

Urban Mexican Children and their Intermedia/Transmediatic Cultural Habits Crianças Mexicanas Urbanas e seus Hábitos Culturais Intermídia/Transmídia

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Abstract:

The article examines elementary school children and their intermedia/transmedia cultural habits, from the perspective of the students who have grown up in a rapidly changing multimedia environment defined here as the complex ecosystem of texts and images that surrounds people and that flow through traditional media and all digital formats. How do children relate to it? The answer to this question is guided by the classic theory of Uses and Gratifications and the Intermedia/Transmedia approach that helps us to understand the new ecology of the media environment surrounding children. Data were collected in public and private schools in Mexico City. The results give us a snapshot of the interconnectedness of modern media and its centrality in the lives of children.

Keywords:

Digital media; Cultural habits; Transmedia narratives.

Resumo:

O artigo examina crianças do ensino fundamental e seus hábitos culturais intermídia / transmídia, da perspectiva dos alunos que cresceram em um ambiente multimídia em rápida mudança, definido aqui como o complexo ecossistema de textos e imagens que envolve as pessoas e que flui através da mídia tradicional e todos os formatos digitais.

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Como as crianças se relacionam com isso? A resposta a esta pergunta é guiada pela teoria clássica de usos e gratificações e pela abordagem Intermídia / Transmídia que nos ajuda a entender a nova ecologia do ambiente de mídia que cerca as crianças. Os dados foram coletados em escolas públicas e privadas da Cidade do México. Os resultados nos dão um instantâneo da interconectividade da mídia moderna e sua centralidade na vida das crianças.

Palavras-chave:

Mídia digital; Hábitos culturais; Narrativas transmídia.

1 Introduction

Today's media environment is huge, diverse, fragmented and interactive with all kinds of players competing for user's attention. How do children relate to the always-increasing menu of content offerings that could be consumed through different media, platforms, and devices? Children's books can be read on iPads, video games played on cell phones and television watched on TV. sets at home or streamed via the Internet in tablets or personal computers. Undoubtedly, we are living times of cultural and media convergence, where the answer to the proposed research question, was guided by two different approaches: The classic theory of Uses and Gratifications (Katz, Blumler, and Gurevitch, 1974) that conceives the child as a psychologically active person who seeks media content to satisfy some need and the transmedia approach of cultural convergence. Digital media, when compared to traditional formats, have unique and distinctive characteristics. Ruggiero (2000, p.16) suggests that through demassification, individuals pick and choose what content to consume, giving them a more personal interaction with media to fulfill their needs. The assumption of a psychologically active person is methodologically helpful because implies that users' orientation to their media environment should be explored in their own terms and perceptions. Similarly, because the U&G approach is not technological, but people-centered, it has proven effective for understanding the uses of new media formats, in fact, it has gained momentum and significance in the Internet era (Ruggiero, 2000; Tanta, et.al., 2014; R.Das, 2017). Questions about how much time children spent on media, which content they select to satisfy a variety of cognitive or

emotional needs are to be answered here. But first, the mere definition needs to be explored here, since there is a new ecology that has transformed into bytes almost all the media known up to now (cinema, music, books, photography, comics, television and other artistic forms)" as Vilariño-Picos (2016, p.74) explains, referring to the field known as Digital Humanities and within this framework the concepts of Intermedia/Transmedia (lity) became central for the interpretation of the findings of this study.

As an introductory example to give context to this discussion, imagine children's cultural habits in the 2018 summer when Russia hosted the XXI edition of the Soccer World Cup, from June 14th to July 15. For a month the broadcast transmission of the event had set the agendas of millions of children around the world eager to watch the games. Just like 10, 20 or 40 years ago, they watched some matches on their television sets surrounded by friends or family. Due to the time zones, many were at school premises to catch some of the action on a sneaked Tablet or a Cell phone. The children also had face to face interactions, when exchanging and collecting cards for their Panini Album, with photos of the players, their bios, weight, height and all sorts of soccer statistics for each player of every team participating in the tournament. They became real and amazing experts on the 2018 World's Cup. In the afternoons, they watched on their television sets, the News with edited videos of the most important goals of the day. Later on, they searched for further information in their personal computers, to access specialized comments from professionals around the world who evaluated the performance of each country team. But beyond these transmissions, there were twitters and social networks to comment on, joke about and scrutinize players, referees, and coaches. In addition, many children were playing online or in their consoles the FIFA video-game (a FIFA franchise produced in 18 languages and available in 51 countries) which required children's decision-making in a simulation scenario, where winning was a matter of complex analysis on a budget, marketing, game strategies and players recruitment. In order to assure a winner, they probably got advice from You Tubers and FIFA tutorials. Also, many children wrote all sort of comments in Facebook, delighted to get "likes" from their friends and trying to

be first ones sending through WhatsApp the best memes and jokes on flaunts committed by the players or the spectators.

