it, on the Political Economy of Communication. We try to provide our work with an eminently critical stance and a perspective of totality that allows for the broadest possible synchronic interpretation. In short, an analysis of the sociological, ideological, economic and media interconnections that brings us closer to a sketch of the current macro-context. Structuralist thinking highlights the need for a macro discursive analysis. Thus, transferred to the field of mass communication, it follows that contextual interpretation is essential to understand the real hidden motivation of media messages. Likewise, we also find contributions in mathematical structure or in the studies of Gestalt psychology, which is particularly committed to transcending associationist theory and seeking a more complex structural approach. In this sense, thinkers such as Marx and Freud also use the concept of structure. The former to crystallise his hypothesis of historical evolution, and the latter to illuminate the structural model of the human unconscious. In this way, we intend to show the relevance of the multidimensional vision with regard to a fact that is already a fact in itself: mass communication.

Our argument is the convergence of a set of results from studies, dialogical work with texts from both disciplines (Communication and Philosophy) and pedagogical strategies for the implementation of critical media literacy. Our aim is to address these fundamental questions for all those involved in education and, especially, in "its most current and controversial variant: media literacy" (Kendall & McDougall, 2012).

### **3. Political Economy of Communication, philosophy and critical media literacy**

#### **3.1 Premises and convergences in the study of communication: building bridges**

Within the basic conceptual framework, we have to highlight the premise that behind the current media there are shareholders with common interests in other business organisations or political or financial institutions, which brings with it the appearance of a macro-discourse with implicit intentions that are completely alien to journalistic criteria. Our aim as scientists would be to unveil this underlying level, recalling the words of the philosopher Paul Ricoeur, who stated that "interpretation is the work of thought that consists in deciphering the meaning hidden in the apparent meaning, in unfolding the levels of signification implied in literal signification" (Ricoeur, 2003). In this sense, we start from the idea that, as Vázquez Montalbán asserts, in "the domain of social communication, the sender grants an intentionality to the communiqué that coincides with his interests in order to impose them on the receiver" (2000: 17).

The selection of content, the discursive treatment, the approach or the segmentation of information are daily journalistic practices in which these factors come to influence, putting at risk the exercise of social responsibility by journalists and their role in the development of a dignified profession. According to Reig: "one question is the good faith of journalists in their desire to offer rigorous and effective information and another is the messaging line imposed by companies in accordance with the interests of Western mercantile expansion" (2004: 51-52). Taking these interferences in journalistic work as frequent and, in most cases, far removed from the will of the reporter, we must reflect on how and why they occur. The methodological school that provides us with the theoretical corpus to do so in a more complete way is the Political Economy of Communication, and the set of techniques that allow us to verify the hypothesis correspond to critical discourse analysis.

The journalistic document is a fundamental primary source for the study of communication, but also for the study of social manifestations in general. Increasingly, hemerography is being used - in other disciplines apart from journalism itself - as a tool for the analysis of historical, political or socio-cultural events. The knowledge that the media text can consolidate or expand requires an extensive prior cultural base, acquired both in the endocultural and exocultural process. Even assuming the subjective load that the media story contains, it is considered a substantial element for sociological and cultural study, among other modalities.

Van Dijk (2003) considers journalistic news as a specific type of discourse. Developments in the cross-disciplinary field of discourse analysis allow us to study media text and speech in a more explicit, systematic and in-depth way. Within a broader socio-economic and cultural framework, this analysis considers media discourse as a particular form of social, institutional practice. This discursive practice of

production or reception of the media product can be analysed theoretically in two main components: a textual component and a contextual component. The textual component systematically analyses the different structures of journalistic discourse at various levels. The contextual component analyses the cognitive and social factors, conditions, limits or consequences of these textual structures and, indirectly, their economic, cultural and historical context. In this sense, Lozano argues that with the description of textual culture "recipients do not receive recognisable singular messages, but textual sets; recipients contrast the messages with the sets of deposited textual practices; recipients never receive a single message, they receive many, whether in a synchronic or diachronic sense" (Lozano, 1991: 37). It is therefore essential to claim the analysis of discourse within a context that influences it and is transformed by it, using the media document as an object of research.

