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VI International Conference Communication and Reality

LIFE WITHOUT MEDIA



Facultat de Comunicació Blanquerna
Universitat Ramon Llull

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Content

Introduction

Imagining the death of the mass media may help us understand their function and import. If we envisage removing the media from our lives, society will be left devoid of three basic faculties: democracy, the free market economy and the enlightenment of its people. Thus far, the communication media have brought together professionals with a core mission in western society. They have exercised as mediators in social relations and interactions. They have established a common terrain to launch and contrast ideas, to share knowledge, as well as to buy and sell products and services. For more than a century, press, cinema, radio, television, public relations and advertising have provided a public space to help us construct a public, communal "self".

In the three prior editions of "Communication and Reality" hosted by the Blanquerna School of Communication, scholars and researchers have charted the incursions of new types of communication media into this public space: in 2005 we explored the digital utopia; in 2007 we examined the limits of the media and the transgressions made possible by the new media; and in 2009 we proposed metamorphosis as an apt metaphor for the changeability of the media space. In our 2011 conference we feel that the time has come to rise to the challenge and envisage what might happen if the "traditional media" were to stop operating altogether. Thus, the aim behind the title of our upcoming conference is to appropriate the apocalyptic discourses of many media experts and take them to their deliberately challenging extreme: *Life Without Media*.

Call for Papers

We part from the premise that the mass media have constituted a unifying, monitoring and restraining element in the power constellations of all democratic forms of government since their inception. That furthermore they have played a key role in the unrestricted flow and circulation of information essential to the functioning of a free market economy, and the informative, entertaining, and persuasive messages that sway individuals to consume. And lastly, but perhaps most importantly, that the mass media, commencing with the printing press and culminating (for the moment) in the invention of the Internet, have contributed to the conservation, spreading, and management of knowledge, without which the steady growth of learning, science, and intelligence would be unthinkable.

Paradoxically, however, while our daily lives appear to hinge more than ever on the new information technologies, we are faced with a fast growing chorus of voices that augur the impending demise of the established press, the disappearance of television as we know it, and a radical makeover of the conventional forms of advertising.

Things have become terribly uncertain. Senders and receptors of messages have abandoned their customary positions, and the divisions between news outlets and their audiences and readerships are blurring. The same individuals who habitually consult an encyclopedia are now the ones writing it. The idea that the free market needs no restrictions, as long as the necessary intelligence to understand it is freely available and largely reliable, has now been exposed as a fallacy. And as for the question of the spreading, acquisition, and management of knowledge, culture, and information, multiple doubts arise as to whether the enlightenment project is still a viable concept, and where contemporary society envisages its position on the medieval-postmodern continuum.

We contend that by contemplating the possibility of *Life Without Media*, we may gain deeper insight into the key roles the mass media have played over the past two hundred years, and into the mechanisms and causes of the

radical changes that are taking place with ever-increasing speed. Thus we hope that media practitioners, scholars, and students rise to the challenge and submit their research and analyses on topics such as the importance of the new social networks and the digital society, and to what extent they are taking over the central function which the traditional media have so far exercised. Similarly, how do news outlets, books, magazines, encyclopedias and social networks contribute to, affect, or even jeopardize cultural competence, media literacy and education in general? How do Internet advertising, viral advertising, Spam, or direct mail affect our market economy? Do online publications, social networks, forums, chats and blogs provide a space for public debate, argument, demagoguery and even aggression? Are these the same practices that in the 20th century used to be performed by the "traditional" media?

These are not gratuitous questions. Currently, the distribution of content via online news outlets is profitable only in very few cases. At the same time, the existing crisis manifests itself in a significant decline of advertising revenue across all the traditional media, which is mirrored in their diminished capacity to influence consumers. This situation has resulted in a widespread espousal of a discourse that predicts the disappearance of the media professional.

Our conference *Life Without Media* seeks to take this apocalyptic discourse to its extreme by taking it ad absurdum. We hereby expect to determine what are, or used to be, the core functions of the media in industrialized societies; without, however, engaging in self-satisfied chronicling of media history. In fact, by extension, and as a hypothetical end result of *Life Without Media*, we invite you to imagine, as a thought experiment if you will, ***Life Without Democracy, Life Without a Market, and Life Without Enlightenment***. The answers to these queries will eventually corroborate or reject the hypothesis that if the gatekeeper role of the media professional is abolished, then the fabric and the organization of western society will be transformed in its entirety.