In sum, the children were immersed in a flow of content through multiple channels that have to be understood in its complexity. The described interconnectedness of modern media of communication is called Intermediality. In a sense, such interdependence is a byproduct of communicative strategies, and a commercial aspect of branding and franchising where media companies are integrated with their interests and the child is an avid consumer. Some scholars, define Intermediality as the totality of cross-media phenomena, with emphasis on the set of "grammar" rules needed to be grasped in each text created for intermedia products (Henning, 2015, Schröter, 2011). Transmediality, a concept coined by Henry Jenkins in 2003, is needed in order to understand that current media ecology is about storytelling, with nonspecific media connotations. In the World Cup example described above, we should ask for the central narratives: Is it friendship and fair play? Is it about Nation and country's identities? Is it about power and competition? or Fitness and physical talents in soccer games?

There is no doubt that we live in a time of media and cultural convergence - which implies a constant flow or liquidity (Bauman, 2013) of messages, information, people, and spaces. It is important to note what Jenkins (2009, p. 4) "post-reflected" in his blog- that transmedia content has more dimensions than the extended and magnified intermedia content. It frequently has powerful background stories and connects to another world with the character's narratives perspectives and points of view. This deepens audience's involvement with the characters and their stories, where receptors are not mere spectators, but active contributors to the unfolding narratives. The Intermedia/Transmedia constructs are considered focal for the study of the new media ecology constituent of a wider cultural environment. In this article the term Intermedia/Transmedia will be used as one concept, like Vilariño-Picos (2016) does in her article about literature analysis.

Findings reported in the results' section of this article confirm the centrality of the intermedia/transmedia phenomenon in the lives of children, unfortunately occurring far away from their classrooms. We are in fact witnessing, in Mexico City

schools, a new digital divide that does not refer to unequal access to ICT by children of different socioeconomic status since urban children seem to have access to all media technologies. This digital divide denotes the split between school culture and media culture. While media environment is creating new ways to learn, to create content and be related to each other, most teachers ban the media completely and altogether from school activities, probably thinking that the child is saturated by them, preventing the learning of "real" culture.

Children's cultural habits described in the following sections have to be linked to key cultural concerns, such as the development of critical thinking and interpersonal and intermedia communication skills. The definition of culture in schools with digital citizenship participation and involvement in society is something to be taught. These matters will be discussed at the end of this article.

2 Methods

Results reported in this study pertain to the second stage of a bigger research effort that originated at the beginning of 2017 with a qualitative and exploratory study that asked children from selected schools to write an essay on their media use and what they like or dislike about it. More than 100 essays were content analyzed to gain knowledge about children's perception of their media environment and the language they use to refer to their cultural habits. Essays were content analyzed and constituted raw material for a questionnaire designed and pretested in Mexico City. The final version of the questionnaire was applied at the beginning of the school year 2017-2018, to a projected sample of 600 children at private and public urban schools. However, and because of the Mexico City's earthquake of September 19, 2017, schools had mandatory closings, delaying data collection until April 2018. The results reported here describe a sample of 470 girls and boys from 3rd through 6th grade, registered at Mexico City private and public schools located in diverse socio-economic areas (A, B and C). Within each of the six schools visited, third to sixth-grade students had participated. A not random sample of children answered the questionnaire during class

hours. In a 45-minute period, the instrument was read aloud by one member of the research team, while each student marked his or her choice to closed-ended questions. Questionnaires were coded and analyzed with the Statistical Package for Social Sciences.