### 3.2 Political Economy of Communication and Critical Discourse Analysis

We start from CPE, seen as a method of analysis and as "the best and most complete theoretical line to approach the study of globalisation" (Quirós, 2005: 231). Observing the approaches to globalisation of authors such as Giddens (2005) or Beck (2004a, 2004b), we see that many of their postulates are common, although the prism of analysis of the field varies. Nowadays, we consider the CPE to be the best approach to understand the functioning of the communication industry in a new phase of capitalism characterised by "the end of ideologies, single thinking, the blunting of critical thinking and functionalist reinforcement" (Quirós, 2010: 23-44). This approach of the communication theorist Fernando Quirós is quite complementary to the critical view of postmodernity presented in his works by Vattimo, Descamps or Urdanibia.

In a strict sense, Political Economy is, as Moscó pointed out: "the study of the social relations, particularly power relations, that mutually constitute the production, distribution and consumption of resources, including communication resources" (2006). That is, the entire operational dynamics of the communication business. A more general definition of Political Economy refers to the study of control and survival in social life, which again brings us back to Foucauldian reminiscences. In general terms, the processes of control to which we refer are political, since they constitute the social organisation of relations within a community; the processes of survival, on the other hand, are primarily economic because they encompass processes of production and reproduction, such as those present in the information industries. Hence also the connection between economics, politics and communication.

Communication has generated the quaternary sector of production, presented as the business and mainstay of the 21st century: the free flow of information. Philosophers such as Foucault have argued this link between power and communication. Similarly, many philosophers (such as Giddens, Taylor, Lash or Touraine) stress the crucial role of social factors in the creation of individual and collective identity. The structural analysis of the message aims to decipher the macro discursive line of each medium, through the links and interrelationships that guide this informative treatment. Only through knowledge of these multiple factors is it possible to give the text its full meaning. In order to understand them, it is necessary to delve deeper into those connections that remain alien to society (shadow power structure), as well as into the corporate strategies that tend to protect and self-legitimise the current system. A similar reflection, but from a philosophical perspective, is offered by Lanceros in the work compiled by Gianni Vattimo et al. on postmodernity (2011).

Broadly speaking, in the study of the structuralist scientific method, the contribution of multiple postulates stands out: from the contributions of communicative theory in Europe -with authors such as Kuhn, Popper, Lakatos or Feyerabend-, through Marxist theories, Freudian psychology and the notes of the Frankfurt School (as a reference of critical thought) and its allusions to classical German philosophy. Discourse analysis is at the same time a cognitive, social and political analysis, although it focuses above all on the role played by discourses, both locally and globally, both in society and in its structures or institutions. "Critical discourse analysis is based on certain elements of structural analysis, and brings together and synthesises many other traditions, particularly those of a more Foucauldian origin" (Conde, 2009: 28).

Classrooms are spaces where discursive actions and practices do not operate independently of what happens in the outside world, but are linked to phenomena that construct social structures, such as power and ideology (Jenks, 2020). Hence, CDA methods (Wodak & Meyer, 2015), distinguish between discourse and other aspects of social reality, "between structure and agency" (Newman, 2020). In the field of education, CDA also has interesting applications in terms of the theoretical and methodological framework that allows us to address the place of discourse in educational practices, "attending to the description of the texts that are produced in this discursive order and the interpretation of the discursive practice and the social practice to which the discourses that emerge in this field belong" (Moreno Mosquera, 2016: 138). Critically analysing discourses enhances both basic competences and specific skills.

### **3.3 Symbolic interactionism and its application to the critical analysis of media discourse: communicologists and philosophers**

Within qualitative research, one of the positions to be highlighted for its suitability with the approach of critical discourse analysis is the tradition of symbolic interactionism, a current oriented towards subjective meanings and individual attributions of meaning. Other currents related to qualitative study are "ethnomethodology, interested in the routines of everyday life and their production, and structuralist or psychoanalytic positions, which start from the processes of the psychological or social unconscious" (Flick, 2007: 31). Each of them tries to systematise how the subjects of study relate (through their attitudes, experiences and concerns) in different ways to the context in which they are analysed. This idea of context should be taken in its broadest sense, given that symbolic interactions also take place between discourses, which is what Conde describes as follows: "every discourse is produced and develops in relation to another discourse to which it alludes, interpellates, approaches or from which it differs" (Conde, 2009: 43).