Conference structure

Thematic sections

The conference will be structured along three thematic lines:

A. Life Without Democracy

The established mass media have constituted a unifying, monitoring and restraining element in the power constellations of all democratic forms of government. What is the role of more recent conceptions of "media" such as new social networks and the digital society? To what extent are they taking over the central mission so far exercised by traditional media in representative democracy? How do these changes affect constellations of power, mechanisms of control, or the shaping of moral values?

In this area of discussion we propose the following topics:

Information and Power

- Citizen Empowerment. Redefining the public and private sphere (the public self and the private self). Rethinking the concept of intimacy (extimacy?) in the new media/social networks.
- The limits of freedom of speech.
- Ethics, communication and power: the complexity of preserving moral values given the enormous volume of individual contributions.

The Power of Persuasion and Influence

- New forms of power, influencing and decision-making.
- The dynamics of reciprocal influencing: two directional communication.
- Communication strategy: the new bastions of brands and brand equity: specialization, innovation and pleasure.
- The limits of persuasion and influence.
- New forms of persuasion and exercising influence.
- Public opinion, stakeholders and communication.
- *Issues Management*: Influence, trust, communal and exchange relationships and satisfaction.

Images of Power

- Representations of power / power and representation.
- Violence and communication.
- Communication and exclusion.
- Social values and their presence and evolution in communication.

B. Life Without a Market

The media are fundamental components in the mechanisms that steer the free market economy. They have played a key role in the unrestricted flow and circulation of information essential to the functioning of a free market economy, and the informative, entertaining, and persuasive messages that sway individuals to consume. The massive financial crisis of the global economy not only casts doubts on its management and performance, but it seems to shake the very foundations of free market economy. The idea that the free market needs no restrictions, as long as the necessary intelligence to understand it is freely available and largely reliable, has come under serious scrutiny.

In this area of discussion we propose the following topics:

Managing Complexity

- New multicultural and multiethnic identities and spaces.
- The explosive proliferation of new communication systems: Web 3.0 (web semantics: context and meaning), social media, TDT, videogames, Advergaming and mobile phones (mobile art: creativity in your pocket). Enhanced reality: the new frontier. Mobile audiences: ubiquitous communication.

Complexity and Europe, Communicative Permeability and/or Localization. Regionalism, Supra-Regionalism and Globalization

- Culture and cultures in communication. Cultural globalization and communication, evolution and expectations.
- Communication and representation of social groups: Class, opinion leaders, lifestyles, social status: their evolution and future perspectives.
- Consumption: Stereotyped portrayals, use of celebrities, portrayals of purchasing situations/conditions. Representations of the family, structures, communication, family models and varieties.

The Complexity of Communication as a Business

- Reinventing models of business communication.
- Professions and professional relationships in professional communication.
- Creative thinking: coolhunting, innovation, novelty, discovery.
- Life without paper.
- A future with less television.

C. Life Without Enlightenment

The communication media as a key element in the transference of knowledge and (media) literacy: Is the enlightenment project still a viable concept in terms of how and where contemporary society envisages its position on the medieval-postmodern continuum? How do online news outlets, books, magazines, encyclopedias and social networks contribute to, affect, or even jeopardize cultural competence, media literacy and education in general? Is the Internet an adequate tool for the expansion, acquisition, and management of knowledge, culture, and information?

In this area of discussion we propose the following topics:

An Anthropological Model and the Media Space

- Intermediality and the re-mediation of past practices.
- Media literacy.
- The rebellion and desertion of the receptors. Changes in the habits of production and consumption of information and knowledge.
- Storytelling. The narrativization of life. The story, your story, the story of your brand, the story of your corporate identity.
- New relationships of individuals with their peers, with society, with entities and governments.
- Communication and gender.

Models of Digitized Knowledge

- Convergence of digital media.
- Mobile and landline telecommunications.
- Narrative adaptations of information technology. *Low cost* content vs. *premium* content.
- Multidirectional communication by/with citizen reporters, audiences and stakeholders.

Ethical Models and Human Rights

- Moral indignation, power abuse by mass media and governments.
- Moral values and the practices of new methods of persuasion.
- Media corporations and social responsibility in business agendas.
- Uses and abuses of technologies.

Submission of abstracts

Proposals for individual papers and complete panels can be submitted to our web site between July 15 and November 15, 2010.

Submitters will receive notification of acceptance or rejections by January 31, 2011.

We will grant a special excellence award for young scholars.

For more information please see: <http://cicr.blanquerna.url.edu/>