3 Results and Discussion

3.1 Sample Characteristics

Four hundred and seventy surveys were included in the sample used for analysis. Of that number and for gender comparisons, 47% were males, and 53% females. Twenty-four percent of the respondents were in grade 6th, 18.9 % in grade 5th, 24,5 % in grade fourth and 32% % in grade 3rd. Their age ranged from 6 to 12, with the age of 10 years old. with concentration on 10 (26%), 11 (18% %), 12 (24% %). Thirty-two percent of the sample was 8 and 9 years old. Forty-seven percent of the children of the sample were registered at public schools and fifty-three percent at private schools. Socioeconomic status (SES) lower (28.6%) middle (44.9%) and higher (26.5%) was linked to school type in addition to school neighborhood location.

3.2 Children's interaction with their media environment in terms of frequency

In terms of time and frequency, results in Table 12.1 are largely descriptive, without differentiation by age, gender or school type providing percentages on 10 different media use and the frequency of access that our students sample claimed to have. The circle marks the median value separating the higher half of the data sample telling us about the differences within media use. For example, the being connected to the Internet, television watching and listening to music have the highest positional average indicating that for 50% of the sample are the most frequently used media. Video games seem to not be as important for the sample's majority, as the access to

cellular phones very much divided at extremes because their use is prohibited by some parents and teachers. Television is still a most preferred media and surprisingly books are read often by 64% percent of the sample. The media convergence allows watching television on a computer, or a Netflix program on demand. Note that the category “listening to music” a behavior since radio times, is still a favorite cultural habit, delivered nowadays through multiple channels like radio, TV musical videos, Internet or Spotify- Examining the data in this section, comes to mind remarks made by Morduchowicz (2014) about children living between screens.

Spearman correlations were performed between demographic and media use variables. Correlations between media usage, age and grade were not statistical significant between age and grade. However, regarding SES there is a correlation indicating that the higher the SES, children listen more to music ($\rho=.46$, $p<.05$). For school type and gender One Way ANOVA were done to assess differences in media use. When the overall F was significant, mean comparisons tests were performed between groups, finding that males (mean score= 3.09) use more the Internet than females (mean score= 2.69) $p<.05$) and that children in public schools read more books((means=3.64) that those in private educational centers (mean=2.26, $p<.05$)

[Table 12.1] Children use of their media environment (n=553)

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		DAILY (7)	SEVERAL TIMES A WEEK (4)	ONCE A WEEK (2)	ONCE A MONTH (1)	NEVER USE IT (0)
INTERNET (md value= 7)		52.1	23.5 ●	14.3	2.5	7.6
CELL PHONE (md value= 2)		30.3	6.7	15.1 ●	24.4	23.5
TELEVISION (md value= 4)		46.2	42.9 ●	7.6	0	3.4
TABLET (md value= 2)		9.2	26.1	33.6 ●	10.9	20.2
LISTENING TO MUSIC (md value= 4)		41.2	35.3 ●	9.2	2.5	11.8
VIDEOGAMES (md value= 1)		5.9	15.1	12.6	21.8 ●	44.5
CINEMA (md value= 1)		4.2	6.7	19.3	69.7 ●	6.7
COMIC BOOKS (md value= 2)		17.6	22.7	20.2 ●	14.3	25.2
BOOKS (md value= 4)		29.4	35.3 ●	15.1	6.7	13.4

Elaborated by the authors.

3.3 Preferred Content and Transmedia Narratives

Beyond the time invested in the use of digital technologies, Table 12.2 illustrates the cultural convergence diagnosed by Henry Jenkins (2003) in regard to the existence of several narratives constructed through different media and creative manifestations. On the first level of Table 12.2, ten examples of the most preferred content are listed. For instance, two animated programs are registered first: The Legend of Korra, that emerged from the film Avatar, and Gravity Falls, a Canadian production about twin brothers who have supernatural adventures. My Babysitter is a Vampire (a spinoff from Quebecois film) or Henry Danger, are Adventure Series. The latter, about a boy who has a part-time job associated with a superhero. The narrative of fantasy and magic is a constant theme in children’s preferred content. Empowerment is also a narrative present in these programs, telling and depicting