Specifically, the position of symbolic interactionism has developed out of the philosophical tradition of American pragmatism: "the empirical starting point is the subjective meanings that individuals attribute to their activities and their environments" (Flick, 2007: 32). His focus is on interaction processes (social action that is characterised by a reciprocal orientation), and investigations of these processes are based on a particular concept of interaction that delves into the symbolic character of social actions. For Uwe Flick, "meanings are handled in an interpretative process used by the person in dealing with the things he or she encounters, and this process modifies them" (2007: 32-33). The consequence is that the different ways in which individuals invest objects, events, experiences, etc. with meanings form the central starting point for the research. The reconstruction of these subjective views becomes the instrument for analysing social worlds. These notions are again reminiscent of Foucault (1991) and Álvarez Yágüez's (2013) approach to forms of subjectivation. Let us recall that Álvarez already spoke - addressing the will to truth and subjectivity - of a totalising power that addressed the globality of the processes and of another individualising power, forming a particular subjectivity through different practices. The latter power would refer to those meanings, described by Flick, which individuals handle in their interpretative processes.

Following this approach, the fundamental methodological principle of symbolic interactionism implies that the researcher must view the world from the point of view of the subjects under study. The first methodological imperative thus comes "in the form of subjective theories, used by people to explain the world to themselves (...) it is important that these give access to temporal and local contexts, reconstructed from the narrator's point of view" (Flick, 2007: 33). For philosophers such as Beck, Giddens and Lash (1997), this biographical creation by the individual is key, as production, representation and combination of various vital elements. We thus observe a new connection between philosophical approaches and those of qualitative communication research.

Symbolic interactionism is rooted in the fact that "participants actively produce realities through the meanings attributed to certain events and objects, and that social research cannot escape these attributions of meanings if it is to deal with social realities" (Flick, 2007: 44-45). In this process of constructing reality, texts (understood in the broadest sense as comprising written, visual, symbolic discourses, etc.) are taken to be visions of the world in whose process of interpretation (understanding, attribution of meaning) factors such as experience, the natural and social environment, events, activities, etc. intervene.

We can see how the assumptions of symbolic interactionism are relevant in the critical analysis of discourse from a double perspective. From the point of view of the construction of narratives (textual or audiovisual) as versions of reality projected onto the individual, it is very interesting to observe the modifications that the graphic/visual components undergo when they converge into a whole: the media product. That is to say, we can witness two recreations or textual (media) representations of the same event that are very different from each other, taking into account the symbolic projection that results from the deliberate pooling of certain elements that the broadcaster makes interact under his particular criteria: images, music, sound effects, textual and graphic components, etc. Secondly, with regard to the interpretation by the receiving subject, the discourse must take into account the contextual characteristics of its audience, which (rules, values, standardised patterns of behaviour, etc.) are crucial when it comes to orienting the symbolic perception that the message will generate. This idea would again converge with American sociologist Scott Lash's approach to cultural structures (linked to information and public communication) which would be the condition of reflexivity of the social agents of late modernity.

### **3.4 Communication as the epicentre of the spider's web from a philosophical perspective**

In the contemporary era, the philosopher Manuel Barrios argues for the positioning of the communicator - and no longer the worker - as the dominant figure in our world. The mass media mogul - as well as the

television presenter or the *influencer* - has colonised the new centre. "Our technological world is above all a world of total communication: the way in which the "total mobilisation" advocated by Jürgen takes place today is in terms of pan-communicative reality. Everything is communicable to everyone: everything must be" (Barrios, 2001: 218). This communicated and communicable world, which in many respects replaces the real one, is extremely attractive, given the promises of freedom and individual choice that it brings with it: "the new world of virtual reality is characterised by promising the user free access to everything they want, encouraging a dream of omnipotence that, while reconfiguring them, has unmistakable traits of sacredness" (Barrios, 2001: 202). The goal, therefore, would no longer be the superman but the "supercable", the total and multidimensional connection.

