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New Media, New Research Challenges

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NEW MEDIA, NEW RESEARCH CHALLENGES AN INTRODUCTION

PETER GOLDING
SLAVKO SPLICHAL

Abstract

The authors introduce the European Science Foundation Forward Look Report *Media in Europe: New Questions for Research and Policy* (2013) which summarises the conclusions and recommendations of a series of ESF workshops held in 2012 to draw up a strategic research and science policy agenda for media studies in Europe for the next 5-10 years. The presentations in five meetings, along with informal dialogue and exchanges, shed greater light on the pervasive role of the media in so many areas of social, economic, cultural and political life. Five articles based on the ESF workshop position papers by the same authors, debates in the workshops and the final conference held in Ljubljana in January 2013, and respective chapters of the ESF Forward Look Report, discuss current trends in mediated identity formation, the 'digital divide' conundrum, political participation in an age of mediatisation, the agency of content creators, and research literature on media literacy.

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The contributions to this issue of *Javnost-The Public* develop themes explored in the ESF Forward Look final report *Media in Europe: New Questions for Research and Policy*. The European Science Foundation instrument called the 'Forward Look' is designed to develop medium to long-term views and analyses of future research developments in specific research areas with the aim of defining a set of key research questions that should be addressed at national and European level. By assessing what is known and what needs to be known, the Forward Looks try to identify the ways in which research can advance knowledge and steer the development of policy and practice.

Of all different spheres of social life being transformed by digital technologies, mass mediated communication is undergoing the most significant changes, which can be characterised in terms of digitisation, globalisation and commodification. Given the pervasive role of the media in so many areas of social, economic, cultural and political life, the field of media studies will become even more important in the years to come. In this context, the ESF Forward Look "Media Studies: New Media and New Literacies" (2012-2013) has drawn up a strategic research and science policy agenda for media studies for the next 5-10 years. The Report outlines the research priorities in the field of media studies in Europe in the years ahead, focusing on four broad clusters of critical issues: (1) political engagement, (2) digital divides, (3) the creative economy, and (4) identity formation.

This Forward Look grew up from a workshop initiated by the ESF Standing Committees for the Humanities (SCH) and the Social Sciences (SCSS) in response to the need for a better coordinated development of research initiatives that stretch across the (methodological) divides between the humanities and social sciences. Following the example of the ESF Research Networking Programme "Changing Media, Changing Europe" (2000-2004) focused on the development of media as part of the modernisation and globalisation of society, the new initiative brought together researchers from different backgrounds in the humanities and social sciences, to outline the priorities for future research and to sketch funding initiatives crossing traditional borders between different disciplines in media studies.

The FL report *Media in Europe: New Questions for Research and Policy* summarises the conclusions and recommendations of a series of four ESF workshops held in 2012 in Helsinki, Nicosia and Lisbon, and the final conference in Ljubljana in January 2013. The meetings brought together in an interdisciplinary dialogue scholars and researchers representing different areas of social sciences and humanities from almost all European countries. The presentations in five meetings, along with informal dialogue and exchanges, shed greater light on the pervasive role of the media in so many areas of social, economic, cultural and political life. In this special issue of *Javnost-The Public* on new questions on media research and policy in Europe, we share with you five articles based on the ESF workshop position papers by the same authors, debates in the workshops and the final conference, and respective chapters of the ESF Forward Look report *Media in Europe: New Questions for Research and Policy* published at the same time as this theme issue.

Recent years have witnessed an unprecedented growth in research – in terms of publications, scholars and students – in the field of communication and media studies in Europe and elsewhere. "Over the past 50 years, the associated fields of communication and media studies have expanded perhaps more than any other academic field apart from computer science and biomedicine" (Nordentstreng

2012, 1). It is true that the field is flush with resources that some other disciplines may only dream of, including an increase in the number of students at all levels of higher education. Yet the same conditions that make media and communication departments at universities crammed by students also maintain their relatively low status in the research community. However, while communication as a research field is believed to have made one of the greatest growths of all academic fields over the last 50 years, it is also believed that it has become increasingly heterogeneous and diversified, mirroring its intellectual origins and goals, powerful changes in the media landscape as well as its socio-cultural significance (Splichal & Dahlgren 2013). Because of the conceptual and paradigmatic divisions, the field still lacks identity and tends to lose normative orientation in empirical research (Donsbach 2005).

With the advent of the internet, research on ('new') media was adopted by almost all disciplines in the social sciences as well as humanities. The ubiquity of the Internet in social relations makes it more than just new information and communication technology; its development embodies, reproduces, and sustains forms of social organisation spread through the entire social structure. With one of the seven 'flagship initiatives' of the 'Europe 2020 Strategy', the European Commission committed itself to

> *maximise the social and economic potential of ICT, most notably the internet, a vital medium of economic and societal activity: for doing business, working, playing, communicating and expressing ourselves freely. Successful delivery of this Agenda will spur innovation, economic growth and improvements in daily life for both citizens and businesses. … [Digital technologies] will provide Europeans with a better quality of life through, for example, better health care, safer and more efficient transport solutions, cleaner environment, new media opportunities and easier access to public services and cultural content* (Digital Agenda 2010, 3).

There is increasing optimism that new communication technologies will bring significant advances in human life. The internet can indeed empower individuals and groups to 'construct' new communities and spaces of shared interests but their agency can only be efficacious within properly regulated political and economic conditions on both national and transnational levels. Otherwise, the internet may generate new forms of marginalisation and exclusion. For example, with the new interactive virtual spaces it has created, the internet increased the possibility of citizens' participation in political discourse beyond national boundaries but the mere extension of communication networks does not yet provide (new) opportunities for citizens' participation in political processes.

Both the general optimism invested in the increasing use and availability of digital media and the new research challenges have stimulated governmental and non-governmental actors, science and funding organisations to undertake systematic reviews of the current status and trends in the field in order to identify potential opportunities for better and perhaps more legitimate social use of new communication technologies and media, and to determine priorities for future funding. The articles collected in this issue of *Javnost-The Public* present a number of prospective directions in media research, illustrating their potential relevance and/or societal impact. They summarise the key defining features of the issues demanding research priority in the field of media studies in Europe in the years

ahead. Authors of the articles in this issue make it clear that research on media is closely related to questions of economic and technological developments, public policy and the state, and more broadly to social, economic and cultural issues. They do not suggest that their observations exhaust the research priorities or possibilities in this field; nevertheless, the ideas expressed in the following pages do represent a range of vital and pressing questions to be addressed in the near future.

The first article "Mediated Identity Formation: Current Trends in Research and Society" by Johan Fornäs and Charis Xinaris discusses the changing conditions of identity formation in a media-saturated society. The authors identify a wide range of connections and interdependences between media, users, and broader cultural developments while discussing the relationship between the formation of personal and collective identities and media developments in contemporary societies, recognising the many ways in which the media are both a resource for the construction of identity and a means for its dissemination and publication. They see media competence (which includes not only access to the media but also the ability to critically assess and process media content) as directly relevant to the processes of identity formation.

Although a variety of approaches to identity formation from a media studies perspective exist, the authors suggest that relevant research questions and topics of investigation in this area may be summarised under three fundamental thematic categories. (1) The first category of questions is concerned with defining and describing ongoing changes of identity formation. Since issues of media competence and identity formation always implicate issues of power, more research is needed to find out how interactive mechanisms between media practices, identity formations and democratic politics actually function. (2) Equally urgent is research that uncovers the media-related causes behind current identity transformations, including matters of technology, form and context of communication, as well as the roles of the digital media. (3) Finally, research is needed to recognise and explain the consequences of new modes of identity formation as they affect the development of transcultural identities and the issue of empowerment.

In the article on "What Is the 'Digital Divide' and Why Is It Important?", Colin Sparks presents a clear and balanced overview of research concerning digital divides, thus integrating diverse positions and sources of research, including institutions such as the OECD. The article concentrates on one aspect of access in advanced economies – on familial and individual access and usage of digital media. While the author admits that access to, and use of, new information and communication technologies in the workplace is clearly central to understanding the experience of labour in the 21st century, he had to restrict his contribution to access in the home and individual usage of ICTs which to some degree (still) overlaps with the consumption of the 'old' (print, broadcasting, cinema, recorded music etc.) media.

As the author argues, it is unlikely that in the future network society every last aspect of social life will depend upon using information and communication technologies, but the range of significant activities which will do so will almost certainly increase. At the same time, the digital divide may well be deepening, as it is not only reflecting existing social structures and pre-existing inequalities but also helping to form and reproduce them. Large political and social questions of equity and efficiency do not disguise that, however complex and multi-dimensional, inequities in access to and ability to use new communication technologies persist,

and endure beyond what once was expected to be ephemeral. Thus it is important to identify sources and forms of social disadvantage and inequality in the use and ownership of communication facilities both nationally and internationally. The author concludes that questions about who has what kinds of access, knowledge, experience, confidence and opportunity to sustain an acceptable standard of life in the future network society will become increasingly central to all social inquiry as well as to the distribution of power and resources within society itself.

The article on "Political Participation in an Age of Mediatisation" written by Peter Dahlgren and Claudia Alvares, outlines the importance of mediatisation, the saturation of political communication of all kinds by media, and suggests the need for a renewed research focus on the nature of alternative democratic politics. The article suggests prioritising research that considers "political agency in context" and sets out a number of themes that would follow from such a perspective.

The authors present a coherent overview of research regarding the relationship between two key areas of concern in the modern world: democratic political participation and the contemporary media environment. They question the presumption that technology will inevitably and insistently enlarge possibilities for political action and mobilisation, not least because of its potential for by-passing representative organisations and institutions, and the possibility that selective exposure in a diverse and individualised communication environment could emphasise the reinforcement of attitudes as much as constructive dialogue. One of the strengths of this contribution is the elaboration of the ways in which formal as well as informal practices of political engagement relate to media and their everyday uses by citizens. Whereas 'publicness' of the public sphere has traditionally been conceptualised in terms of rational deliberation, it is now increasingly linked to digital multimedia channels that often privilege other and different forms of political expression, including the visual, the symbolic, the affective, and the experiential. The textual has not disappeared, but text online tends to be more cursory than in print, and shares the stage with other communicative modes. As the authors believe, this shift may also correspond to an increasingly visible dichotomy between traditional institutional and non-institutional, alternative politics.

They suggest that research on media and democracy, especially concerning engagement and participation, needs to be rethought not only in the light of the rapidly changing media landscape but also in relation to the current crises of economies, welfare, political participation, and private-public provision. These crises are altering the life circumstances of many citizens as well as threatening the character and quality of democracy itself. The very notion and practice of citizenship in a democracy, in other words, is at issue, with the media in all their forms and changing nature at the heart of engagement and empowerment.

Ola Erstadt's article, "The Agency of Content Creators – Implications for Personal Engagement and Media Industries," focuses on the interconnection between different levels that creative cultural production represents, from the social practices of individuals to collective orientations in media use and macro processes of the creative economy in Europe. It is argued that, "A focus on content creation among audiences implies a reorientation towards the productive mode, and how this has moved from the domain of professionals in media organisations towards a common practice among people in their everyday lives."

While much research has looked into everyday experience and the values, ideas,

beliefs, and attitudes of consumers, there is much less known about the acts and structures behind both creation and creativity. There remains a need to depart from the residue of romantic excess imbued in the concept of creativity, and to understand better the relationship of symbolic to material value in the content of communications. One resource for taking this research forward is in the rediscovery and deployment of various ethnographic methodologies, and to recognise that media research has always, for reasons of access and practicality, been unable to generate the volume of 'production studies' required to obtain a balanced understanding of the full communications process. There remains much to understand about the qualities, activities, and character of the creative workforce and creative industries in three key areas: media creativity, social practices of audiences, and the impact of technological developments on the creative and cultural economy.

In the initial Forward Look Proposal "Media Studies: New Media and New Literacies" submitted to the ESF Directorate in spring 2008, the issue of media literacy was the guiding concept and focus. The concept was much debated, and these debates are reflected in the review essay "From Protection to Public Participation" provided by Ola Erstad and Synnøve Amdam. As debate evolved in the development of the Forward Look, it became increasingly necessary to go beyond many of the issues raised in discussing media literacy in order to formulate proposals for research and policy responding to the pervasive role of the media in so many areas of social, economic, cultural and political life. Yet Erstad's and Amdam's essay presents a solid, constructive, and useful review of previous research on media literacy. One of its strengths is the specification of literacy simultaneously as an individual capacity and a social practice.

The articles presented in this issue of *Javnost-The Public* reflect the combined ideas offered by numerous specialists from different countries having participated in the four ESF workshops, whose contribution is briefly described and acknowledged in each of the articles included in this issue.

