



Cognitive Rights Observatory

INDEPENDENT ORGANIZATION

Founding Declaration

Cognitive Rights Observatory

*Let it not be said that we watched it be lost and did not
know how to give it a name, a defence or a home.*

*Translated from the Spanish original. In case of discrepancy, the Spanish text is
authoritative.*

Barcelona, 1 May 2026

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I. The new frontier of freedom

For centuries, the conquest of freedom consisted in protecting what could be seen: the body against the chain, the voice against the gag, faith against the stake, assembly against prohibition. Each age recognised a new freedom when a new power appeared that was capable of denying it.

Today that power has taken a different form. It does not act only upon the body, upon speech or upon outward conduct, but upon the inner conditions that make every freedom possible: attention, perception, memory, emotion, identity, the formation of beliefs and the capacity for judgement.

Freedom of thought, of conscience and of personal self-determination is not born now. What is born now is an unprecedented capacity to observe, anticipate, induce, modulate and exploit mental life on a large scale, by means of ever more precise technologies and techniques: persuasive design, the attention economy, artificial intelligence, the mass exploitation of personal data, psychographic segmentation, the architectures of algorithmic influence and, on the near horizon, neurotechnology.

Never before has the human mind been so measurable, so predictable, so exposed and so profitable. And never before has that exposure taken place, to such a degree, without those who undergo it being able to perceive it, understand it, resist it or fully consent to it.

II. The harm that calls us together

We call **cognitive abuse** any deliberate practice which, through deception, opacity, coercion, emotional manipulation, the exploitation of vulnerabilities or significant asymmetries of information and power, seeks to steer a person's mental processes towards ends that they cannot freely examine, understand, accept or reject.

We call **cognitive harassment** the repetition, intensification or persistence of those practices when they produce attentional capture, psychological pressure, erosion of the will, weakening of judgement, dependence, confusion, intimidation, fragmentation of identity or deterioration of relational life.

We call **induced cognitive stress** the psychological, emotional and attentional wear produced by digital environments —platforms, services, interfaces and systems of algorithmic communication — designed in such a way that they subject a person to continuous pressure, decisional overload, hyperstimulation, permanent alarm, systematic interruption or the practical impossibility of mental recovery.

These practices should not be understood as mere individual excesses, nor as the inevitable accidents of progress. In certain business models, strategies of influence and technological architectures, they have become structural incentives: where attention, emotion, data,

behaviour and belief turn into exploitable resources, mental life risks being treated as a raw material.

III. What cognitive rights are

Cognitive rights are the set of guarantees intended to protect the integrity, the autonomy and the conditions for the development of human mental life.

They comprise the protection of the cognitive, affective, symbolic, relational and identity-forming processes by which a person forms beliefs, organises experience, perceives reality, builds a self-image, sustains relationships, deliberates, decides and develops their personality.

Their purpose is to prevent those processes from being intervened upon, manipulated, exploited, degraded or instrumentalised through opaque, coercive, deceptive, addictive, abusive or disproportionate practices, especially when these are subordinated to economic, commercial, financial, electoral, ideological, sexual or private ends that do not respect the dignity, the mental health, the autonomy or the free development of the person.

Cognitive rights do not regulate what a person ought to think. They protect the conditions that allow someone to think, feel, believe, decide, remember, desire and form bonds without being instrumentalised by opaque, abusive or disproportionate systems of influence.

They do not defend a mind isolated from the world, nor do they deny the influence of which every human, cultural, educational and social life is made. Education, debate, truthful information, reasoned persuasion, artistic creation, care, political deliberation and cultural transmission are legitimate forms of influence when they recognise the person as a free subject and keep open their capacity to examine, accept, reject, interpret or transform what they receive.

The violation begins where influence stops being directed at a person's freedom and starts to operate against it: when it bypasses their conscious judgement, exploits their vulnerabilities, compulsively captures their attention, induces dependence, deliberately distorts their perception of the real, degrades their self-esteem, erodes their identity or reduces their effective capacity to decide.

The purpose of these rights is not to impose a single form of thought, nor a closed model of normality. It is to preserve the condition without which no other freedom fully means anything: that each person may form their thought, develop their personality and build their identity autonomously, under conditions compatible with their dignity, their mental health and their life in common. Because there is no free citizen where there is no free mind.