The *mass media* are our medium, "the symbolic reality in which we are and in which we move", says Barrios (2001: 220). This other reality travels with us wherever we go and we live in it. The philosopher from Seville also addresses the Nietzschean perspective of the postmodern multiplied self, which stands out for its instability. Here we see a complementary approach to that of the intrinsic weakness of postmodern ethics as expounded by Bauman. At the same time, Barrios complements Lipovetsky's (2007) analysis of consumerist hyperindividualism, in the sense that he not only highlights how the new logic of consumption shapes the dominant tastes of the market under the guise of presenting an à la carte offer, but also warns about how this consumerist logic shapes the subject himself, in the form of a "hyperman": no longer the Nietzschean superman freed from the chains of the old values, but its parodic and decadent version, the man of the hyper(market), who drags his burden heavily. While Nietzsche conceives the openness to the multiform becoming that life consists of as an experience of acceptance of our mortality, here it is a matter, as in video games - or social networks (Illouz, 2013) - of being able to die many times without affecting the player's life in any way. The abstraction of "an I separated from the world, who plays at collecting experiences without really getting involved in them: apparently free, but fiercely subject to his own capricious will" (Barrios, 2015: 4) is once again enshrined.

All these spider webs woven between society, the economy, the individual and identity find their articulation in the mass media, with audiovisual content occupying a pre-eminent place. By tackling the process of media mediation, from its genesis to its reception, it is possible to approach formats, peculiarities and keys to the process of identity identification.

### **3.5 Philosophy and Educommunication: Shared Exploration of Identity**

The weight of the media in the creation of individual and collective identity is widely addressed from a philosophical perspective. In fact, the Italian philosopher Gianni Vattimo spoke as early as 1994 of the relationship between the media and the dissolution of the grand narratives, an idea which in turn takes us back to the text by the thinker Jean-François Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition*, since, for the Frenchman, the era of the grand narratives (or "metanarratives", which attempted to give a universal and unitary meaning to the course of history) had ended with the arrival of postmodernity.

It is therefore appropriate to combine these perspectives with empirical verification through media discourse analysis. The incorporation of part of the philosophical thinking on the creation of identity must be complemented with the vision of critical discourse analysis on the projection of the individual. The methodology that brings together both approaches, which we have called empirical-philosophical-journalistic, is intended to verify in a practical way a hypothesis that many contemporary philosophers have put forward about the palpable influence of the mass media in today's society. This objective can be achieved by combining philosophical approaches with a purely journalistic approach through discourse analysis. This incorporation can also serve to enhance the practical character of philosophical study as applied research.

The study of media literacy also reflects on the way in which cultural products connect with the configuration of individuals, analysing how the media play an essential role in the creation of identity on and offline. In this sense, "the "key competence" of this literacy would be a critical analysis of how we attribute meaning to cultural material, and how we attribute meaning to ourselves" (Kendall and McDougall, 2012: 23). Already Lave and Wenger (1991) emphasised learning not determined by skills, but by learners' own theorisation of their culture. This experiential, biographical learning, in addition to critical media literacy, poses a reflexive negotiation of their identity as a further dimension of cultural literacy. What Kehler and Greig (2005: 367) see as promoting ethnographic research that enables young people to read "textualised stories of their lives". Critical literacy research should therefore "embrace this "ethnographic mix" to transition from text to new forms of exploration that probe how individuals, immersed in culture, attribute meaning to media" (Kendall & McDougall, 2012: 26).

The multiplicity in digital representations of identities draws real possibilities around "online socialisation platforms as emerging media contexts with educational possibilities" (Livingstone, Haddon & Görzig, 2011). However, economic, political and ideological control is exerted over these platforms, networks or media, which conditions the cultures that are truly present and empowered in them. This is what numerous

critical authors, within CPE, have delimited as globalising powers and discursive macrostructures of meaning (Ramonet, 2006; Castells, 2008; Ritzer & Jurgenson, 2010; Calvo, 2018; Castañeda & Williamson, 2021). This occurs despite the appearance of control by users, understood as EMIRECs (Aparici & Silva, 2012) or *prosumers* (Aparici & García Marín, 2018) over the construction of their digital identity.