We wish to express our profound thanks to Professor Klaus Bruhn Jensen and Professor Ed Mcluskie who thoroughly reviewed the contributions to this issue. Their cogent, lucid and constructive comments and suggestions were an invaluable assistance to the authors.

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MEDIATED IDENTITY FORMATION

CURRENT TRENDS IN RESEARCH AND SOCIETY

JOHAN FORNÄS
CHARIS XINARIS

Abstract

This paper aims to overview the current processes and challenges that relate to how media developments influence – and are influenced by – the ways in which personal and collective identities are formed in contemporary societies. First, it discusses ways to approach and define the concept of identity from a media perspective. A discussion of how identity formation issues links to the concept of new media literacies forms a transition to three sections that in turn analyse the social trends, the policy trends and the scientific trends that may be discerned in this area. The final section first summarises key research questions and then offers some more concrete ingredients for identifying possible instruments of a new research agenda.

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Contemporary Perspectives on Mediated Identities

Identity formation can be broadly described as the development of ways to define and give meaning to individuals or collectives in relation to others and to themselves. Identities are formed both from within and from the outside, in a complex interplay of mutual recognition and understanding of self and others. Identity formation in relation to both 'old' and 'new' media has been the subject of various humanities and social sciences discourses, including analyses of subject formation in different media genres (from romance novels to talk shows) as well as audience research on how different people use media as resources in their everyday lives.

People shape their tools of communication that then shape them. This is particularly true of identity formation in the digital era, where the development of consciousness (e.g. individual, social, national, racial or gender) is profoundly mediated by uses of communication technologies and identifications and therefore directly linked to experiences of media use. Individual self-understanding increasingly has to negotiate how different identity dimensions are proposed and ordered in media texts of various kinds (Nava 2007; Bennett et al. 2011). This may be extended to discussions concerning the formation of hybrid identities which for instance relate to cyberbodies and gamer subcultures; formations of individual identity and identification with 'others'; performative social networks that construct imagined identities; and new forms of linguistic and cultural hybrid identities that are both produced and reflected by new forms of archiving and interaction.

Identity is a term that incorporates two seemingly opposite meanings, as it implies both affiliation with another and individual uniqueness in terms of a difference from the other. It suggests belonging, as in being part of a community, as well as making oneself distinct; it signifies both sameness and difference. Identity is not just a strict *sameness* across time or space, even though it often implies some kind of similarity, in that for instance somebody is recognisable over time or the members of a collective entity share some characteristics. It has another aspect that may be called *selfhood*: a dynamic project with a cultural dimension, linked to the effort to give meaning to oneself and to others through signifying practices of interpretation (Ricoeur 1990/1992). Such signifying processes make use of various kinds of symbols that are mediated through shifting modes of communication, thereby linking identity formations closely to media processes. Consequently, the topic of identity formation incorporates a number of contradictions to be explored through an interdisciplinary approach.

Identities are formed on different levels, from the individual to overlapping sets of social collectives. On shifting scales, similar processes of identification develop on all such levels, though the precise dynamics vary. For instance, there is today a contested project of adding, constituting or consolidating a strengthened European identification that is not meant to substitute older, regional or national identifications, but rather to supplement them (Arslan et al. 2009; Uricchio 2008, Fornäs 2012). This project has since its emergence been recurrently in crisis, and European media studies should be able to offer important insights into the dynamics and dilemmas of European identification, not least in relation to new media, ethnic diversity and generational shifts. The internet in particular has been seen as having the potential for transnational dialogue through its open and participa-

tive structure. However, what such efforts through media-related projects have shown in the recent past is that although people are enthusiastic about the ideal of intercultural dialogue they are not as clear when it comes to the objective of such efforts, which in practice makes it hard to establish efficient online platforms to promote intercultural dialogue. This suggests that what is currently needed is not so much the medium, the technology, or the enthusiasm for working towards the development of transnational identities but rather a clearer theorisation and understanding for the need, the necessity, or the benefits of the development of such identities, be it on a European or a more international level.

Whether individual or collective, identities are not fixed, stable or unified entities, but increasingly fragmented and fractured, constantly in a process of change and transformation. No identity is a fixed essence; all identities are to at least some extent fluid, contextual, contested and discursively shaped (Anderson 1983/1991; Hall 1997; Hall & du Gay 1996; Pickering 2001). In spite of this fluid diversity, there are still some structural frameworks that organise identity discourses in relation to certain dominant dimensions or *identity orders*, such as age and generation, gender and sexuality, class and status, ethnicity and nationality, etc. Specific individual or collective identities are formed at the intersection between all these. This *intersectionality* is no mere addition of age, gender, class, ethnicity, etc. since none of these identity orders is constituted in splendid isolation from the others. Instead, they deeply affect each other from the very beginning, as they are mutually co-constituted. Media studies increasingly tend to take such intersections into account. Identities are relationally constructed across different (often intersecting and antagonistic) discourses and practices that link different forms of individual habitus and cultural capital to positions in social fields (Bourdieu 1979/1984).

New Media Practices and Competences

In contemporary post- or late-modern society, through processes of mediatisation, globalisation and commercialisation in the information and knowledge society, individuals form identity in relation to media access and media effects. Therefore, media competence (as access to ‘new’ and ‘old’ media as well as the ability to critically assess and process media content) becomes directly relevant to the issue of identity formation. If media competence poses the question “what is needed in order to be a literate person?”, then media competence in the twenty-first century is a condition of knowledge for the formation of identity and subjectivity. Knowledge involves technical qualification but also ethical wisdom and aesthetic appreciation. Navigating in today’s media world demands knowing how to search and find relevant sources of information as quickly as possible, by googling etc., but also being able to tell reliable from unreliable sources.

Media competence is a life skill that is necessary for full participation in society, and it is itself an integral part of identity formation, since it immediately relates to how people understand and define themselves as well as each other. It has long been argued that democratic deliberation in contemporary societies, which are increasingly diverse, complex and intertwined, demands subjective identities that are less bound to traditional conventions and more open to mutual interaction and reflexivity. In theory, this demands and may be supported by changing modes of socialisation in families, schools and other parts of everyday life – and not least in

media use. More research is needed to find out how such interactive mechanisms between media practices, identity formations and democratic politics actually function.

This also raises questions of who is considered to be literate today and how liberating media competence is in relation to identity formation. It is often argued that increased and facilitated access to media use and media content enables the individual to form identity in a more informed, responsible and critically aware manner. On the other hand, some 'democratic' forms of access to media use and content tend to fix subjects in set identity formations that may appear fluid and boundless but in practice serve as new forms of oppression, for instance with the invasion of privacy, victimisation, abuse and networked group pressure. There is therefore a need to strike a balance between emancipatory and authoritarian traits in new media practices and skills. Issues of media competence and identity formation always implicate issues of power, where there tends to be problematic imbalances between different social groups (in terms of class, gender, ethnicity, age, etc.) as well as between individual citizens and political or commercial institutions (state and market actors; Canclini 1995/2001).

This furthermore gives rise to questions of the subject of media competence. Do audiences need to be educated or should corporations be targeted – or both? This is in turn related to whether media content is primarily determined by socio-economic factors, media corporations, audiences or wider cultural trends in society. Such questions point towards a need to differentiate among different types of media competence, related to different media contents or genres, as well as to different media users (the elderly, for example, seem not to be as often researched as younger users). Such a differential approach may also take account of the ever-faster fragmentation of audiences, enabled by the new communication technologies and growing individualisation in media use (Livingstone 2005). At the same time, the links between such different types must not be forgotten, as both ordinary users and media industries increasingly tend to develop intermedial connections that allow various contents to move between different platforms.

Trends in Society

Media impinge upon almost all aspects of contemporary life, including key financial, social and cultural processes. To study media is therefore an important pathway for understanding fundamental processes in society and the human condition more generally. In the last two decades, media have undergone profound changes linked to digitisation, globalisation and commodification. Digitisation shapes a shared technological platform for telecommunication, media and ICTs (information and communications technologies), offering new multimodal forms of expression and exchange. Globalisation is facilitated by satellites and cables that offer instant communication and networked interaction with distant others through networked mobile devices. Commercial enterprises push these processes forward and shape media products and processes of use by familiar fault lines in terms of class, gender, ethnicity, age and region. Even though terminologies vary, there is a wide consensus among researchers that contemporary societies are increasingly media-saturated, so that these new technological, economic and socio-cultural media developments together constitute a mediatisation of society, whereby complex

ensembles of media processes impact on all dimensions of social life (Elliott & Urry 2010; Hepp 2011/2013; Hjarvard 2013; Morley 2006).

In particular, these societal changes have clear implications for identity formations. A widened range of societal debates and conflicts are today centred upon identity issues: intergenerational shifts, gender inequalities, national issues, ethnic relations, European integration, human rights, multiculturalism and xenophobia all have a primary focus on issues of collective and individual identity, which are in turn strongly related to uses of media genres and technologies. The latter are obviously related to the former, but it remains an open question whether new media have opened new links between people or just offered new modes of being "alone together" (Turkle 2011). Joint European media research has therefore started to take such issues seriously, and approach identity formations as they are constructed by the use of various kinds of media, which is for instance important when it comes to the interplay between new waves of media technologies and complex sequences of overlapping generations among media users, audiences and publics. Media policies and identity policies at both the national and European levels also need to be considered in this respect as they represent a social and democratic response to the challenges put forward by the mentioned societal changes. Moreover, public policies reflect the public efforts within societies directed to an organised regulation of media development trends.

The term 'mediation' denotes that something functions as a linking device between different entities. Media are socially organised technologies made for being used in the practices of communication that are prime examples of such mediating processes. 'Mediatisation' refers to a historical process whereby such media increasingly come to saturate society, culture, identities and everyday life. There is currently an intensified activity among European scholars to discuss and clarify this alleged process of mediatisation, in a number of international conferences, working groups and publications. There is a need for theoretical development to better understand whether and in which respects various aspects of society and everyday life are becoming more mediatised, and in what sense: how has this changed over time, which forms may be discerned in different world regions, what dimensions and spheres of life and society are affected, and with which results. Still, there is a widespread discourse that takes such development for granted, indicating a need for a deeper understanding of how media texts, technologies and practices interact and affect identity formation on both an individual and a collective level.

Serious efforts are today made to uphold a reasonable balance so that the social effects of new media technologies are fully acknowledged but not overestimated (Hepp et al. 2008; Morley 2006). It seems for instance clear that networked digital modes of communication and so-called social media of various kinds have had strong (though contested) repercussions on social and political life. The Arab Spring offered ample evidence to the way text messaging, mobile phone cameras and blogs have affected civic resistance as well as state and market surveillance. But at the same time, processes of *remediation* (whereby new media lean on and reshuffle aspects of older ones, and vice versa) imply that the older media forms and practices largely remain in place too (as do indeed certain traditional forms of political power and ideology; Bolter & Grusin 1999). One cannot take for granted that new phenomena make the older ones obsolete. For instance, in most countries

television is still the dominant medium in terms of time of usage in the majority population, followed by radio, while the internet continues to reproduce important structures, forms and contents from the established media (press, books, TV, radio, film, music media, etc.). Also, television largely remains among the most socially widespread media forms, while the internet still has a very biased use in terms of class and other identity categories. Conventional mass media are now embedding social media for increased audience participation and identification, giving rise to remediation and intermedial hybridity rather than a simple substitution of one medium for another. Today new research is looking at how such combinatory flexibility and hybrid media use is causally or otherwise linked to new modes of being and identification. Such considerations must be kept in mind when formulating policies for meeting the present media situation and envisaging their future developments.

In a media saturated world, audiences are bombarded with messages and information. However, it remains to be seen how much media content audiences actually absorb and how much they filter out, and whether there is any wider spread of a social media fatigue syndrome where individuals are overloaded and therefore tend to abandon network activities. Perhaps too much agency has been placed on technology and there is therefore a need to reconsider how institutions and individuals cope in a media saturated world. In addition, if everyone processes information through a filter bubble, then it is perhaps necessary to investigate how to empower people in their need to break the bubble. This is particularly important when it comes to issues of media competence as people need to be aware that they are in a "box" (or in a number of different "boxes"), and to this effect, a broader perspective of media competence is needed. It seems that the latter is also a key point for policy formation.

Besides its fundamental intersecting of diverse individuals, collectives, identity orders and symbolic modes, identity formation in an increasingly mediatised society involves the increasingly complex interaction of several key levels. Identities are always symbolically expressed, and when these modes of signification involve a growing scale of media technologies, the potential gap increases between (a) the 'front-stage' performance of identity, for instance in shifting internet environments, (b) the often complex and hybrid 'back-stage'understandings of selves and others in everyday life, and (c) the industries and institutions' ways of managing and organising how identities can be formed and communicated.[1]

Trends in Media Policy

Most policies focus on computer-based ICT competence, as a tool for virtual collaboration, information processing and learning in the workplace or in education (e-learning). Media competence is a broader term, embracing the shaping, sharing, (critical) evaluation and use of print as well as audiovisual and digital media. Divides remain between definitions of ICT competence versus media competence. All policy documents agree that more systematic and trans-border research is needed in order to facilitate effective policy-making, but public and private stakeholders differ in identifying the appropriate aims and outcomes of such research. While ICT competence spreads rapidly and is standardised to be relatively easily transferred, media competence demands efforts that enable understanding of a wide range of

social processes (cultural, historical, language, etc.). The interactions between the two interconnected spheres of competence (ICT and the media) need therefore to be studied in the perspective of the media and ICT policy trends.