IV. Criteria for distinguishing legitimate influence from cognitive abuse

In order to avoid any paternalistic, moralising or censorious drift, cognitive rights must be founded on public, verifiable and proportionate criteria. Not all influence is abusive. Not all persuasion is manipulation. Not every communicative intensity constitutes harm.

A practice should be examined as a potential cognitive violation when, among others, the following elements converge: opacity as to the ends or methods of influence; the absence of meaningful consent; a disproportionate asymmetry of information, power or technical capacity; the exploitation of personal, developmental, emotional, social or clinical vulnerabilities; design oriented towards generating dependence, compulsion or loss of control; deliberate distortion of the perception of reality; the production of psychological, relational or deliberative harm; and an effective reduction of the possibility of exit, resistance or critical recovery.

These criteria do not seek to close down the cultural, political, moral or commercial dispute proper to a free society. They seek to prevent that dispute from being replaced by architectures of capture, exploitation or covert intervention in mental life.

V. What we affirm

We affirm that the human mind is not a market, nor a resource, nor a territory to be conquered.

We affirm that a person's attention forms part of their inner life, and that its persistent, opaque or compulsive capture may constitute a form of dispossession.

We affirm that every person has the right to form their beliefs and to make their decisions free from manipulation, coercion, deception, the abusive exploitation of their vulnerabilities or covert interference with their judgement.

We affirm that childhood, adolescence and those in situations of vulnerability deserve the highest protection, because upon them cognitive abuse is easier to exercise and graver in its consequences.

We affirm that democracy requires something more than the formal freedom of expression and of the vote: it requires citizens capable of attending, understanding, deliberating, remembering, dissenting and deciding without their mental life being administered by opaque powers.

We affirm, finally, that these rights are not a concession that someone must grant, but the recognition of a condition prior to all political freedom: sovereignty over one's own inner life.

VI. What this Observatory is and will do

To uphold these principles the Cognitive Rights Observatory is born. Not as one more voice in the noise, but as a place of evidence, of meeting and of action.

It will observe, document and analyse the practices of cognitive abuse, harassment and stress where they occur at scale today: on platforms and social networks, in recommender and algorithmic ranking systems, in the persuasive design of interfaces, in digital advertising and commerce, in video games, in conversational assistants and in artificial intelligence; and in the spheres of consumption, work, education, the media and politics, to the extent that it is these architectures that organise experience.

It will produce rigorous and independent knowledge, under a scientific and ethical council bringing together psychology, psychiatry, law, neuroscience, philosophy, sociology, education, communication, technology and political science.

It will develop conceptual standards, indicators, reports, recommendations and normative proposals capable of distinguishing between legitimate influence, intensive persuasion, manipulation, abuse, harassment and induced cognitive stress.

It will convene parliamentarians from different countries, professionals, institutions, universities, civil organisations and citizens, so that this cause ceases to be a scattered intuition and becomes public culture, democratic policy and legal guarantee.

And it will propose the legal, educational, clinical, social and technological instruments needed to protect what is at stake: the integrity of mental life as a condition of human dignity, personal freedom and democratic coexistence.

VII. A call

This is why we call.

On legislators, so that they give legal form to a freedom that the law already senses, but does not yet name with sufficient precision before the powers of our time.

On the professionals of the mind and of the law, so that they place their knowledge at the service of those who today are intervened upon, pressured, exploited or manipulated without being able fully to understand the mechanisms acting upon them.

On universities, public institutions, civil organisations, research centres and professional communities, so that they add their authority, their method and their work to a task that demands rigour, prudence and courage.

On families, educators and carers, so that protecting the cognitive, emotional, relational and social development of children and adolescents is recognised as a civilisational priority.

And on every person who has ever felt that their attention, their time, their desire, their fear, their identity or their convictions were being taken from them without their permission: because this cause, before it belongs to anyone, is theirs.

VIII. Closing

Every generation has had to recognise and defend the freedom of its time. To ours falls the protection of an intimate and decisive freedom: the freedom of the mind against the new forms of capture, exploitation and invisible government of inner life.

Let it not be said that we watched it be lost and did not know how to give it a name, a defence or a home.

This is that name. This is that defence. This is that home.

Matías Gálvez Fdez.

Author and promoter of the Cognitive Rights Observatory

Cognitive Rights Observatory — Founding Declaration
Barcelona, 1 May 2026

The adhesions of the people and institutions that endorse this declaration will be published as they join.

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