### 3.6 Critical media literacy: challenges and realities

Whether we talk about Educommunication or Media Education, *Media Education* or *Media Literacy*, media literacy is understood as "the knowledge, skills and competencies required to use and interpret the media" (Buckingham, 2010: 7). In this way, "both the way we read media discourses and the way they are organised, structured and related to other discourses and to reality" (Toro Castillo, 2016: 32) participate in this process. Two contributions stand out here: one didactic, on how media education is integrated into general formal education; and the other critical, which is responsible for proposing the exercise of critical thinking in the face of media messages (Pérez Tornero, 2000: 13). It is not only about learning to interpret the media correctly, but also to do so through the user's own experience: "a literacy to form readers open to experience (...) open to their own transformation" (Larrosa, 2006: 93).

We live in a context dominated by the digital (Kaplún, 1998; Castells, 2001), an "infosphere" (Florida, 2006), which often carries more weight than the physical analogue environment. It is no coincidence that nearly 32% of adolescents use their mobile phones for more than 5 hours a day (UNICEF Spain, 2021). In this environment, screens play a key role and "alter the ways of perceiving, feeling and constructing the notion of reality" (Serres, 2016), which is why educational policies should promote the development of a critical perspective among adolescents in the use of these devices.

According to Buckingham (2010), the real impediment to the promotion of media literacy as a form of critical thinking lies in the transition to digital literacy understood as a technological process assessed through competences and skills, without the accompaniment of deep and consequential reflection. Critical media literacy requires multi-competential learning, which takes into account both digital competences per se and modes of relationship and interaction. Hence, it is highly relevant to transcend the ICT approach with that of TRIC (Relationship, Information and Communication Technologies), proposed by Gabelas and Marta (2020), in order to focus on the relationships established in the technological-communicative processes.

Media education combines different dimensions related to narrative, the technological component, the possibilities of interaction, the dissemination of content, ideology and explicit and implicit values (Ferrés & Piscitelli, 2012). Critical media literacy also adds an extra component, which is in turn an important goal: "to put up barriers to the violent reproduction of indoctrinating ideas by raising awareness and, therefore, taking control of messages and media" (Calvo, 2018: 3780). Only in this way is it possible to confront harmful behaviour, such as online hate speech.

Technological solutionism" (Morozov, 2015) is based on the assumption that technological implementation per se can be used to solve problems, which, derived from the educational dimension, undervalues the social function of schools (Adell-Segura et al., 2018). The COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted the crucial role of the school "as a guarantee of equal opportunities, as an institution of socialisation and as a key agent in the complexity of the digital framework in which we live" (Mesquita-Romero, Fernández-Morante & Cabreiro López, 2021: 48). An environment in which new literacies must emerge that combine the new digital devices with the integral development of citizens, without «forgetting the most critical approaches to media education» (Gutiérrez & Tyner, 2012: 35). In order to implement it, it is necessary, as Calvo (2018: 3775) argues, "to overcome instrumental educommunicative practices that submit to a system of consumption and that justify its gearing for the benefit of the organs of power that control it".

Overcoming the "tricky" instrumentalisation of new technologies (Martín Barbero, 2012) to cover up deficiencies in the adjustment between educational processes and social progress requires new processes of media education for their implementation. The new literacy thus implies "a dimension of understanding, of critical and reflective reading, but which is complemented by creative work, the active participation of the subjects" (Micheli, 2017: 75). It is therefore far beyond training in technological tools and the use of digital media for learning, "educating with the media" and "educating in the media" (Ferrés, 1998). It requires analysis, evaluation and reflection within a post-digital society which, as such, questions the very use and appropriateness of the digital. Twenty-first century citizens need to be digitally literate in all symbolic systems, "to become competent users, critical readers and active writers in social media" (Osuna-Acedo, Frau-Meigs & Marta-Lazo, 2018: 40-41).