Besides political and social citizenship, research as well as politics have increasingly recognised the importance of *cultural citizenship*, which requires access to tools for active participation in those communication practices that underpin civic society and its mutually overlapping public spheres (Canclini 1995/2001; Stevenson 2001; Cardoso 2007; Fornäs et al. 2007). This demands access to the means to fully use the widest possible range of media in dialogues with others. *Communicative rights* aim to secure the democratic availability of three main kinds of such means: material, social and personal resources. Material resources for interaction include access to many kinds of media texts and technologies; social resources imply access to interactive networks and public spheres in which such media forms circulate; and personal resources point towards the area of media competence in a more narrow sense, including access, knowledge and critical education.

Citizens all over the world use a wide range of communication media to satisfy their personal, social and economic needs as well as to try and intervene in the political arena. Governments on local, state and supra-state levels also develop increasingly sophisticated methods for administering society and meeting popular opinions and movements either with democratic or non-democratic measures. Media and communication issues are increasingly important in virtually all policy fields of today, including both market policies in the economic sphere and governmental policies in the political sphere. To a large extent these negotiations and struggles relate to issues of identity formation. One example is how European integration has a key cornerstone in the efforts to make Europe's citizens identify as Europeans and not just as different from the rest of Europe (Bondebjerg & Golding 2004; Uricchio 2008; Salovaara-Moring 2009). Another example is how equality issues relating to gender, sexuality, ethnicity and other identity dimensions are more and more placed at the core of policy development for new media technologies and content (Arslan et al. 2009; Olsson & Dahlgren 2010).

Co-extensive to that is the issue of policies on privacy and copyright, as the two intersect when it comes to the use of social media. The sexualisation of society, as well as an apparent lack of media competence and sexual education, often make users (especially youths) more vulnerable to various kinds of dangers, threats and abuse. Therefore, the conditions under which agency and self-governance is exercised need to be re-examined. The issue of copyright is also related to the distribution of cultural capital and how that is distributed, as currently the information gaps of policy makers seem to have prevented the creation of policy related to this issue. The changes in the media and in the way these have changed identities need to be interlinked with new policies which reflect recent developments.

A policy for cultural citizenship and communicative rights needs to reflect upon the main ongoing developments in media, culture and politics. Processes of mediatisation and new challenges to the existing political and economic structures combine into an urgent demand for reformulating the interfaces between identity formation and new media.

Trends in Research

Media studies have developed at most European universities, but in rather disparate ways – from sub-sections within a mother discipline to independent, interdisciplinary departments both in commercial as well as academic traditions. Media studies embrace an equally wide array of foci, evolving out of the social sciences and humanities, and drawing on a wide range of traditional and emergent disciplines. There is also a range of strong international research societies in the field (ECREA, ICA, IAMCR, etc.).

There are many different branches of media studies of identity formation. Whereas in the late twentieth century, this academic field was divided by deep and often antagonistic gaps, one may today discern considerably more convergences and dialogues between positions and perspectives that supplement rather than fight each other. Instead of distinct and mutually hostile camps, there is more often a dynamically interweaving set of currents that sometimes reinforce, sometimes contradict each other.[2]

This is for instance true of textual and contextual approaches. There has for many decades been a number of *cultural* turns, including the development of cultural sociology and of cultural studies, together with a general awareness in the wider social sciences of the importance of cultural factors and dimensions in various social and human spheres. Within media studies, this has implied a greater attention not only to genres of arts, entertainment and popular culture, but also in a wider sense to signifying practices and aesthetic aspects in all kinds of media and communication processes. As identity has to do with social actors' meaning-making, this in turn has reinforced the interest in identity issues. At the same time, interpretations have become more aware of the importance of *contexts*, so that the cultural acknowledgement of meaningful texts has fused with a complementary attention to social contexts. As a result, identity formations have become understood as resulting from signifying practices that link individuals and collectives to various forms of meaning, always mediated through communicative resources that operate within a complex set of social contexts. In one sense, the cultural and the contextual current seem to contradict each other, as they either expand or delimit the scope of symbolic forms, but in another sense, they supplement each other and have blended in fruitful ways, for instance in the diverse field of cultural studies (Silverstone 1999; Couldry 2000; Lehtonen 2000).

The development of new, networked and electronic media technologies has had far-reaching effects on identifying practices, for instance as a result of a heightened compression of time and space and a convergence between different modes of expression, technologies and branches. Much common as well as academic discussion of this *digital* turn has produced the expression of a radical break that completely alters the conditions for everything from political agency to fan culture. The whole distinction between 'old' and 'new' media is based on that idea. At the same time, influential currents of media history have emphasised the *intermedial* connections between 'old' and 'new' media, and the fact that new forms of mediation always remediate older forms and genres. This in turn tends to relativise the recent digital turn and point at certain continuities across time. Again, there are both affinities and tensions between this pair of currents, as digital and intermedial perspectives

on mediated identities offer slightly different takes on change and continuity in media history (Bolter & Grusin 1999; Herkman et al. 2012).

Another pair of themes concerns the basic coordinates of time and space. A *historical* current has revitalised an interest in not only understanding the present situation as if it was autonomous from all that came before, but rather linking the present to the past and the future, focusing on various kinds and levels of temporal processes. This is not least important for identity issues, as identification has very much to do with tracing genealogies and trajectories of subjects across time, reconstructing identity positions that link past to contemporary actions. At the same time, a *spatial* current has also been notable, with studies of communication geography, city branding and media ethnography. This is likewise essential for identity issues, where a move from abstract and universal ideas to situated modes of understanding has been influential. Here, the spaces and locations where identities are made by uses of media are put in focus, making use of ethnographic or geographic modes of mapping. Just as time and space need to be understood together, there is also a need to synthesise historical and spatial perspectives in media studies of identity formation (Kittler 1997; Hörisch 2001; Falkheimer & Jansson 2006; Morley 2006; Fornäs et al. 2007).

A strong *visual* current has been notable, fuelled by the success of new visual media forms. Verbal interpretations are not enough, and there is a need for refined readings of the visual markers and landscapes that define individuals and groups. However, *aural* modes of communication, not least music but also speech, continue to be of vital importance in today's mediascape. Music is sadly neglected in much ordinary media studies, while being focal for much of the content and use of new as well as older media. There is a great need to develop new innovative methods for understanding how mediated sounds work as tools for identity formation, and not neglect this analysis and leave it to dedicated musicologists or other sound specialists(McCarthy 2001; Sturken & Cartwright 2001; Sterne 2003; Nyre 2008; Erlmann 2010).

One may also discern a *material* current, where some from a perspective of media archaeology have argued for a focused attention on the materiality of media effects instead of interpreting meanings. This stands in a dialectical relation to another, *discursive* current, which focuses on how meanings are made across media texts. Discursive approaches map out the webs of communicating meaning that organise the social world, and how such ordering mechanisms position and constitute human subjects. In some ways, the two again contradict each other, in that radical discourse analysis tends to deconstruct material worlds (from sensual and affective bodies to technological machines) as effects of social and communicative discourses, while on the other hand materialist positions have argued against textual analysis of mediation and for a return to immediate lived experience and material effects. For instance, are human bodies and technical artefacts in communication practices to be seen as extratextual material actors or textual discursive constructs? On closer scrutiny, the two streams often run in parallel, in important efforts to understand the close interaction between materiality and discourse, seeing materiality not as an alternative to meaning but instead focusing on the close interaction between the two (Shields 1996; Sundén 2003; Turkle 2011; Hayles 2012).

Key Research Questions

In conclusion, it is important that future research in media studies addresses the issue of identity formation as both a consequence and a cause of engagement with media-related technology and production. Although current research has dealt with a variety of aspects of identity formation from a media studies perspective, relevant research questions and topics of investigation in this area may be seen as comprising three major thematic categories which aim to explore (1) how mediated identity formations are changing today; (2) why these changes take place; and (3) what are their main consequences.

1. *How are mediated identity formations changing today?* This first category of questions is concerned with defining and describing ongoing changes of identity formation. This relates issues of individual, social and cultural identities to notions of diversity and power.

a. *Individual, social and cultural identities*: As individual identity formations interact with social and collective identifications and with the symbolic forms of identity that are constructed in various media texts and genres in arts and entertainment, it appears relevant to examine the way such formations work. Moreover, the issue of self-identification of an individual or a social group and its interaction with other identifications as well as their struggle for recognition through different media forms is directly relevant here. This is reinforced by the role of media-focused subcultures such as fans, gamers or 'hacktivists', particularly considering the changing role of public institutions – from archives and libraries to museums and public service media – in supporting identity formation and the dynamic of that change.

b. *Diversity and power*: In addition to these issues, social fragmentation and media fragmentation as they relate to audience power and institutional power place identity formation in a field of tension. The distribution of cultural capital across social space as well as the intersections between different identity dimensions such as age, gender, class and ethnicity play an important role in the formation of identity. There is a need to examine the materiality of mediated identities, which identities are excluded or marginalised in current media practices, which are the performative aspects of identity formation, and which bodies (e.g. gendered, abled/disabled, young/aging) matter while others do not. For instance, the performances of (masculine, feminine or 'queered') gender and sexual identity are affected by developments of 'new' media access and content in feminist groups, male subcultures, internet pornography, dating, chat-rooms, blogs, information websites, etc. (Ahmed 2006; Butler & Spivak 2007). There is further a need to come to grips with the ways in which 'haters' of various kinds (misogynistic, homophobic, xenophobic, sectarian or fundamentalist 'trolls' etc.) threaten to undermine efforts to make new media a vital element in the public sphere.

2. *Why have key modes of identity formation changed?* This second category relates to the media-related causes behind current identity transformations, including matters of technology, form and context of communication, as well as the roles of the 'new' media.

a. *Technology, form and context of communication*: Understanding the interaction between new media technologies, new genres of text and communication, new political and economic structures, and new social and psychological ways of life

is one of the relevant issues here, particularly considering the changes in communication technologies in relation to other social and cultural factors. In assessing the proper role of 'new' media, one must not disregard the historical process of mediatisation that the sociocultural world of identity formation is subject to. It must here be studied how new media forms remediate older modes of communication, replicating but also redefining them. This effort can benefit from the history of previous media transitions that may shed light upon the current situation, involving mutually contradictory and ambivalent processes of exploration, exploitation, institutionalisation, disciplining and normalisation.

b. *Roles of new media*: The way in which conventional features of social interaction (e.g. immediacy or ritual social events) limit or enhance identity formation in social media environments should be explored. The ways in which the engagement in new ICTs redefines identity by creating distinctions between non-users and (different kinds of) users is also of relevance. Furthermore, the trend towards individualisation in new media resources (techniques and genres) also affects identity formation. Both the brighter and the darker aspects of for instance the internet need to be acknowledged, neglecting neither its emancipatory nor its authoritarian potentials – the former linked to resources for democratisation and empowerment, the latter to new forms of surveillance and post-panoptical 'sousveillance' as well as to misogynist and xenophobic 'haters'.

3. *What are the consequences of new modes of identity formation?* This third category of research questions concerns the consequences of new modes of identity formation as they affect the development of transcultural identities and the issue of empowerment.

a. *Transcultural identities*: Whether recent changes in cultural consumption and media use have led to new forms of identity, e.g. changing the balance between European, national and sub-national identifications, is a possible area of investigation. This directly relates to the prospects, problems and potentials of transnational identities such as those linked to Europe, in a situation of increasingly complex and multi-levelled global media flows. It remains to be seen whether new social media contribute to intercultural dialogue and the emergence of new 'contact zones' where diverse cultures meet, as well as to what extent they shift or perpetuate established power structures between different cultures and societies. The role of language and translation for the formation of identity in 'new' media environments, and the rise of hybrid linguistic systems due to the use of 'new' media that further contribute to the proliferation of more hybrid, fluid, transitory and de-territorialised identities has also not been adequately researched. Current media transformations affect the ways in which fictional identities in arts, popular culture and games interact with people's own identifications and social practices.

b. *Empowerment*: Media studies should get a better understanding of issues related to empowerment, aimed at strengthening individual and collective citizens' (and non-citizens') communicative rights and resources in relation to state control and the power of large corporations to pre-structure and delimit the potentials of new media technologies. Here, regulation and responsibility need to be balanced with rights and freedoms of expression, and democratic movements as well as public cultural institutions should find ways to make even better use of the emerging new media resources.

