

Media Citizenship – A New Charter For An Informed Society (World Economic Forum)

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I was chair of the [World Economic Forum's council on Informed Societies](#) last year. We meet again this month with a new chair, [Chan YuenYing](#). We will be discussing how to find ways to put into practice our Charter For An Informed Society. At the heart of it was the idea of Media Citizenship.



Events around the world this year have made it clear that the news media has a vital role in our personal, community, national and global lives. Shocking disasters like the Japan tsunami and devastating acts of terror in Norway have touched us all and raised deep questions about human security. Complex economic problems like the US deficit and the Eurozone crisis, or environmental problems such as famine and extreme weather challenge us to find clever, collaborative solutions. To meet the goals of the 21st century it is vital that the citizen is better informed. With all the challenges of the Internet Age, information is a precious resource that needs to be used properly.

The World Economic Forum established a Council on Informed Societies made up of a group of distinguished media practitioners and analysts. Their job was to set out the challenges and opportunities of the new media era. Is WikiLeaks a threat to democracy or the harbinger of a new age of transparency? Is Facebook creating communities or invading our privacy? Does the Arab Spring show us how new media platforms like Twitter and satellite TV bring freedom?

The Council determined that an informed society is one where citizens have the resources, education and skills to access and participate in the free flow of reliable and useful information through a diverse range of platforms and media organisations that empower them to make considered decisions about their economic, social and political lives.

Our group was convinced that an informed society is also better able to innovate, and through this grow economically. Media industries create jobs directly but they also facilitate efficiencies and growth throughout the economy.

There are clearly dangers. The new media environment can lead to fragmentation. It erodes old business models. It can create a confusing overabundance of information, much of it low quality or even false, misleading or filled with hate. Authoritarian governments or irresponsible companies can use the same media technologies for ill as well as good.

However, the opportunities are unprecedented. The potential for building social capital in our families, communities and across national boundaries is vast. Digital divides can be bridged providing extraordinary access to goods and services. Look at how the mobile phone is transforming Africa – now imagine that combined with the Internet. We hope that better communication might also create greater understanding.

Critically, the new information technologies allow much greater citizen participation in media. That makes both the professional media itself as well as governments and the corporate world more accountable and responsive. Interactivity fosters democracy.

Technological innovation is the key driver of this media change but it is not enough. Governments are vital in providing the infrastructure such as skills and education but also in promoting the kind of regulatory environment that safeguards standards and fosters free, open competition. They should lead by example and open up their own

data.

Likewise, companies, NGOs and other civil society organisations are all now media organisations. They all contribute to the flow of data and opinion to the public – often directly but also through journalists. They should also promote the highest standards of media production and information transparency.

It is vital that the citizen's needs are put at the heart of this new information ecology.

That is why the World Economic Forum's Global Agenda Council on Informed Societies proposed the idea of *Media Citizenship* whereby all individuals are enabled to participate fully in the information society. The citizen should be empowered with media literacy in the broadest sense: skills, understanding and creativity. And all aspects of economic and political policy should now recognise that full citizenship must be based on free and comprehensive access to information flows and networks.

The group called for a charter of *media citizenship* that would affirm these principles:

- Commit to transparency and to communicating pertinent information to stakeholders.
- Build media literacy into education systems.
- Support independent media, especially in the developing world.
- Foster connectivity and open, competitive media markets.
- Protect media freedom, intellectual property and the openness of the internet.

Media should be a vibrant, diverse reflection of human life in all its variety. There is no one template for all countries or communities. But we are now all linked by media. And media now offers us all as citizens of this networked world a remarkable chance to express ourselves anew. We call on everyone to sign up the media citizenship ideals, but most importantly, to put their potential for progress into practice.

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