### 3.7 Critical thinking and media literacy in LOMCE (2013) and LOMLOE (2020)

For critical media literacy to materialise, we need a political project and a regulatory framework to promote it. Therefore, it is relevant to analyse, in the context of a social macro-structure with specific

peculiarities (such as the Spanish one), the weight that the latest educational laws (LOMCE and LOMLOE) have given to media literacy and critical thinking.

In the case of the LOMCE (Organic Law 8/2013), a series of mentions are established that are identified with digital competence, such as the mastery of technological language, access to information and the creation of content, or learning the different uses and values of the technological universe. To this end, students must be competent to search for, manage, analyse and evaluate information sources; manage their digital identity appropriately; create and share content in open format; be aware of the risks derived from the Web environment; solve problems through the use of technologies. In this legislative text, there are barely four direct references to the promotion of critical thinking or the critical spirit, and none of them in relation to media literacy. This law also suffers from a lack of attention to content, focusing on the use of the tool.

In the LOMLOE (Organic Law 3/2020), on the other hand, there are 17 mentions of the development and promotion of a critical spirit. Let us see below, by way of example, some of them, as well as the content directly related to media literacy:

“(i) develop basic technological competences and initiate in their use, for learning purposes, developing a critical spirit towards their functioning and the messages they receive and elaborate”.

*Fourteena. Article 23(e) and (k) are amended as follows:*

“e) To develop basic skills in the use of information sources in order to acquire new knowledge with a critical sense. To develop basic technological competences and advance in ethical reflection on their functioning and use”.

5. Without prejudice to their specific treatment, reading comprehension, oral and written expression, audiovisual communication, digital competence, social and business entrepreneurship, the promotion of a critical and scientific spirit, emotional education and education in values and creativity will be worked on in all subjects.

*Fourth final provision. Amendment of Organic Law 3/2018, of 5 December, on Personal Data Protection and guarantee of digital rights. Article 83.1 of Organic Law 3/2018, of 5 December, on the Protection of Personal Data and guarantee of digital rights shall be worded as follows:*

“1. The education system shall guarantee the full integration of pupils into the digital society and the learning of responsible consumption and critical and safe use of digital media, respectful of human dignity, social justice and environmental sustainability, constitutional values, fundamental rights and, in particular, respect for and guarantee of personal and family privacy and the protection of personal data. Actions in this area will be inclusive, in particular with regard to learners with special educational needs.

The Education Administrations should include in the development of the curriculum the digital competence referred to in the previous section, as well as the elements related to risk situations derived from the inappropriate use of ICT, with special attention to situations of online violence.

*“Article 19. Pedagogical principles.*

3. In order to encourage the habit and mastery of reading, all educational centres shall dedicate a daily time to reading, in the terms set out in their educational project.

In order to facilitate this practice, educational administrations will promote plans to encourage reading and literacy in different media, technologies and languages. To this end, where appropriate, the collaboration of families and volunteers, as well as the exchange of good practices, will be taken into account.

*“Article 82. Equal opportunities in rural areas.*

6. The planning of schooling in rural areas should include sufficient economic resources for the maintenance of the network of rural centres, the transport and canteen facilities for pupils who require them, and equipment with computer and telecommunication devices and networks and Internet access”.

As we can see, although mentions of critical thinking increase in this new law and the recognition of the technological component in education is more profuse, there is still no mention of media literacy as such, and the critical dimension is not used to refer to these learning processes in particular, although it is used to refer to educational work as a whole.



#### 4. Empirical-philosophical-journalistic model of analysis for critical media literacy

Following both the academic postulates on critical analysis and structural analysis of the message and the contributions of philosophy, an original model of media content analysis has been developed, as shown in the following sheet. In it, we can observe the categories that will be the object of analysis when approaching a journalistic text and the macrocontextual and metadiscursive vision that these will provide. This is not a model that must necessarily be used in its entirety, but rather, depending on the content or piece to be analysed, it will be more pertinent, from the point of view of media literacy, to pay attention to some aspects or others. In the process of designing and validating the analysis sheet, the following actions were carried out: (1) creation of the analysis instrument, (2) expert judgement, (3) use of the instrument through observation of variables in a peer case study, and (4) empirical review of the instrument with the data obtained from its application.