Ingredients for a New Research Agenda

A new agenda for media studies needs to find workable instruments to support research that takes these questions seriously. Ingredients to be taken into consideration include the following, all of which are of relevance to the organisation of research but in various ways also to the direction and content of research itself. In three dimensions, there is a core need for interaction across traditional borders, to be enhanced by organisational measures but also through new forms of comparative research.

A. *Interdisciplinary approaches*. It should first be noted that co-operation between humanities and social science scholars, as well as with technological expertise, is already comparatively well developed in media studies, as this is a rather dynamic and composite field of knowledge with shifting faculty locations in different countries and universities. In this area, social science approaches tend also to acknowledge the role of media texts, while humanities approaches likewise tend to be also interested in the social significance of the media genres they focus on. This mutual interaction offers great opportunities for validating results at both sides. There is, however, a need for more real comparative studies across (geographical, political and social) space, time and media/genre – comparing mediated identity formations in different European countries, between different historical periods and between shifting media genres and modes of communication. This requires continued and strengthened collaboration across disciplinary boundaries, both within different branches of media studies and not least also with other disciplines and fields within the humanities and the social sciences. This applies to languages, aesthetic and historical disciplines as well as to sociology, anthropology, economics and political science, but there is also a need to further develop interactions with technological fields of research, so as to bridge the tendential gap between interpretive, critical and technical knowledge-interests in the workings of new media.

B. *International scholarly interaction*. Second, the comparative research mentioned above necessarily demands strong elements of transnational co-operation within Europe but also on a global scale. The new media situation is not confined within national or continental borders, as European trends are intrinsically linked to how states, media corporations and civil society actors contribute to identity formation across the world. European institutions and traditions make it fruitful to develop certain new modes of interaction and research within the overall European community, but such initiatives should never be firmly closed off to participation from the rest of the world, including not just the USA and other 'Western' nations but also actors in Africa, Asia and Latin America.

C. *Dialogues between the academy and other stakeholders*. On such a platform, media studies should thirdly be able to identify innovative ways for various European actors to develop improved media policies for engaging with the current challenges for mediatised identity formation. Media studies have a strong potential to link not only to commercial and policy stakeholders across key sectors in Europe, but also to NGOs, artists and other actors in civil society. Media studies can contribute to analysing both dangers and opportunities in the currently emerging mediascape, by identifying its dark sides but also highlighting examples of good practices and

policies with potential to productively respond to the many economic, political and ecological crises faced today. Free and basic academic research organised according to a bottom-up principle is the essential foundation, but there should also be supplementary resources for interaction with other stakeholders. On one hand, empirically researched and theory-based knowledge needs to be transferred from universities to society at large; on the other hand, researchers can also learn from other actors who are deeply involved in new media practices, in the commercial sector or among media-saturated subcultures and movements of various kinds. For these purposes, models may be devised to enhance interaction, not only by matchmaking workshops and dialogic conferences, but also by experimenting with mutually fruitful forms of postdoc internships or other positions linking academic practice to various kinds of media institutions. The knowledge gathered through such activities and dialogues may inspire new types of regulation and organisation of the media and thus support socially acceptable mediatisation processes. For obvious reasons both media policies and media studies often tend to lag behind important sociocultural and technological media developments, but efforts should be made to increase the capacity for pro-active intervention. In order to meet new challenges and rapidly changing trends in the media world, it might therefore be helpful to invent new modes of '*rapid research*', where smaller amounts of research resources might be given to tight groups of scholars who propose intense exploratory studies of contemporary phenomena, preparing for the more long-term work of ordinary research projects. There is at the same time a continued need for *'slow science*', which involves large interdisciplinary and international research teams and develops methods, data and results over long periods of time, making it possible to better understand complex processes that involve comparative studies of transnational, longitudinal, intersectional or intermedial dimensions.

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Notes:

1. The terms front/back stage derive from Goffman (1959), and have been widely debated in recent discussion of mediated interaction on the internet.

2. The following is based on Fornäs (2008).

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WHAT IS THE "DIGITAL DIVIDE" AND WHY IS IT IMPORTANT?

COLIN SPARKS

Abstract

This article begins with a consideration of the different meanings that have been given to the digital divide, and to the normative concerns that researchers have brought to its investigation. It then examines three major traditions of research into the subject: that which stresses issues of physical access; that which adds to the discussion of technical availability a stress upon some of the cultural competences and skills necessary to utilise the technologies fully; and a third which examines situations in which technical availability is almost universal but in which social and cultural factors play a determinant role in the kinds of usage adopted. Building upon the existing state of knowledge, the article goes on to consider its implications both for future research and for the kinds of policies which might be adopted to address the problems of social inclusion today and in the future.

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Introduction

The term 'digital divide' is used to cover a broad range of social differences in access to and use of digital equipment and services, most notably personal computers, and the ability to access the internet in terms of both physical connection and facility of use. The investigation of this phenomenon has a technical aspect concerned with measuring the degree to which particular technologies and practices have been taken up in any society, but it also raises some quite general issues of both theory and policy. This issue is a relatively 'new' phenomenon, which has emerged in parallel with the immense increase in the scale and importance of the internet itself during the last two decades. It should, therefore, be a leading indicator of the emergent society, however we may choose to categorise its defining characteristics. If we are indeed entering a world marked by a breakdown of the old social determinants which characterised industrial capitalism, as claimed by many social theorists, then this new liquidity should be most evident in the field of internet use and access. Similarly, if the governmental terrain has moved beyond the constraints imposed by such obsolete categories, then we would expect to find the greatest degrees of success with policies designed to accelerate these emerging social trends. The study of the digital divide, then, certainly *is* a matter of relatively narrow problems of definition and measurement, but the findings of such studies have significant implications for the validity of the general propositions advanced by social theorists and the efficacy of the strategies adopted by politicians and officials.

There are several ways in which the digital divide can be conceptualised, and different approaches lead researchers to emphasise different aspects of the problem (Yu 2011). Different conceptualisations in turn lead to differences in analysis and measurement and despite intense debate no clear and agreed solution is in sight (Vehovar et al. 2006). Rather than identify with one or other conceptualisation it is better to begin from a non-prescriptive working description such as the one provided by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD): "the term 'digital divide' refers to the gap between individuals, households, businesses and geographic areas at different socio-economic levels with regard both to their opportunities to access information and communication technologies (ICTs) and to their use of the internet for a wide variety of activities" (OECD 2001). This is sufficiently broad a definition as to allow a fruitful engagement with many, if not all, of the contributions to what remains a lively field of enquiry and debate.

The range of activities that are discussed in terms of the digital divide is very large, including as it does factors that affect the individual citizen, economic entities, and the institutions of government. Furthermore, the term as used by the OECD in the above quotation represents an attempt to measure the distribution of internet resources, both in terms of physical access and facility of use, within societies, but it has also been used to measure differences between states. Aggregating together a range of factors, it is possible to construct measures of the extent to which any particular state has progressed along a road in which information and communication technologies are embedded in the daily life of its citizens. One such attempt, sponsored by the World Economic Forum, produces a "Networked Readiness Index" (NRI) which ranks countries on a wide range of activities including policy and regulation, take up of technologies, impact of technologies and so on.The most

recent version of this index, produced in 2013, reveals that there remains a very substantial divide between groups of nations. On the one side, there is a small group of advanced economies, headed by the Nordic countries, which have high scores in the NRI, and on the other is the rest of the world: "The contrast between advanced economies … and the rest of the world is stark and betrays the inability or limited capacity of a vast majority of countries to fully reap the benefits of ICTs" (Bilbao-Osorio et al. 2013, 17–18).

This paper will concentrate upon more modest goals and will mostly be concerned with the situation in advanced economies, and only with one aspect of access even in those cases. While access to, and use of, new information and communication technologies (ICTs) in the workplace is clearly central to understanding the experience of labour in the 21st century, and the policy issues involved in putting greater physical bandwidth in place are a major pre-occupation of both the telecommunications industry and government, we will here confine ourselves to the narrower issues of familial and individual access and usage. This is a well-established, perhaps the best established, tradition of research into the nature of digital divides and it has so far yielded more rigorous results than attempts to address broader issues. The methodologies of some of the attempts to rank countries along an informational axis remain somewhat underdeveloped and the quality of the data used is frequently unproven. With regard to individual usage, and the availability of home access, there is much more, and much more robust, material available. Equally importantly, access in the home and individual usage are the point at which the usage of ICTs intersects with the consumption of the legacy media (print, broadcasting, cinema, recorded music, etc.). It is in the familial and individual determination of cost and time budgets that choices between new and legacy media, and choices within new media, must be made.

Even within this constrained perspective, however, the range of issues involved is still enormous. The individual user of ICTs has a role as a citizen, as a consumer, as someone who must live and work in what is variously termed the "network society," the "knowledge society" or the "information society." Whatever terms one employs, this reality is central to discussions of our common future, and competitive advantage in these terms is seen as dependent upon the universal, or at least very widespread, access to, and facility in the use of, the internet. Socially, increasing international mobility, the provision of leisure and entertainment services, changing patterns of education, and coping with the impact of ageing are all seen as examples of how these technologies are increasingly woven into the fabric of daily life. In terms of governance, the twin interests of equity and efficiency imply that more and more services are provided in electronic format, and that access is available to all citizens. From the individual point of view, ICT skills are increasingly a requirement for many types of employment and a necessary part of social life, for example in the formation and maintenance of patterns of friendship (European Commission 2010, 3).

From this perspective, the continued existence of a digital divide, however defined, is an obstacle to any agenda of social inclusion. If societies are today partly, and will in the future be more or less completely, structured around the internet, then the demands of economic efficiency as well as social and political equity require that no social group finds itself excluded from participation. Research in this area

has therefore often had a normative bias towards the benefits of digital inclusion and strong links with policy formation.

This article begins with a consideration of the different meanings that have been given to the digital divide, and to the normative concerns that researchers have brought to its investigation. It then examines three major traditions of research into the subject: that which stresses issues of physical access; that which adds to the discussion of technical availability a stress upon some of the cultural competences and skills necessary to utilise the technologies fully; and a third which examines situations in which technical availability is almost universal but in which social and cultural factors play a determinant role in the kinds of usage adopted. Building upon the existing state of knowledge, the article goes on to consider its implications both for future research and for the kinds of policies which might be adopted to address the problems of social inclusion today and in the future.

Divide, Divides, Spectrum, Continuum?

The concept of the 'digital divide' is widely used by politicians, policy makers, the press and public, and even some scholars, but its appropriateness has been subject to searching criticisms for almost as long as it has been current. The term has a history which now spans almost two decades, apparently having been coined in the USA in the 1990s as part of the early discussions over the diffusion of the internet (van Dijk 2006). When it first entered official discourse, it was primarily concerned with physical access to computing and telecommunications services and this remains a central theme in contemporary discussions of the issue. Rather rapidly, however, it was realised that the issues at stake could not be discussed with reference to a single dimension. The OECD Secretariat, for example, argued in 2000 that: "there is no single, clearly defined divide, but rather a series of gaps, brought about by a variety of factors, which often come together, many of which do not have their roots in technology" (OECD Secretariat 2000, 51). Over time, concern has broadened to include less tangible factors that affect the technical skills needed to participate in the online world and the nature, type and quality of the usage made of the resources provided by these technologies. As Selwyn put it: "there needs to be a political recognition that the crucial issues of the digital divide are not just technological – they are social, economic, cultural and political" (Selwyn 2004, 357). As attention has shifted from access to a particular technology towards issues of skills and usage, some of the limitations of the concept of a digital divide have become apparent (Tsatsou 2011, 321–22). Access implies a polarity of connection/non-connection, but issues of skills and usage are better understood using a graduated scale of engagement. At the very least, the concept of a binary 'digital divide' needs supplementing with what is often variously termed a 'digital spectrum' or 'digital continuum' (Guerrieri, Bentivegna & Meliciana 2010, 14–16; Livingstone & Helsper 2007).

Whatever term one chooses, and this paper has retained the familiar 'digital divide' for reasons of simplicity and convenience, one is obliged to recognise that the discussion necessarily involves a number of factors, none of which can easily be reduced to a simple 'on/off' dimension. As we shall show in some detail, there do still remain substantial numbers of people, even in places like the USA, who remain without connection to the internet in any of its forms, and one may certainly consider

them as lying on one side of a single, technologically driven, divide. For the majority of the population, however, access can mean a number of things, involving both the nature of the connections available (super-fast landlines carried by cable connections of various kinds, broadband landlines over copper wires, dial-up landlines over copper wires, mobile access carried by wireless technologies of various generations, and so on). The same is true, to an even greater extent, with the less tangible issues of the skills possessed by individuals within the population and the kinds of usage with which they feel comfortable and which they use on a regular basis.