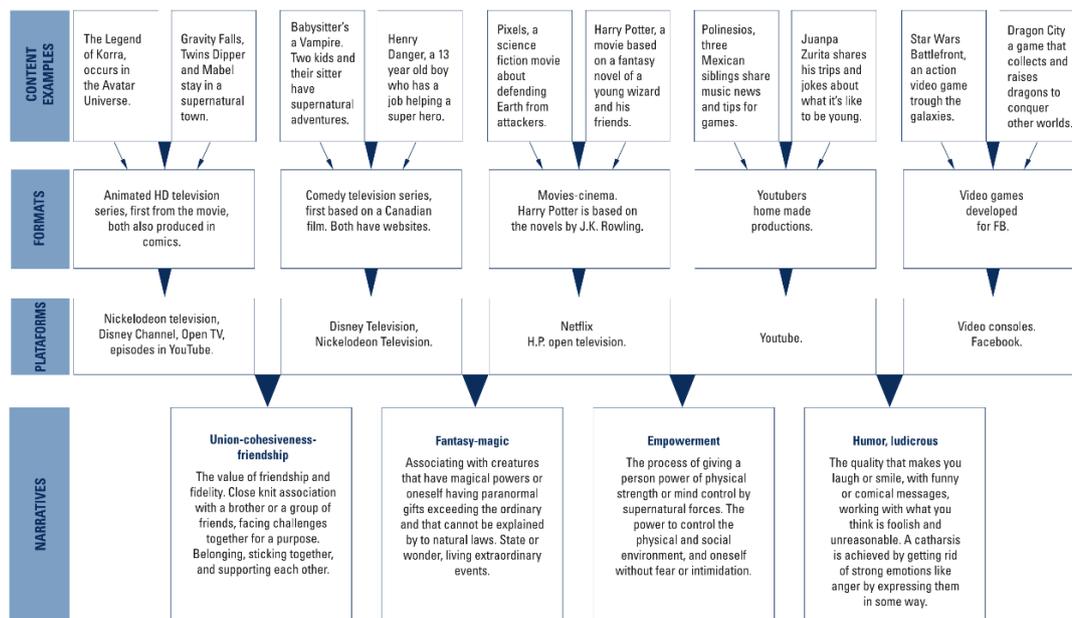
stories about ordinary children with secret powers in movies reported as favorites, as Harry Potter's magic saga based on J.K. Rowling book, and Pixels which portrays classic and modern video games characters who fight in a technological war to save the planet earth. Both movies could be seen in open TV or Netflix . Fantasy and Empowerment also in videogames, as could be appreciated in the examples. Star Wars Battlefront, and Dragon City. The first emerges from the Star Wars movies and the second developed originally as a videogame specifically to play it on Facebook. Besides Fantasy-Magic and Empowerment, there are other two transmedia narratives: Union and Humor. Union crosses among all content and is expressed as loyalty, harmony, friendship and the feeling of belonging to a group. A touch of Humor is present in almost all the selected examples (except in videogames) but it is most employed by You Tubers, uttered perhaps as cathartic, making ludicrous jokes to release tension caused by insecurities or worries produced by society, teachers and parents' expectations.

As Jenkins (2011) emphasized, transmedia narratives are not only about the spinoffs of characters that jump into other media, even to theme exhibitions in amusement parks. There are deeper implications that need to be studied furthermore about how children perceive the transmedia universe of stories, which meanings they derive from them and how they integrate these narratives into their daily lives.

[Table 12.2] Transmedia Narratives

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Elaborated by the authors.

3.4 Functions and Gratifications

Table 12.3 presents data about the motivations to use media and content and the gratifications obtained by satisfying different needs in the media. Items are grouped into functions' clusters. Respondents were asked to mark how often they use the media for the following reasons: To learn, to have fun, to relax, to escape from boredom, and for social interaction. The items were also constructed from the children's essays gathered in the first stage of this study. Percentages are shown to describe children's distribution among answers. The circle marks the median value separating the higher half of the data sample, telling us about the differences among media gratifications. Further information was obtained by comparing gratifications mean scores, thus being able to rank the relative gratifications obtained by children from media use: 1) To have fun (mean=3.61, sd 1.6); 2). To learn (mean=2.94, sd.1.7); 3) To escape from boredom (mean= 2.76, sd 1.7); 4) To relax (mean= 2.69, 1.4); 5) For social interaction (mean=2.35, sd 1.7) . All mean differences were significant at the p<.05 level, except the gratification obtained from using the media for social interaction. There were not significant correlations between age, grade or SES and the degree of gratification

obtained to satisfy different needs. Neither was found significant differences between gender or school type and gratifications obtained from media use.