**Figure 1: Content analysis sheet according to the empirical-journalistic model**

Sheet No.			
Medium:		Date:	
LINGUISTIC VISUAL SERIES (text)	NON-LINGUISTIC VISUAL SERIES (image)	PARALINGUISTIC VISUAL SERIES (titling elements, emphasis, typographic resources)	STRUCTURAL HEMEROGRAPHY
Headline: Type of holder: News Expressive Thematic Declaration Appellation Exhortative Elements of titling: Pre-title Subtitle Whether or not it is consistent with the body of the text ( <i>clickbait</i> ). Consistency or non-consistency with the image.	Placement on the page or in the medium:  - IVM zone (highest visual impact)  - Location at the top/bottom of the page.	Typographical presentation:  Section No. of page/medium Extension Context Despieces Crabs Image(s) and/ or other iconic elements  Other notable typographic resources.	The media:  - Legal and financial structure.  - Manufacturing and distribution conditions: professional routines I.  - Organisation of the Editorial Office: professional routines II.  - The media line and political action.  - The line of the media group. Coincident or not with that of the text.
Sources:			
- Appearance of the source - Source character - No. of sources			
Use of propagandistic techniques and distraction strategies: deletion, addition, distortion, biased attribution, distancing quotation marks, resonant generalisations, selective objectivity, imposed labels, selection and omission of information, transfer of ideas or perspectives, etc.			
Other appreciations:			

In addition to this first file, it is worth adding the treatment of aspects related to the field of structural hemerography, which are shown in Figure 2:

**Figure 2: Aspects of analysis of the structural newspaper approach**

<p><u>Symbolism:</u></p> <p>Playing with the symbolic load and the experiential imaginary of the audience.</p> <p>Strategies of collective symbolism or "figurativeness".</p>	<p><u>Metadiscursive dynamics:</u></p> <p>Dynamics of conceptualisation and abstraction through text.</p> <p>Activation of learning in a particular direction.</p> <p>Spin-offs: effects and motivations of information.</p>	<p><u>Hierarchisation:</u></p> <p>Internal/external</p> <p>Metadiscursive/product of agenda setting.</p>
<p><u>Application of complex thinking:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Structural component analysis (Structural conditioning. Allusion to media and related products)<sup>[1]</sup>.</li> <li>- Application of socio-cultural-political-ideological components.</li> <li>- Emergence of sociological factors.</li> </ul>	<p><u>Context:</u></p> <p>Presence/absence of context: Historical context of the event narrated (use of journalistic experience for interpretation).</p>	<p><u>Semantisation process:</u></p> <p>Ideology is presented at the metacommunication level as a system of semantic rules, pre-existing the message.</p> <p>Search for the social representations present in the text.</p>
<p><u>The journalist as primary source:</u></p> <p>Accessing the journalist as a primary source of news. The journalist in the classroom as a direct source for media literacy.</p>	<p><u>Diatribes: economic message/ structural message:</u></p> <p>Presence of strategies of situational pluralism<sup>[2]</sup></p> <p>Structural unambiguity/ apparent thematic variety.</p>	<p><u>Values transmitted:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Main values present in the text.</li> <li>- Successful models</li> <li>- Relationship with consumer products</li> </ul>

Source: Own elaboration, 2022

Each of these aspects can be analysed individually depending on their greater or lesser representativeness in the content analysed. From the point of view of critical media literacy in the classroom, the questions related to the last item of analysis (values transmitted) are of notable interest. Analysing, for example, the macrodiscursive dynamics present in many of the successful media contents, we detect tendencies such as: the sentimental and aesthetic overexposure of the actors involved; a notable hybridisation of formats typical of a multi-screen receiver; the tendency towards hyper-segmentation of content in the face of the difficulty of concentration of the receivers; the hyper-briefness of content, which prevents the interrelation of elements and the shaping of the method of interpretation of events; the covert fictionalisation of content in the era of the triumph of audiovisual neoreality; the promotion of competitiveness, polarisation and radicalism, often expressed through the undervaluing/discrediting/disqualification of the other. All these dynamics detected in the media content that is consumed have an impact on the identity configuration of subjects and should therefore be analysed from the perspective of critical media literacy inside and outside the classroom.