It still makes sense, however, to speak of a 'divide,' or at the very least of 'divides,' because the evidence reviewed below seems to suggest rather strongly that positions on these various scales tend to cluster, and further to be closely related to endogenous social factors of a familiar kind. To anticipate our subsequent argument, demographic factors appear strongly to influence physical access, the possession of skills, and the kinds of usage to which these technologies are put. At the individual level, it makes good sense to see a continuum of access, skills and usage, but from a sociological point of view the picture that emerges is better understood as one in which there are marked divisions between different social groups with respect to all of the aspects of under consideration.

The Need for Normative Transparency

For a variety reasons, the majority of studies, particularly those which are closely articulated with policy formulation, take a strongly normative stance towards digital inclusion. Social groups that currently do not have high participation rates are seen as problematic and, in the words of the British government, will be "targeted" as part of programme of "driving digital participation" (Department for Business, Innovation and Skills 2010). The digital divide is conceptualised as a social problem that needs to be eradicated or at least minimised through the adoption of a range of policy initiatives. So, for example, the Consumer Panel appointed by the UK Office of Communications (Ofcom) commissioned a study for which: "the overarching objective of the research was to provide insight into the journeys individuals take towards digital participation, including what facilitates that journey and the barriers that they encounter" (Essential 2010). There are many more or less celebratory reports of projects aimed at showing how those barriers might be overcome on the road to achieving the goal of universal participation (Broadbent & Papdopoulos 2013; Newholm et al. 2008).

Such coercive rhetoric may be appropriate in policy proposals but an unreflective normative approach is an obstacle to a properly social scientific research agenda. However much we, as individuals, may share this belief that access to the internet, and the ability to use it with facility, is valuable both in itself and as an aid in one's life course, we must recognise that this is not a statement of fact about what *is* but an opinion, albeit a majority opinion, of what *should be*. The respondent who ticks the box in the questionnaire that states "I have no use for the internet" is not necessarily someone who is ignorant of the advantages that it might bring them and who stands in need of remedial education designed to alter their estimation of its benefits. Neither are the users who spends their time on a massively multiplayer online role-playing game (an MMPORG) necessarily wastrels who are in need of a short sharp shock that will push them into fruitful self-improvement.

The motivations and pleasures of social groups who choose not to have physical access to the internet, and those who do have access but decide to use it for entertainment rather than self-improvement, can only properly be understood if they are studied as authentic human cultures rather than simply as problems to be targeted for correction. The enthusiastic embrace of computers and the internet are readily accepted as understandable activities that bring both practical and emotional rewards, and a similar recognition should be extended to their rejection. The latter attitude is as much rooted in a complex of values and practices as the former. As one respondent told an investigator, who was concerned to understand rejection, the reason for not using a computer was: "A computer? Why don't I use one? Well, it's not much when it comes to shovelling snow and it's just in the way when carrying firewood" (Hakkarainen 2012, 1206). Particularly for those researchers and policy makers who are committed to finding ways to extend digital inclusion as far as is possible, an accurate and sensitive understanding of the meanings that rejection of the internet has for those citizens who exclude themselves from it is an essential starting point. It is only on the basis of such an understanding that it will be possible to formulate effective policies to achieve the goals of inclusion.

More critical approaches also tend to rely upon a strong normative framework. Many writers, following Bentham and Foucault, have argued that the widespread adoption of the internet leads to the perfection of a 'digital panopticon' in which every action is subject to computerised surveillance and analysis. It is argued that government and business gain unprecedented knowledge of citizens and customers, and are thus able to exercise more effective political and marketing control (Campbell & Carlson 2002; Marwick 2012; Taekke 2011; Andrejevic 2011). In its extreme form, it is argued, we are all implicated in this process through our acceptance of, and participation in, such technologies: "the ultimate public panopticon can be achieved by convincing the population to spy on itself" (Kietzmann & Angell 2010, 137).

Again, there is an alternative normative approach which argues that the vast accumulation of information about individuals and their social behaviour, aggregated into 'big data,' permits a much fuller and more accurate understanding of social life and thus the development of policies better suited to achieving desirable goals. This field has so far been most explored by natural and medical scientists, but it is also the case that big data: "seems to be promising a golden future, especially to commercial researchers" (Mahrt & Scharkow 2013, 25). Whether the compulsive collection of data by Google or other commercial operators constitutes a treasure trove which will allow corporations to service their customers more efficiently or transforms audiences into marketable commodities remains a contentious issue (van Dijk 2009). Similarly, whether governmental collection of data on everything from medical records to social media use constitutes an advance towards more individualised health and social services or an instrument for social control continues to provoke controversy (Werbin 2011). These differences of approach, in the end, boil down to a normative argument over the relative merits of, and the ways to achieve a balance between, liberty and efficiency, upon which there can, quite legitimately, be major differences of opinion.

This, of course, is nothing new. All researchers bring normative frameworks to their investigations: from Karl Marx and Max Weber to Jürgen Habermas, Anthony Giddens and Manuel Castells, prominent social scientist have worn their ideological

hearts on their sleeves. Indeed, it might well be argued that such commitments are precisely what make some of these authors enduring milestones in the field when they have been in their graves for a century or more. These normative frameworks need not cause problems provided they are acknowledged, so that the extent of their influence on the reported research can be assessed by the reader. What is problematic is when the overall research agenda into a complex human phenomenon is subordinated to one single un-theorised normative framework that is, in turn, closely linked to policy. No matter how worthwhile the drive for digital inclusion might seem to an investigator, and the current author holds to that view as part of a more general commitment to human equality, to conduct research into the digital divide on the premise, usually unspoken, that those who resist the latest policy in some way need to have their behaviour and attitudes corrected is surely mistaken.

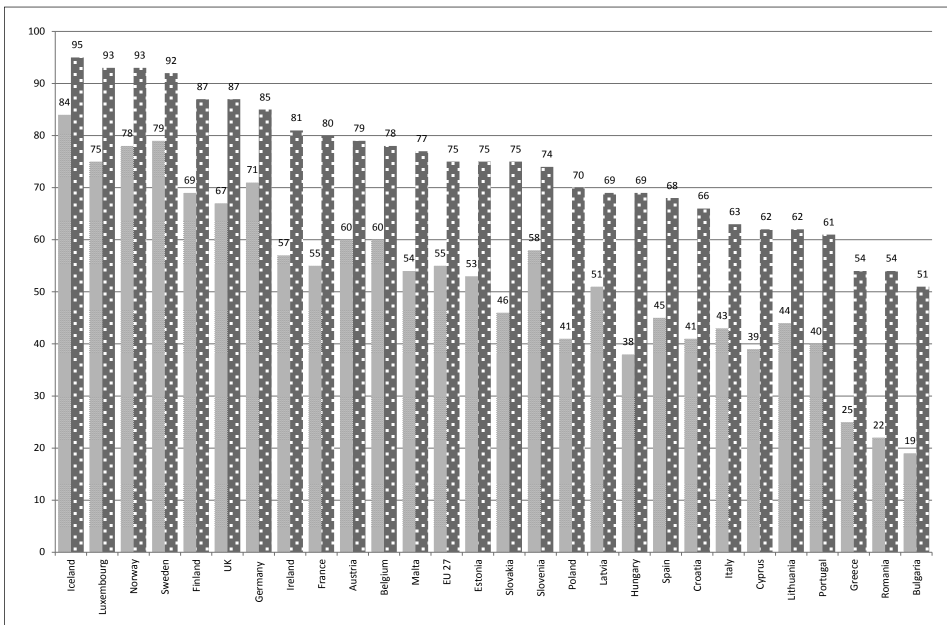
Patterns of Physical Access

From the earliest studies of access to the necessary technological apparatus, it was apparent that the digital divide mapped very closely on to some of the standard sociological variables. One of the earliest studies, *Falling Through the Net*, published in July 1995 by the US National Telecommunications and Infrastructure Authority (NTIA), showed that among the rural poor only around 1 per cent had access to the technology then needed to go online (i.e. a telephone connection, computer and modem), while for well-off urban households the figure was around 30 per cent. Such results were repeated in country after country: income, age, gender, education, location and so on were all powerful predictors of access to the physical infrastructure necessary for internet use. A study by UK National Statistics, published in December 2000, for example, demonstrated that while 7 per cent of the lowest income decile group had home internet access, 62 per cent of the highest decile group had the facility. As Norris put it: "the heart of the of the problem of the social divide in Internet access lies in the broader patterns of socioeconomic stratification that influence the broader distribution of household consumer durables and participation in other common forms of information and communication technologies, as well as in the digital world" (Norris 2001, 234). Early studies of the international distribution of internet connectivity demonstrated an equally unsurprising pattern of inequality. In general, internet connectivity closely correlated with per capita gross domestic product: more developed countries tended to have higher access than developing countries (Hargittai 1999).

For many commentators, these findings were to be expected, since studies of the diffusion of new technologies very often show a propensity for early adopters to come from relatively wealthy and educated groups. From this theoretical perspective, it was only a matter of time before the spread of the technology to poorer and less well-educated groups more or less evened out these crude sociological inequalities. The diffusion of the internet, it was thought, would be very like that of television: a new and expensive technology was adopted first by the wealthy but later, as the cost fell, it became close to universally available, with only very few households remaining without the means to receive a signal. The main difference, it was argued, was that the rate of diffusion of the internet was much higher than for earlier technologies and therefore more or less universal access would be achieved relatively quickly.

To some extent, these predictions have been borne out, at least in the developed world. A range of studies has shown that, over time, the internet does indeed become a much more pervasive feature of social life and that the stark gaps that were observed in the earliest period are eroded. As early as 2002, Katz and Rice argued that: "concerning access, on all the dimensions considered here – gender, age, household income, education, and race and ethnicity – the digital divide is shrinking" (Katz & Rice 2002, 65). This trend has continued: the most recent NTIA report, from February 2010, for example, demonstrated that while 29.2 per cent the poorest group reported (with family incomes of less than $US15,000) were using the internet in the home, amongst those in the richest group reported (with family incomes of more than $US150,000) usage was 88.7 per cent. This is still a substantial difference, but it is much lower than that recorded in the first report back in 1995. Similarly, Figure 1, illustrating the most recent data from Europe, shows that, at least within the developed world, national differences in access remain, but are reducing over time. On this account, the digital divide is closing and may one day effectively disappear, in the same way as difference in access to broadcast television effectively disappeared in the past.

Figure 1: Percentage Household Internet Penetration in Europe 2007 and 2012



Source: Eurostat http://appsso.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/nui/show.do?dataset=isoc_ci_in_h&lang=en

The process is more protracted outside of the developed world, but even in the developing world wireless telephony means that it is possible to foresee a future in which simple physical access to the relevant technologies will be, if not universal, at least very much more widely diffused. In many European countries, the ownership of a (fixed) telephone connection was still in the 1980s a socially and economically divisive factor. Today, the situation has dramatically changed: the number of mobile telephones in Europe exceeds the number of people. In 2011,

there were 120 cellular mobile subscriptions per 100 people in Europe. Even in Africa, where access to fixed line telephony has been severely restricted, the spread of mobile connections has been phenomenal: in 2011, while only 1.4 per cent of the African population had access to fixed-line telephone, 53.6 per cent had a mobile connection and this is projected to reach 63.5 per cent in 2013.As a consequence, wired broadband subscriptions stood at 0.2 per cent of the population in 2011 but a total of 12.4 per cent of Africans were using the internet in the same year, with an anticipated rise to 16.3 per cent in 2013 (ITU 2013a). This is still low compared to the 69 per cent of Europeans and very low indeed compared to the 94 per cent of Norwegians using the internet, but it nevertheless offers the promise of much higher levels of connectivity and usage in the foreseeable future (ITU 2013b).

Considered in more detail, however, there is one very important reservation to such a view: even in countries where the technical means of internet access are widely available, and where policy initiatives designed to ensure universal take-up have long been in place, there remains a substantial proportion of the population that are unconnected. A recent NTIA publication, *Exploring the Digital Nation: Computer and Internet Use at Home* investigated this issue in some detail. In the USA, more than 20 per cent of the population remain without internet access, and "the results indicate that households with lower incomes and less education, as well as Blacks, Hispanics, people with disabilities, and rural residents were less likely to have home Internet access service" (NTIA 2011, 11). This finding confirms more than a decade of previous research about the demographic factors that influence access, but further analysis demonstrated that these factors did not explain all of the differences between social groups. At the survey date, March 2010, 29 per cent of US households did not have internet access at home. When asked the reason for this, by far the largest group (47 per cent) stated that their reason was that they did not need it or were not interested in it (NTIA 2011, 35). In other words, nearly 14 per cent of US households have made a more or less conscious decision not to connect to the internet.

