

UNESCO CHAIR "media and Journalistic Practices" the University of Strasbourg

13 to 15 May, 2019

STRASBOURG

FRANCE

8<sup>th</sup> Annual Meeting  
of the network of  
UNESCO Chairs in Communication

ORBICOM

This manifestation is open to  
all the international scientific community  
whether present or via videoconference

Freedom of expression in the digital era  
From Fake news to Artificial Intelligence

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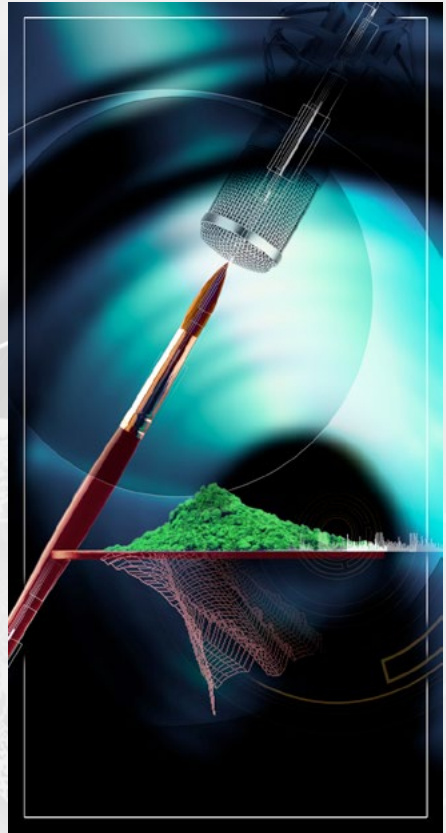
*Freedom of expression wears out only if you do not use it  
(From Le canard enchaîné, satirical French newspaper)*

## Call for Papers

Freedom of expression has been a question of study since the first democracies. In the Greek antiquity, Athena elaborated a system allowing citizens to express themselves, yet with limits related to the notion of citizenship. Later, the development of the press, then radio and television increased the possibilities of expression, but still with limited control. Antagonism between political and/or religious power and media, citizens, and artist freedom, transformed into an pretty permanent fight. The first approach then is to question the concept itself: does it cover the same reality in all countries of the world ? What to do in the democracies where limitations are brought by the law, rules, or legal decisions? The evolution of the annual ranking of press freedom in "Reporters sans frontières" shows the flexible dimension of the concept. In this context, the advent of the digital era, particularly social media, changes the games' rules. In fact, the possibility for everyone having access to internet to share information, the relatively legal vacuum created by the international dimension of the web, today's high economic stakes and the professionalization of the digital practices of the states and the different social groups, all modify at the same time the stakes and the implementation of freedom of speech. The new technologies should, neither be accepted naively, nor rejected by an ideological systematic opposition. They are everywhere, and we all use them. The objective of this congress is to question, with the international scientific community, the actual practices and their consequences on freedom of speech that are the basis of democracies success. This congress is part of the work that UNESCO has been conducting for years on this topic (<https://en.unesco.org/themes/defending-freedom-expression>) particularly with an annual publication of an observatory on World Trends in Freedom of Expression and Media Development.

The work would focus on four thematic:

the definitions, the space, the people, and the cross disciplinary themes:



## 1. Définition(s)

The search for a definition of a concept is the basis of all scientific work. This congress is no exception. What have been the different developments that freedom of expression has experienced since its Greek origins? How is it defined in the world today? Its links with democracy seem obvious to some, others seem to be more critical, especially since each individual freedom will be able to oppose another or social freedom. How are the differences that can be seen can be managed in international organizations such as UNESCO or the UN? The development of new technologies has changed people's access to information and communication. Are we facing the empowerment of citizens as some say? How do national legislations manage this notion and its practice, which today is largely internationalized by the web? Some activities such as journalistic information or art can systematically exploit this freedom, or even voluntarily exceed its legal framework. With what consequences for individuals and societies?

## 2. The spaces of freedom of speech in the digital era

Freedom, as an abstract concept, can only exist through a space. First, school where students learn how to be citizens. In fact, educational systems differ even among democratic states: some give limited autonomy to students, some larger. Besides, the curriculum and the teaching freedom also differ. Hence, are societies more or less free depending on their educational system? After examining media literacy, what about digital learning? Does it provide the youth with extra freedom? University follows the same line of this development. States train their future officials, and students are supposed to learn how to practice their critical thinking. Does the digitalization of teaching, engineering, and administrative management, help in making students' voice heard better?

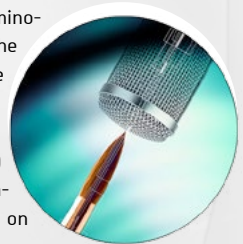
Media, a sort of adults' school, is another fundamental space that forms and informs citizens. The majority of today's media come in a hybrid form: a traditional medium for their mature audience and the web for the young one. Did they win in terms of autonomy? Do they inform better while targeting their spectators/readers'/ listeners's desires? Organizations, whether public or private, are also spaces of social life. Thus, a space where freedom of expression is at risk. If the legislation frames adequately the large enterprises, what about the SMEs? How do organizations use ICTs internally and externally? Finally, the Web is modifying radically the old practices of private and public expression through equalizing gradually the differences between the two. Can we associate what is visible on the Internet with what is visible in public? Does the followers's logic coincide with the supporters's one? Internet users receive everyday a large number of information. Are they better informed this way, or does "too much information kill the information"?