## 5. Discussion and conclusions

Taking advantage of contemporary philosophical thought for the study of communication - and vice versa - is a methodologically profitable experience. The basic approach consists of narrating, explaining and taking advantage of the analytical capacity and knowledge of media structure to tackle media discourse from a critical empirical-philosophical-journalistic perspective. It is critical in that it draws on qualitative discourse analysis with a proactive and questioning stance; it is empirical, as it uses specific case studies to test its hypothesis; it is philosophical, given that it analyses the contributions made from the field of philosophy, as well as its reflective deepening of the theoretical bases from which analysis

and criticism are exercised; and it is journalistic, because it considers the media product as the main tool for gauging social activity and media literacy.

The shift from "industrial" capitalism to "informational" capitalism, as Castells points out, and from this to capitalism as a "destructive metastasis" (Han, 2022c), highlights the importance of the media and the communicator on the contemporary scene as a central feature of postmodernity. Today everything is communicated, everything can and must be communicated. We are in a pan-communicative orbit. In the same way, communication has become a productive field in itself, a sort of quaternary sector that generates economic profit both through the commercial value of information and through the consumption of technological infrastructures based on the possibility of communicating.

Personal identity is attributed to us by others as an inheritance and a requirement; we cannot detach ourselves from what others have bequeathed to us. In fact, the idea of identity, like freedom, is dependent on its time. Because of this, interpreting the projection made of it in a current cultural product is a good way of approaching its reality. Audiovisual contents are today the most reproduced, the most influential and transversal, so the content chosen for analysis need not be limited to the news sphere, but successful formats can be incorporated for analysis, with a wide audience following and of interest to young social strata, given that these are the ones who present a more malleable and relativized identity.

The state of supremacy of the dominant ideological burden (through capitalism's cultural system of values and norms) is made possible by what Marx called the "general state of alienation", a process by which the individual or the collective transforms its consciousness to the point of making it contradictory to what was to be expected of its condition. In this field, the mass media, as the privileged loudspeakers of the present era, are directly involved in the creation of contemporary identity.

From the analysis of content and messages aimed especially at young users in the media sphere, it is possible to appreciate the projection of a denatured concept of the individual, distanced from the community, yet bound by the self-image it exports, superficial and harshly individualistic. The projected individual is then diluted, alienated, becoming just another piece, identical to the rest and, therefore, with an uncertain personality. When this personality is defined, it is usually by virtue of physical, aesthetic and trivial traits, which are in turn considered desirable within the export of a model individual.

The cross-disciplinary approach outlined in this article establishes not only the relevance of the transdisciplinary approach in the study of the construction and projection of the individual through media content, but also the special complementarity of critical philosophical postulates and schools of political economy of communication. Research such as the present one provides a new approach to applied philosophy, as well as a further scientific basis for the structural analysis of media discourse.

The findings obtained from this type of transdisciplinary bibliographical and methodological research can form the basis for future critical literacy debate and proposals (Bennett, Kendall & McDougall, 2011). Given that critical literacy is still an incomplete project today, and without specific promotion from governmental educational policies, it requires the formulation of new teaching strategies that address the textual, contextual and media dimensions as part of the creation of our own identity. As future lines of research, we propose the translation of this method of analysis to the verification of false news and against the propagation of hoaxes, especially those that are harmful to human rights and stimulate cyber-hate within adolescent communities. Transferring and adapting this analysis to content that goes viral through social networks is proposed as a next line of research.

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## Notes

1. Semantisation processes make it possible to go beyond the explicit content presented by the media. They require a contextual interpretation of the information in its environment in order to be able to approach the detection of the ideological line present in the medium, something that structural content analysis makes possible because it relates some information to other information in order to make an overall ideological reading.

2. When mention is made of situational pluralism, the presence of transversal (macrodiscursive) themes, overabundance of official sources, abuse of statement-based journalism, lack of context and depth, presentation of isolated facts without interpretation or repetition of content and images in different media are alluded to.