Factors in Digital Inclusion

These findings suggest that the availability of technology is not adequate to explain even physical access to the internet and that the digital divide can only be fully understood as a complex and multi-dimensional phenomenon that involves a strong sociological dimension. It has long been recognised that, unlike television, the internet enables an enormous range of different activities and the uses to which it is put are multiple (Mossberger, Tolbert & Stansbury 2003; Sparks 2001; Jung, Qui & Kim 2001). There can, therefore, be substantial differences in the way that digital technologies are used even when physical access is very widespread if not universal.

The second main line of approach to the digital divide begins from the recognition of this complexity and examines the divergences present in the social capital available to actual and potential users which would allow them to enjoy 'meaningful' internet usage (Gangadharani & Byrum 2012). Following this line of thinking, Guerrieri and his collaborators developed a "European index of digital inclusion" (EIDI) which combined measures of the availability of broadband infrastructure, of facility in usage and of impact, understood as the range of uses to which the internet is put. The evolution of the components of this index demonstrated that, as time

passes, patterns of internet usage are less and less a matter of physical access and much more a matter of the range of skills and social resources available to users (Guerrieri, Bentivegna & Meliciana 2010, 115).

The EIDI study of the countries of the European Union arrived at striking conclusions. At the national level, differences both in the components of the index and of the index itself, are significant and enduring over time, although there is a general 'improvement' in the levels overall. A similar set of findings applies to the distribution of the index with regard to those groups (e.g. the elderly, women, rural dwellers, etc.) who have long been known to be less likely to have even simple physical access. For these groups, too, although the overall levels are rising, there remain significant differences in their performance against the overall index. The authors go on to analyse the reasons for these enduring phenomena and argue that the main reasons for the differences in what they call 'e-inclusion' are to do with the level of economic development and social inequality. From this perspective, the aim of digital inclusion can only be realised if governmental policy is directed towards developing "a social system that promotes the economic development and social welfare of its citizens by reducing inequality in all its various aspects" (Guerrieri, Bentivegna & Meliciana 2010, 139).

Internet Usage and Social Reproduction

A third approach shares a great deal with the second, but accords even greater importance to social inequality and shifts attention further away from physical access. Even with populations in which all or most individuals both have access to the internet and the skills to use it, there nevertheless remain significant differences in what they use it for, and: "insofar as Internet use can enhance people's life chances, it is the types of activities for which people use the medium that will be most important in examining potential divides" (Hargittai & Hinnant 2008, 617–18). In this account, best exemplified in the work of van Dijk and van Dursen, the focus of enquiry shifts from seeing inequalities of access and usage as *resulting from* social inequality towards one in they are seen as *contributing to* such inequalities.

Basing their work on the situation in the Netherlands, which has a very high level of internet penetration, and where issues of physical access are of relatively limited importance, they investigated a much wider range of the skills that may be, in this context, taken to constitute digital competence. In particular, they distinguished between what they term "operational and formal internet skills" of the kind investigated by Guerrieri and his colleagues, which allow people simply to use the internet with a greater or lesser degree of facility, and what they call "information and strategic internet skills" (van Deursen & van Dijk 2010, 908). These latter, they argue, permit particular kinds of usage, and a high level of such skills permits usage for news, information and personal development. They argue that there are distinct patterns of usage emerging that map, once again, on to familiar social indicators. These patterns demonstrate that there is emerging a "structural usage gap." This gap is between different social groups, some of whom habitually "take advantage of the serious Internet activities they engage in, while others only use the Internet for everyday life and entertaining activities" (van Dijk & van Deursen 2012). The conclusion which they draw from these findings is that the digital divide not only reflects social inequalities but that it is increasingly coming to be an element in their

reproduction. To borrow the framework developed by Pierre Bourdieu, "serious" online activities are ones that increase the social and cultural capital of the user and which, as with other forms of cultural capital, can be brokered into an increase in material capital. Other authors have reached similar conclusions: as one study of internet news put it: "it is probably more essential to think of the digital divide not as a new problem peculiar to the online world, but, rather, as an old problem that might be worsened by the Internet" (Nguyen 2012, 260). On this account, very far from fading away, the digital divide will persist and may well deepen.

The Digital Divide Today

The extensive research that has been conducted at least since the 1990s seems to confirm the continuing reality of the digital divide. White and Selwyn (2013, 18), in their recent longitudinal study of the UK, conclude that: "while levels of Internet access and use among the UK adult population have increased steadily over the decade, engagement with key Internet activities is structured by individuals' social, occupational and educational backgrounds." This study found that occupational class and educational background were the most important variables in explaining both access to and use of the internet. In the UK case, at least, the evidence appears to demonstrate that some other fundamental variables, notably sex and ethnic background, are of relatively limited, and perhaps diminishing, importance in explaining access and most kinds of usage. These findings require further elaboration, since these variables, and particularly the latter, have been seen as particularly important in studies of the US evidence (Hacker & Steiner 2002; Jenkins 2002). Rather than conceiving of any social indicator as a fixed and measurable quantity, it is better to think in relative terms: different social structures place different stresses upon the same categories and they generate greater or lesser advantages or disadvantages according to their place in each structure.

It is important not to overstate this finding, however, since there are some forms of digital exclusion which operate irrespective of such determinants. The best-researched of these is that related to disability, in which studies show that, even controlling for factors like income and education, a significant divide can certainly be detected between the general population and disabled groups (Dobransky & Hargittai 2006). According to one study, not only are disabled people in general poorer than the population as a whole but "even among individuals with the same income level, many people with disabilities are still less likely to use the Internet because they have to incur the extra costs of the adaptive technology for accessing the Internet" (Vicente & Lopez 2010, 59). In this case, the overall patterns of inclusion and exclusion which are familiar from studies of earlier societies are supplemented by significant additional exclusions that can be traced to the social stigmata that have long been associated with disability. Overall, it seems to be the case that what Sassi called the "strong hypothesis" which suggests that "the emergence of the information society will create new social cleavages and strengthen old ones" has been strongly supported by the available empirical evidence (Sassi 2005, 686).

Most recently, the range of developments known as Web 2.0 have greatly expanded and supplemented the communication and display functions that characterised the earlier days of the internet as a mass phenomenon. In particular, important elements of this new functionality, embedded notably in Facebook and

YouTube, have allowed individual web users not only to consume the content of the text but also to produce it, giving rise to the phenomenon often referred to by the ugly terms 'prosumer' and 'produser' (Bird 2011; J. van Dijk 2009; Ritzer, Dean & Jurgenson 2012). The number of studies on this phenomenon from the point of view of the digital divide is so far rather small, but nevertheless the findings that are available paint what is by now a familiar picture (Hargittai & Walejko 2008). Among the most enthusiastic participants in this new culture are members of what has been called the "new global middle class," who use its potential to enhance their position in the managerial market place (Polson 2011). In terms of the promise of the technology for revitalising political democracy, which is one of the most enticing promises held out by the internet, what evidence there is points to the continuing, indeed increased, domination of political discourse by elite groups: "as creative content applications and uses have grown, the poor and working class have not been able to use these production applications at the same rate as other uses or users, creating a growing production divide based on these elite creative functions" (Schradie 2011, 165). There is also evidence that the pattern of different kinds of usage reflecting different social determinants is also present in the creation of content, with political content being significantly related to income and education while social and entertainment content is less likely to be produced by those with higher incomes (Blank 2013). The propensity for the poor to be less attentive than the rich to official politics, as expressed for instance in voting patterns, appears to be translating itself into the online world.

The overall conclusion that must be drawn from any survey of the available evidence is that the digital divide remains a reality even in the most developed online economies. It is neither an artefact of the pattern of diffusion, nor of the relative scarcity of technical resources. Rather, it is a function of deep-seated and enduring social inequalities and, the evidence strongly suggests, has come to act as a significant factor in the reproduction of these same inequalities.

Implications for Research and Policy

These findings make uncomfortable reading for those social theorists who have proclaimed digital technology in general, and the internet in particular, as tools that will transform societies. The diffusion and use of the internet does indeed have a technological dimension, but the most powerful factors in determining its take up and usage are the same ones that explain the access to, and affordances of, all sorts of other devices and practices. Indeed, they also suggest that social relations remain much more stable and obdurate than theories that stress the 'liquidity' of contemporary society might suggest. Very far from rendering concerns about the relatively limited degree of intergenerational social mobility that characterises societies like the USA and UK, and which depends so heavily on inequalities in parental economic and educational capital, an irrelevance, the probability is that patterns of internet diffusion and usage will serve to prolong and perhaps intensify them (Blanden, Bregg & Machin 2005; Causa & Johansson 2009).

They also make uncomfortable reading for policy makers who have tried a range of different strategies to overcome the various aspects of the digital divide. In Europe and the USA, the initial impetus for policy came from what Selwyn calls the 'centre-Left' governments that held office in a number of the key states (Selwyn

2004, 343). For these politicians, it was a matter both of social justice and economic efficiency that the whole of society had the opportunity to participate equally in the new world that the internet had opened up and they made modest efforts to improve access for all. The new century saw a change in the political colour of the government in several countries. Whether as a result of these changes or as a consequence of the limitations of the policies adopted in the preceding years, the general direction of policy in both the USA and the EU became one of relying more and more on the workings of the market to overcome these inequalities (Stewart, Gil-Egui & Tian 2006). From the evidence cited here, it appears that all of these policies, whether promulgated by the centre-left or right, have failed to make any fundamental difference to the overall picture of digital inequality.

This perhaps should not be surprising since, if economic and social inequalities are among the key determinants of the digital divide in all of its manifestations, internationally these have certainly not been significantly reduced, and in some important cases have increased, during the same period as the internet was undergoing development and diffusion. The average Gini coefficient of the original 15 members of the European Union was estimated at .31 in 1995 and recorded as .308 in 2011 (Eurostat 2013a). It was, perhaps, naïve to think that the digital realm would display a different logic to all other areas of social life. If the root cause of the digital divide is inequality then, obviously, any serious policy designed to reduce that divide must address the elimination, or at least the substantive amelioration, of economic and social inequalities as central priorities.

Such an outcome is, at the time of writing, highly improbable given the enduring domination of what is termed 'neo-liberalism' over public life in the developed world. It is hard to imagine the government of any major country embarking upon the kind of radical programme of economic democracy and social equality that would address the central issues at stake in the digital divide, short of quite drastic changes in the social and political order. As an inevitable consequence, the digital divide will remain a central reality of the coming society, however much its leaders proclaim it to be driven by information, knowledge, or networks.

Despite this rather bleak overall outlook, there remain some serious opportunities both for researchers and concerned policy makers: eliminating the digital divide in its totality might not appear feasible at the moment, but it may be possible to ameliorate some of its more egregious manifestations without the need for fundamental social change. An example to hand is the relative disadvantages experienced by disabled people, which were discussed briefly above. A great deal of this disadvantage has been traced to the cost involved in purchasing the additional equipment necessary to make the standards of access and usability acceptable for members of this group (Macdonald & Clayton 2012). While these authors are pessimistic that the current British government can be persuaded to implement such a policy, since it would inevitably involve extra money being directed towards disabled people, there is nevertheless scope for detailed research into the ways in which the standard equipment would need to be modified and supplemented in order to ensure that different groups of people could enjoy the same access as others.

A similar case can be made for education in digital competence. The overall evidence on the determinants of the digital divide suggest that while, over the life-span, differential education helps to produce and reproduce the digital divide, formal education might provide an arena in which at least some of these divisions

could be addressed and perhaps ameliorated. At least some basic aspects of ICT use are shared across social differences amongst young people during their educational years (Tondeur et al. 2010). There are, however, observable differences in the ways in which this usage contributes to educational achievement, and the patterns of digital accomplishment tend to reproduce other forms of cultural capital (Angus, Snyder & Sutherland-Smith 2004; McDougal & Sanders 2012; Paino & Renzulli 2012). There is evidence that, whilst many educationalists are aware of this problem, at present educational institutions do not have in place policies that can assist their students to overcome prior disadvantages in the kinds of skills that are needed to address the divide in terms of on-going use of the available technology (Goode 2010, Neuman & Celano 2013).

These findings confirm the more general result that while some of the issues involved have been partially addressed by the diffusion of the basic technologies involved, and are particularly attenuated in an environment like education which attempts to provide as much of a level playing field as possible, there remain strong elements in the institutional culture that tend to reproduce and reinforce the existing unequal distribution of skills and competences. Finding ways of remedying such deficiencies in schools and universities requires further research to determine which policies might prove effective, but does not necessarily imply the kind of substantial investment that would be unlikely in the present circumstances, since the problems could be at least partially addressed by changes in pedagogical practice.