[Table 12.3] Needs, Functions and Gratifications from content

NEEDS	FUNCTIONS	ITEMS	FREQUENCIES%			MEDIAN SCORE ●		
			Always	Sometimes	Never			
Cognitive needs	To learn	About the world and nations	28	52	20			
		Seeking information in Internet for homework	38.8	49	12.2			
		With tutorials that teach how to do things	38.8	38.8	22.4			
		About adults, jobs and professions	28.8	61	10.2			
		While creating presentations for school	38.8	32.7	28.5			
		Gratification obtained when using media to learn	Not gratified			● 3	4	Most gratified
Excitement needs	To have fun	I watch series and programs	67.3	24.5	8.2			
		I laugh with Youtube videos	75.5	18.4	6.1			
		With exciting superheroes stories	24.5	42.8	32.7			
		With scary and supernatural content	36.8	26.5	36.7			
		With challenging videogames	67.1	14.3	18.6			
		Gratification obtained when using media to have fun	Not gratified					● 5
Tension release	To relax	I watch TV when I get home tired from school	32.7	55.1	12.2			
		I listen to music	46.9	34.7	18.4			
		To forget about problems	47	30.6	22.4			
		Because media creates companionship	44.9	24.5	30.6			
		While editing music and videos	44.9	24.5	30.6			
		Gratification obtained when using media to have relax	Not gratified			● 3	4	Most gratified
Tedious avoidance	To escape boredom	I play games in my phone. I don't have anything to do	42.9	36.7	20.4			
		Media is a distraction, when I am bored	63.3	30.6	6.1			
		I chat with friends, to get "unbored"	26.5	24.5	49			
		When it is raining and I cannot go out	59.2	26.5	14.3			
		While everybody is using their cellphone, I use my tablet	32.6	38.8	28.6			
		Gratification obtained when using media to escape boredom	Not gratified			● 3	4	Most gratified
Social needs	For social interaction	To get ideas and tips to play with your friends	51	32.7	16.3			
		To play online with friends all over the world	20.4	34.7	44.9			
		To communicate with my family and friends	32.7	24.5	42.8			
		To see and share profiles and photos	59.2	12.2	28.6			
		To be connected with events happening, there would be chaos without Internet	53	18.4	28.6			
		Gratification obtained when using media for social interaction	Not gratified		● 2	3	4	Most gratified

Elaborated by the authors.

To escape from boredom is not a function frequently employed in the U&G studies. However, in the children's essays emerged as a type of function given to media use, because "you don't have anything else to do" and has a certain quality of wishing for another kind of activity or source of satisfaction. Gratification values from using the media for Social Interaction should be taken with caution because almost 50% of the children reported not using cellular phones or Facebook because of age restrictions. By adding up percentages in the "always" and "sometimes" rows, it can be said that children do learn from the media, even when in other survey question more than 80% reported an average ICT/ media use at the school of 45 minutes!

3.5 Closing Comments and Pedagogical Suggestions

“One thing about which fish know exactly nothing is water since they have no anti-environment which would enable them to perceive the element they live in.”
Marshall McLuhan, 1967.

What are schools doing to help students to understand the evolving intermedia/transmedia environment just described? Many adults find difficult to understand and control media environment's perils and capabilities and prefer to draw a line between duty and leisure, media entertainment and "serious" formal learning. There is evidence suggesting that media environment contributes to the socialization of youngsters, as Bandura (1977) suggests that informal learning occurs from information about society and role models depicted by characters in media stories, and by narratives of their most admired You Tubers. In contrast, we have observed that there is not only a media literacy curriculum in question, but that media are banned altogether from school. Even the ICT programs, despite the investment in equipment and software, are reduced to a 45 minute a week period as 80% of the children reported in this study.

The results show that children live submerged in it. If we add the hours spent by them watching television, connected to the Internet, using a tablet or a cell phone, the sum will easily exceed a 24-hour day, considering that children have to sleep and attend school. Only using several devices at the same time explains the large portions of time spent by children during their waking hour in in intermedia/transmedia cultural habits. As Natalia Notar (2017, p.65) explains, all media experiences are done in three planes: The wall where the television hangs, the knee where there is a Tablet or a computer and the palm of the hand for the cell phone. Being the media environment so central in children's daily cultural habits, we need a wider definition of culture in schools where digital citizenship - participation and involvement in society- is a pending subject.