The street is another space of expression that is questionable. The Roman forum or the Greek agora were the first public expression spaces. After being mainly a "market place", it later became the space where people, from different origins, meet to talk about economic, religious, legal and political topics. Later, artists used the walls to express themselves, just as sculptors used rocks to express their annoyance in the cathedrals sculptures, or more recently, Banksy on the walls of London. Could the digital upcoming, in line with these ways of expression, be an additional medium? In what way does social media facilitate the organization of public expression? Does cultural digital broadcasting help in enriching the spread of ideas?

### 3. People: rulers, associations, or simple citizens

If Aristotle was one of the precursors of powers separation, Locke and Montesquieu would later theorize the necessity of separating the executive from the legislative and the legal in the representative democracies. What did the digital advent change in the communication between governments, administrations, parliament, justice and the citizens generally in the political tribune? Could these latter make their voices heard more easily? How is the e-citizenship developing? The political oppositions, muzzled in dictatorships, use freedom of speech to be present and active in democracies and contribute in the balancing of power. Therefore, there are three categories of opposition to distinguish: one that accepts the system, one that stays anonymous, and one that refuses the system and is ready to act illegally or even violently to express it. So, where do they all stand in social media? Groups, or even states can put in danger the good functioning of democracies through sharing disinformation campaigns on the Web. How to protect ones' self from these dangers from the outside without limiting the citizens freedom? The international dimension of the web also gives associations and NGOs an increasing importance: how does it manage this worldwide communication?

Other groups are particularly concerned by freedom of expression: minorities, whether they are indeed or just treated as such, and whether visible in the media space or not, are also concerned with freedom of speech. Groups include women first: what doors do blogs open for them, those of the political expression in the broad sense or those of the fields to which they remain confined (fashion, beauty, psychology,...)? How do minorities (ethnic, linguistic, religious, sexual...) raise their voices in the Web without shutting themselves away in a reductive communitarianism? How do they stand against hate speech that might affect them on social media, both individually or collectively?



After all, who are the individuals excluded from the Internet, due to technical, economic, political, psychological and social reasons, and who cannot enjoy the digital freedom of expression unless they have a free access to this tool. What are the remedial measures taken in the different countries. And what are their effects? Is the digital world efficient enough to involve illiterate people in the democracy?

## 4. The main topics stemming from freedom of expression in the digital era and in the age of contexts' diversity

Because of its global dimension, the digital world confronts the international right with new challenges. Indeed, what is allowed in one country is not in another, what is accepted in a culture can be a real issue in another. A court decision can be difficult to apply in a particular country. Transparency is one of the most important criteria of the digital communication: it is thus essential to know the owner or the funder of a website. How does the net neutrality takes place in the different countries? If, instead of offering a universal service, operators make choices depending on economic and political criteria, the freedom of expression would be questioned. Furthermore, the truth has always been the main objective of communication. Studies show not only the immanence of the concept, but also its relativity. If democratic media advocate and put into practice information ethics, the development of fake news questions information practices to such an extent that some countries want to enact legislation on this matter. What are the expected results? And what happens in the countries where freedom of expression and religion are in conflict?

However, the main emerging topic that will certainly be prominent in the following years is artificial intelligence (AI). This topic is still at the beginning of its technical development, which does not prevent human and social sciences from involving this new phenomenon and the consequences that it may have. The expression itself can be considered as a misnomer, to doubt the "real" feelings of a robot or its capacity to have a conscience. But the question that should be raised is whether freedom of expression would benefit from the AI, or would it be its own implacable enemy: The first trials for the use of the journalistic monitoring and the verification of fake news are ongoing.

### Practical Information

Two trilingual publications are planned: the first one is available as hard copy at Éditions de l'Immatériel (Paris) in the "Écritures du monde" collection, and is a compilation of the productions of Orbicom members. The second one will be online with texts of other researchers that would be selected by the scientific committee.

Each proposal should be about one of the three suggested topics. It will be in the following form: the name of the author/s and their association structure, a title, a presentation text of 2000 to 3000 signs, spaces included, in French, English or Spanish (word or a compatible format) and a summary of 5 lines in one of the three languages. Moreover, the proposal should indicate if the candidate will participate personally or via internet.

Each proposal must necessarily be submitted online on the website <https://chairesunescom.sciencesconf.org>

**Deadline for the submission of the proposals: December 1, 2018**

Deadline for the return of experts: January 31, 2019

The fees of in-person participation to the congress reach 140,00€, for the three days, including: the registration, breaks, lunches and dinners, evening events, visits, the symposium electronic or paper proceedings. The acts regrouping the articles presented by the Orbicom members are offered at a modest

price. The accompanying persons who pay the same fee can benefit from the same services, but they do not make a presentation. Phd holders pay 70,00€, those of Strasbourg University and Haute-Alsace University are exempt from fees.

- The traveling and accommodation fees are on the participants.  
A list of recommended hotels will be communicated at the registration.
- The remote participation is free, but the registration is mandatory.
- Members of Orbicom up to date of their subscription are exempted from registration fees.

## The scientific committee

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## Organization Committee

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- The Orbicom Secretariat: Rania Aoun, Pierre Giguère, Yves Théoret.
- Annick Le Ny and his team.