The availability of current technologies has often also been a matter of public concern and thus of public policy: the insistence upon universal services in telecommunications is an obvious example. The pace and direction of technological innovation is unpredictable, but it will certainly impact upon availability and usage. Two current examples are the deployment of technologies of control like IP6 and the shift to wireless access to the internet through mobile phones. The former has provoked debates over the continuation of "net neutrality," in which all messages are treated equally, versus the implementation of systems whereby additional payments ensure priority treatment (Noam 2011; Yoo 2010; Bendrath & Mueller 2011). Mobile access has re-kindled debates over, for example, pricing policies that have a direct and obvious impact upon internet usage: unlimited access encourages a wide range of usage; metered access tends to limit it. More generally, it is argued that the implementation of mobile connectivity poses a very broad challenge to the current modes of internet governance (Goggin, Dwyer & Martin 2013, forthcoming). Both these and future developments in technological hardware and the kinds of services available raise questions whose impact upon the digital divide in terms both of access and usage requires investigation.

There are, in other words, many ways in which policy makers, and those researchers who are closely linked to such activities, can hope to develop their understanding of the factors that impede access to, and usage of, the internet in different situations that do not demand a wholesale assault upon the structural inequities of contemporary society.

The Future of the Digital Divide

Since current political realities, at least in the advanced world, seem to preclude the kinds of substantial and transformative interventions that might address the

root causes of the digital divide, and that therefore it will remain a reality, and perhaps a deepening reality, for the foreseeable future, it remains as urgent a task to track its development. There is a range of reasons why such research, although it is unlikely to identify startling changes in the fundamental features of the digital divide, stands a good chance of producing fresh and provocative results.

The first of these is that technological innovation will certainly continue and therefore the nature of the digital divide will be subject to modification. Simply because there is a mountain of evidence that technological change in itself does not transform access and utility, it does not necessarily follow that innovation cannot produce some startling local effects. A case in point comes from China, where the digital divide is as stark as it is anywhere in the developed world. In large measure, access through fixed line telephony of various kinds has been the province of the young, the educated and the urban, particularly those inhabiting the great cities of the eastern seaboard. The introduction of cheap mobile phone services into the Chinese market on a mass scale did not remove the digital divide, but together with cybercafés and other mechanisms, it did allow large numbers of workers, mainly migrants from the countryside who follow a precarious existence in the cities, to have for the first time at least some way of accessing the internet. While this did not compare to the kind of facilities available to, say, students at Fudan university, it nevertheless significantly altered the pattern of inclusion and exclusion in China (Qiu 2007; 2008). It is true that China is a society experiencing very rapid social and economic change, so that changes in one aspect of social reality tend to become noticeable much more quickly than in more settled societies, but it would be an example of the kind of normative blindness criticised above not to recognise that similar impacts might result from technological change even in Europe and the USA.

The second main feature that makes continued research a viable project is that despite the fact that they are much more settled societies, the processes of social change continue, albeit at a relatively slow pace, in even the most developed countries. One obvious example, particularly prominent in Europe, is that the current, rather protracted, economic crisis has produced unemployment that is much more widespread and prolonged than that which was experienced during the preceding quarter century. The evidence about the gradual erosion of that aspect of the digital divide that depends upon physical access was gathered in circumstances of relative prosperity, in which all but the most marginal groups enjoyed a certain degree of economic stability and disposable income. In at least some countries, notably in Southern Europe, those conditions no longer apply: they are characterised by falling living standards and mass, long-term, unemployment. In 2011, nearly a quarter (24.2 per cent) of the population of the 27 countries of the European Union were living in conditions that put them ‘at risk of poverty or social exclusion’ and this figure has been growing, albeit relatively slowly, since 2008 (Eurostat 2013b). It remains an open question as to what the effects of this phenomenon will be. One view would be that a decline in disposable income will see payments for access and equipment, which may have seemed relatively modest during periods of relative prosperity, become one of the aspects of household expenditure that has to be sacrificed in hard times. An alternative view is that intense competition for employment will drive individuals to acquire more sophisticated internet skills in order to improve their chance of finding work, despite the fact that what evidence

there is suggests that such skills are not in themselves a decisive advantage in the labour market (Rodino-Colocino 2006).

For this group, it might be argued that the measure of home access which is often taken as indicative of a physical digital divide is relatively less important, given that being unemployed allows such individuals the time to use public access terminals in libraries. The evidence, however, is that public library budgets are under strain due to exactly the same economic reasons. In the UK, for instance, library expenditure fell by 5.2 per cent between financial years 2010–11 and 2011–12.It is projected to fall by a further 4.4 per cent in the current financial year. The decline in the number of terminals with internet access has been much smaller, at 0.2 per cent, but it is extremely unlikely that provision will expand to cater for increased demand (Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy 2012). Whatever is true of this group, the more general point remains that the future of internet access and usage will need to be analysed in the context of the changing social and economic positions of different groups in society.

The most important future research issues, however, do not arise from the digital divide as narrowly conceived in terms of access and usage but are a function of the increasing centrality of these technologies to many aspects of social life. Mobile access technologies are a case in point. With the saturation of our everyday life by mobile telephony and online connectivity – especially for the younger generations – there have developed expectations of their democratising influence. The new kinds of social networks are assumed to create new kinds of sociability and engagement, with fresh cultural and political implications – new solidarities and new social identities. Some examples of the political potential of these networks are the big political protest movements of the last years – the Arab Spring, the Occupy movement, the Los Indignados movement and many others, which owe at least part of their impact to the use of online resources. The shape and structure of these new social movements, and the role played in them by technological developments, is a major new research theme (Harlow 2012; Gustaffson 2012; Mercea 2011; Wolfsfeld, Segev & Sheafer 2013; Hussain & Howard 2013; Bennett & Segerberg 2012).

The more general implication of the increasing importance of the internet in all aspects of social life lies in its effect on the interplay between public policy and private provision. Historically, there has been widespread concern to ensure the universal availability of a range of information and opinion about public matters, since these are considered essential to any version of democratic political life. To that end, governments have established policies designed to ensure the plurality of sources and universality of availability, particularly with regard to broadcasting. The rise of the internet as a means of distribution disturbs the often-delicate balance that has permitted these mechanisms to function: for example, the advertising subsidy to commercial newspapers seems to be in danger of disappearing in many countries. It is at present not known what effect this shift will have on the plurality of provision, on the independence of the providers, or the availability of such material (Collins 2011). As access to the information and organisational forms appropriate to the exercise of the citizen's rights and duties in a democratic society become more and more exclusively available in online form, a continuing digital divide risks embedding a deep division between the informed and connected citizens and the excluded population. Similarly, while it is well-established that

the internet provides opportunities for a variety of new forms of political activity, these will necessarily fall short of realising their democratic potential if effective participation is restricted to only a portion of the population (Fuchs 2008, 225–47; Dahlberg 2011). A technology which is widely agreed to hold out the promise of greater democratic participation could, in such circumstances, become a major mechanism for further restricting the proportion of the population that plays an active role in political life.

Conclusions

Increasingly, it will no longer be adequate to formulate problems in social investigation in terms of "the digital divide AND this or that social phenomenon." Rather, the shape of social life itself will be in increasing measure structured around the internet. The agenda for "digital inclusion" formulated by the European Commission and cited above certainly rests upon unstated normative assumptions and is basically conceived of in terms of international economic competition, but it is not mistaken in identifying the ways in which access and usage are coming to permeate social life. A fully networked society is unlikely, in the foreseeable future, to be one in which every last aspect of social life depends upon using information and communication technologies, but the range of significant activities which do so depend will almost certainly increase. So far, discussion has been focused on how the coming of the internet impacts upon existing social structures but, if the research discussed above is to be credited as accurate, it is already the case that the internet is helping to form and reproduce social structures. The issues of who has what kinds of access, knowledge, experience, confidence and opportunity to sustain an acceptable standard of life will become increasingly central to all social enquiries as well as to the distribution of power and resources within society itself.

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POLITICAL PARTICIPATION IN AN AGE OF MEDIATISATION

TOWARDS A NEW RESEARCH AGENDA

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Abstract

The media landscape and its societal significance is in rapid transition; likewise basic features of democracy are changing. In this article we pursue these two strands in order to sketch the background to a need for a new research agenda, as well as to arrive at proposals regarding the directions that such research can take. In regard to democracy our emphasis is on the dimension of participation, while the developments in the media we capture with the term mediatisation, which signals not only the ubiquity of media but also the processes by which society increasingly adapts itself to media logics. The first section takes up political engagement and situates it within the changing character of democracy. The second section is focused on the media and dynamics of mediatisation, underscoring their significance for democratic participation. In the third section we provide the foundations for a research agenda on mediatisation and democratic participation.

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Introduction

This article derives from the ESF Forward Look programme concerning a new research agenda for media studies; it can be seen as one of several different background texts that helped prepare the programme's final report. The focus here is on the relationship between two key areas of concern in the modern world: democratic participation and mediatisation. Both are complex in their own right, and their intersection is all the more complicated. Yet to understand the conditions of contemporary democracy and to develop policies that can enhance civic participation in ways that connect with mediatisation require us to grasp as clearly as possible these two fields and how they relate to each other. In our discussion we will review some key research in both areas, highlighting what we know and what we do not know – or what we do not know well enough.

The first section introduces the notions of political engagement and situates it within the current state of democracy. The second section addresses the media and processes of mediatisation – and their relevance for democratic participation. In the third section, set against this background, we offer some proposals for research in the coming years.

Participation and Democracy

Participation and Democracy's Dilemmas

The notion of participation lies at the heart of democracy; that citizens in various ways take part in the discussions and decisions that impact on their lives is axiomatic. Democracy is a complex, shifting and contested political order, and the contexts and modes of participation vary greatly; new forms are continually evolving. While we in this presentation emphasise political participation, broadly understood, a democratic horizon would also include cultural participation, a theme that Fornäs and Xinaris discuss in their article in this issue. The concept of participation actually emerges from a number of different fields and discourses in the social sciences and thus its meaning may vary somewhat (see Carpentier 2011). Its ubiquity can easily lead to it being taken for granted, with its significance seen as bland and uncontroversial. Here we underscore two core aspects of the concept. First, participation should be understood as an expression of agency in some democratic political sense – even if it is not always clear today where participation in broader social and cultural activities, including consumption, ends, and where civil society and politics begin. That problem, however, ultimately derives from the changing character of politics itself, as we discuss below. Second, following Carpentier (2011) we posit that it is important to distinguish between participation and a few associated terms. In particular, it should not be confused with mere access to the media, nor with interaction. These are both necessary elements but not sufficient for genuine participation. What is it that these two terms lack? Basically they avoid the issue of power relations.

Today, we find all too many settings in which participation is rhetorically evoked, but remains at the level of access or interaction ("Go online and express your views to the city council – participate in local government!"). Democratic participation must at some point and in some way actualise and embody power relations, however weak or remote they may seem. Formalised representation

and voting – assuming validity and transparency – embody participation, as do innumerable micro-contexts of citizen input. Participation, in short, is ultimately about forms of power sharing.

Existing 'democracy' does not automatically guarantee extensive civic participation, either in parliamentarian or extra-parliamentarian contexts; democratic systems offer varying patterns or structures of opportunity for participation. There are a number of factors that impinge on how participation actually functions at any particular point in time for any particular group, e.g. closed party machines, lack of representation for many groups, inaccessibility of power holders. The extent to which civic participation is present of course depends on the initiatives that citizens themselves take, but an analytically fundamental point is that such agency is always contingent on circumstances. Thus, any perceived lack of participation should not be seen as simply a question of civic apathy, but must be understood in the context of the dilemmas of late modern democracy more generally. Democracy is being transformed as its social, cultural and political foundations evolve, and the character of participation is a part of these large developments.

This text is written against the backdrop of several concurrent crises that are profoundly shaping contemporary Europe. The economic–financial crisis within the EU (and globally) is generating a social crisis of welfare, of desperation among many people, not least the young who are facing severe levels of unemployment. This in turn is generating a political crisis, as many governments are unable to meet both the needs of their citizens and the requirements for financial equilibrium. And finally, we would suggest, democracy itself is entering a crisis period, where the current stresses and strains are eroding the taken-for-granted socio-cultural prerequisites on which democracy is premised.

The tendency for political power to drift away from the accountable democratic system and into the private sector is not per se new, but has greatly intensified under the logics of neoliberal versions of societal development (see, for example, Harvey 2006; 2011; Fisher 2009; Gray 2009). This not only undermines participation and subverts democracy, but also has destructive social consequences (Bauman 2011). Hay (2007) pinpoints a variety of neoliberal mechanisms in public life:

> *privatization, the contracting-out of public services, the marketization of public goods, the displacement of policy-making autonomy from the formal political realm to independent authorities, the rationalization and insulation from critique of neoliberalism as an economic paradigm, and the denial of policy choice (for instance in discerning the imperatives of competitiveness in an era of globalization) are all forms of depoliticization. Each serves, effectively, to diminish and denude the realm of formal public political deliberation ... Moreover, the increasing adoption of a range of political marketing techniques has also resulted in a narrowing of the field of electoral competition* (Hay 2007, 159).