Considering intermediality /trasmediality dimensions in media environment proposed in this study, what does media literacy mean today?

For the European Commission in charge for these affairs, Media literacy implies "All technical, cognitive, social, civic and creative capacities that allow a citizen to access, have a critical understanding of the media (broadcasting, radio, press), all kind of channels (traditional, internet, social media, (Pérez Guevara, 2015:2). They keystone of the European proposal is critical thinking, as suggested by McLuhan in his fishbowl story. Because a healthy democracy requires the participation of well-informed citizens and Media Literacy could be used as a tool to support democracy. Certainly, critical thinking and the respect for fundamental rights help to fight against political propaganda.

For the new media environment, new literacies are required, where the main purpose is a person that "produces and consumes information and has a relevant role in a participative culture, promoted by technological interactivity" (García Ruiz, García Ramírez and Rodríguez Rossell (2014). The authors describe that the *prosumer citizen* "will possess a set of skills that will allow him or her to perform a series of actions, as a media and audiovisual resource consumer, as a producer and a creator "of critical, responsible and creative messages and content." (p.16).

Carlos Scolari (2014) also talks about forgetting about the old media consumer to educate now a prosumer (producer + consumer), an active subject who creates new content and shares it in digital networks. It is in this context he has proposed a "transmedia literacy" program. Recently on his blog Hipermediaciones (Scolari, March, 2018), he has reported his research advances and focuses on informal learning strategies detected during his ongoing study in Digital Culture of the Interdisciplinary Internet / IN3.

Very precise guidelines for constructing a curriculum are given in Fedorov, A, Levitskaya, A. and Camarero, E. (2016) by asking 65 international experts from 20 countries what should be included in a media literacy curriculum. For elementary school children, the following learning outcomes were stated: children should be able to identify media forms, demonstrate the understanding of some types of media texts, create simple media texts, and explain how media language is used to create meaning, know basic media effects protect themselves against harmful media effects. Older

children should also demonstrate their understanding of the role and functions of media in democratic societies (p.327-328).

What should be taught at schools to be "literate" in intermedia/transmedia environments? First, Henry Jenkins (2009) proposed a syllabus for undergraduate students that should be taken into account when designing media literacy curricula for all education levels, especially as a guide for Teacher's Professional Development in the matter. Learning outcomes on the Jenkins syllabus are listed in Table 12.4.

[Table 12.4] Being literate in New Media Environments

Map the ways the changing media landscape has impacted the way young people learn	Describe our current understanding of the connections between participatory culture and civic engagement, including the relationship between the digital divide and the participation gap
Identify how participatory cultures work to support the growth and contributions of their members	Summarize and critique core theorists working in the field of New Media Literacy
Recognize and be able to respond to core debates surrounding the value of bringing new media technologies and participatory culture practices into the classroom	Comprehend the framework of basic social skills and cultural skills associated with the new media literacies
Outline some of the ethical challenges which youth face in their roles as media producers and members of online communities	Apply their theoretical understandings to the development of curricular resources for use in school or after-school programs.
Map the ways the changing media landscape has impacted the way young people learn	Critique existing curricular resources designed to teach "the new media literacies"

Source: Henry Jenkins, *New Media Literacies: A Syllabus*, 2009.

What are the biggest challenges for the implementation of a media literacy curriculum? The resistance of administrative bodies, the overloaded curriculum and teachers training were the main reasons given in Federov, Levistkaya and Camarero (2015, p.327) experts' study. Probably the same obstacles will be found in Mexican

Schools. However, there is a curricular space in the new elementary curriculum (SEP,2017) called Ethical and Civic Engagement, with cross-curricular presence in all grades aimed to develop student competencies such as being able “to promote a culture of peace, to value the laws in democratic societies, to understand the rules of coexistence and protect the rights of others” (SEP, 2017).

The media environment should concern us as much as the fauna, flora and the air we breathe, as George Gerbner (1980) says. The school is the right place to give direction and coordinates to children’s cultural habits, it is the space where children learn to be citizens and learn what Karl Popper (1996) expressed in his latest newspaper article that democracy always aims “to increase the level of education; this is their oldest and most traditional aspiration ... to promote the growth of education in general, offering everyone better opportunities ". We hope that this study helps the reformulation and application of Media Literacy at schools.

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