When market logic becomes defined as the most appropriate way forward for societal development, the space for meaningful democratic participation by citizens becomes diminished. Discussion about norms, values and justice is undercut, as economistic thinking puts price tags on just about all areas of human life (Sandel 2011). This erodes the political, fostering depoliticisation (Straume 2011), disengage-

ment and disempowerment. Further, the neoliberal horizon impacts not only on policy, but also on cultural perceptions, shaping social relations and social ideals (see, for example, Couldry 2010; Young 2007).

Despite the grim global crisis that was set in motion in 2008, there has been no concerted effort among elite power circles to reconsider this model or reform the system of international finance (Crouch 2011). Concurrently, as the intricate weave of globalisation becomes all the more complex, all levels of government experience diminishing space for decision-making. This renders governance all the more difficult, leading to further constraints on effective democratic participation.

Engagement, Disengagement, Re-engagement

If participation is a visible manifestation of civic agency, we should keep in mind that there is a subjective requirement, namely engagement, i.e. a sense of involvement in the questions of political life. If citizens are without engagement, democracy becomes functionally crippled as well as potentially delegitimised. Thus, media should be seen as not just facilitating participation, but also as preparing for participation in the affective and normative dispositions they may help engender. For many people, disempowerment and political disenchantment point in the direction of depoliticisation – a withdrawal from the political. For others, however, it becomes a signal to mobilise.

Indeed, there is another narrative that runs parallel to the one about disengagement, and research tells us that the affordances of the web, especially social media, play an important role here. We have been witnessing new forms of engagement and participation. These are often located beyond mainstream party politics, in the broad and sprawling arena of alternative politics. Yet, political disaffection has often been understood in the narrow terms of formal electoral politics, and in such reasoning, the explanations quickly turn to models of civic apathy. However, if we see politics in a broader sense, as extending far beyond the party domain, then such disengagement itself can at times be potentially understood as a political act, a refusal to be involved in a pointless exercise. Thus, we frame as conscious alternatives the civic engagement emerging in social movements, single issue groups, neighbourhood associations, interest organisations, and other collectivities.

Given that large numbers of citizens feel that the established political parties are not listening to them or that they are actually marginalised by the political system, many are turning to alternative paths of participation. Such paths promote new forms of engagement and new political practices, which is even altering the way politics gets done in some settings. If we then look at the field of alternative political participation (where actors may or may not still engage in the party system), the argument concerning apathy falls apart. Moreover, alternative politics signals a growing transformation of the political field, of political practices, and the modes of political agency.

Many activists within alternative politics sense that strategic pressure can be brought upon decision makers in different ways. These impulses contribute to the development of what Rosanvallon (2008) terms counter-democracy, the process whereby citizens, in various constellations, exercise indirect democratic power by bypassing the electoral system. These developments, though in many ways encouraging, are not without their dark side: the present crises have meant that

reengagement also includes the rise of political activities on the far right, expressing racist, ultra-nationalistic and other anti-democratic sentiments.

The Dynamics of Democracy

Democracy needs both a functioning representative system with parties and a viable domain of alternative, extra-parliamentary politics; both at present are in transition. Both are also shaped in positive and negative ways by media. Our horizons acknowledge the importance of electoral politics and we suggest continued attention to that realm, but in the light of the crises we mentioned above we would prioritise a research focus on alternative politics and the development of counter-democracy. In a time of tumultuous change it is important to highlight newer 'agonistic' (Mouffe 1999) trends in political life.

The components of political agency thus appear to resonate more immediately in people's lifeworlds of meanings and identity. The task of comprehending democratic agency and participation directs our attention to parameters at the taken-for-granted level that shape people's willingness to engage in politics. In this domain, the mechanisms of power are more subtle. The perspective of civic cultures and their affordances can illuminate elements that enable/disable a sense of civic self in daily life via the promotion of such dimensions as knowledge, trust, values and practices (Dahlgren 2009). Such cultures can be strongly empowering, but they are often fragile and easily eroded by various strategic measures or even merely adverse circumstances.

Where the public sphere has traditionally been associated with notions of rational deliberation, it is now increasingly linked to new, multimedia communicative channels that often privilege other forms of political expression, including the visual, the symbolic, the affective, the experiential. The traditionally textual has not disappeared, but text online tends to be shorter than in print, and shares the stage with these other communicative modes. This shift may also correspond to an increasingly visible dichotomy between traditional institutional and non-institutional, alternative politics. Thus, we should expect that the modes of political expression of counter-democracy may differ somewhat from those of electoral politics. Moreover, the affective character of much online communication suggests that it may well resonate with identity processes and collective memories in ways that traditional political discourse is less likely to do, suggesting that we should be alert to the different cultural patterns whereby alternative politics may function to reconfigure democracy.

Media Connections

Mediatisation – and Its Contexts

Mediatisation is a term that first of all invokes the ubiquity and pervasiveness of media in the contemporary world. From the macro-institutions that structure society to the nooks and crannies of our everyday lives, media have become an inexorable component. In today's world, media are no doubt the most significant spaces where civic cultures can flourish – as well as be obstructed. It may help to think of media not merely as technologies, but rather as means through which much of the life of society takes place. Moreover, media are never mere neutral conduits: they have their own varying contingencies and logics, which serve to

refract communication and cultural patterns in specific ways; this is the second dimension of mediatisation, that media are always involved in impacting on that which is mediated. Understandably, the intersection of political life with media becomes a very complex arena of investigation, not least because of the difficulty that democracy and forms of participation have in accompanying the accelerated pace of transformation in the media landscape. Such technological evolution has profound implications for political life, and it is thus essential to have a grasp of the media terrain.

We should take care to avoid technological determinism in our view of media; there is nothing automatic about their social consequences. Rather, media should be seen as enabling infrastructures (Miller 2011) whose uses and implications can lead in a variety of directions. As technical infrastructures, media are predicated on political economic and policy dimensions as well as on technical aspects. In recent years these features have increasingly come under critical scrutiny, and it is becoming all the more evident that along with their democratic potential, the digital media also embody attributes that are increasingly problematic in regard to participation.

Ultimately our premise here is that research on media and democracy, especially concerning engagement and participation, needs to be rethought in the light of both the rapidly changing media landscape as well as the current crises. These crises are altering the life circumstances of many citizens as well as threatening the character and quality of democracy itself.

Political, Economic and Technological Contingencies

The political economy and the architecture of the web generally and social media in particular underscore that these communication technologies are not just a powerful infrastructure for all sorts of purposes, but also that they are not simply neutral platforms for involvement. Their present arrangements raise serious problems from a democracy perspective. In the words of Curran, Fenton & Freedman (2012, 179), "the internet itself is not constituted solely by its technology but also by the way it is funded and organised, by the way that it is designed, imagined and used, and by the way it is regulated and controlled." The empowerment that the net does offer citizens is thus confronted by other relations of power in which citizens are rendered subordinate. These contradictions suggest continuous tensions of power and interests, an aspect we need to keep in view to understand the links between the web and democracy. As politics in society generally takes on a larger presence online, the prevailing structures of established power in society are increasingly mediated, solidified, negotiated and challenged via these media.

Today, with over two billion people operating online globally (and about half of them on Facebook), the web is a site of intense capitalist expansion. Of the twenty top websites in the US, only one, Wikipedia, is not profit driven with advertising (Fuchs 2011, 273). The deepening commercial logic of the web and its growing commodification alters how we think about it and how we use it. Social media have become a terrain for intense marketing, PR and business activity. Van Dijk (2013) shows how the logic of Facebook (and other social media platforms) has since the middle of the last decade moved towards automated connections driven by technology and economic models. This replaces the original mode of user-driven

and user-controlled social connectedness, appropriating sociality and corrupting the notion of 'friend'.

The prioritisation of deregulation policies in the traditional media is mirrored in the newer media, where content convergence and ownership concentration is also visible. The fact that large media companies preside over not only content but also access can easily result in the accentuation of existing digital divides – or contribute to the creation of new ones. We should be wary especially when much of the prevalent discourse on networks is that of neutrality. The prominence of Google and a few other global giants in the information industries engenders a number of issues on their own that are problematic for democracy (Cleland & Brodky 2011; Fuchs 2011; Vaidhyanatha 2011). In our use of social media we make accessible all sorts of electronic traces about ourselves; this personal information is gathered, stored, processed, sold and used – for the most part legally – for chiefly commercial purposes. One upshot of this strategy is an increasing personalisation of advertising that targets consumers in an individualised manner (Turow 2011).

Yet the lack of privacy also extends into our ostensibly non-economic social relations: Facebook, for example, is becoming an increasingly dangerous terrain in regard to privacy issues, and the legal frameworks lag far behind (see Andrews 2011; MacKinnon 2012; van Dijk 2013). The utility of information is contextual; with just a shift in context, personal information can take on all sorts of significance beyond mere commercial gain; we have reason to be concerned. Moreover, the personalisation of information also means that in the past three years or so, some search engines tailor their results based on the profile they have put together of the person searching on the basis of query history and data gathered from social networking sites. For example, Google has sought to customise searches since December 2009 so as to cater to users' preferences, and Bing has followed suit since February 2011 (Pariser 2011; Crum 2011). Thus, two people using the same search word may well not get the same search results, which can play havoc with the whole notion of shared, public knowledge.

Media and Public Spheres

Traditional mass media journalism, as the classic medium of the public sphere, is a key institution of the public sphere, and its functioning is vital to the dynamics of democracy. It has historically often been the object of legitimate criticism, when in its less impressive moments it fosters ignorance and disorientation. The latter tendencies have flourished in recent decades with the intensifying crisis within Western journalism, which has been characterised as both an institutional/economic downturn and a professional decline. Reliable news useable for civic purposes is increasingly replaced by sensationalism, celebrity gossip and other trivia, and factual content increasingly gives way to opinion (see State of the News Media 2013, for the current annual report on the transformation of journalism in the US; see also Russell 2011). Yet, even when journalism is providing a good professional service, and when citizens are connected to public issues via news coverage, it has been shown that journalism in itself is insufficient in facilitating participation if citizens do not feel that there are meaningful opportunities for them to engage politically (Couldry, Livingstone & Markham 2007). This reminds us that there are limits to what the media can do in altering structural relations of power.

The familiar problematic patterns follow mainstream journalism onto the web, but in the online world other forms of journalism also become visible: from the major news organisations' reliance on social media and citizen-provided material to alternative news agencies, various kinds of blogs, quasi-journalistic material, and information provided by all sorts of organisations and activist/interest groups (Atton 2005; Crick 2009; Forde 2011; Waltz 2005). The terrain has become bewildering and highly contested, but at the same time does allow for much more civic participation than before (Papacharissi 2009; Tunney & Monaghan 2010). Further options for civic participation are found in the seemingly infinite possibilities for discussion and debate available online, and beyond that the whole universe of groups, networks, activists, and movements with their online presence. Online spaces have become an important extension of the public sphere and thus of great significance for participation in a variety of forms. At the same time, issues arise about the appropriation of civic contributions into mainstream news organisations, about the status of professionalism, tensions over editorial control, and not least about how we are to ascertain genuine commitment to the truth from such a multiplicity of voices (see Fenton 2011; Barkho 2013).

Attention: The Political and the Popular

Further, in public sphere contexts, we should bear in mind that the density of the web environment in the contemporary media landscape results in an intense and incessant competition for attention. The entire media sphere, including the web environment, is strongly dominated by entertainment, popular culture, consumption, and massive amounts of information that have no apparent bearing on the dynamics of democracy. We underscore that there is not only nothing a priori negative about these domains, but also they are an essential and indispensable part of modern life, of society and culture. Everyone can find meaningful and rewarding areas of engagement in these domains – and debates about values, aesthetics, and the state of our civilisation that they reflect will and should continue.

Nonetheless, the pleasure of such engagement has to be analytically set in contrast to the 'serious work' required of people in their role as citizens in the public sphere. Moreover, modern media can offer intense experiential immersions with strong affective valences, further putting the question of political participation at a competitive disadvantage. Thus, while they can facilitate political participation in ways that are historically unprecedented, today's media also offer attractive and almost infinite opportunity for engagement in other domains as well (see Olsson & Dahlgren 2010). One might add that such possibilities are both technological achievements as well as a by-product of a degree of affluence and of democracy itself: the political and economic liberty to pursue such engagements is not available in all societies. If it has been the case that throughout the history of democracy most people's engagement most of the time is not directed towards political issues, the starkness of this competition for attention and engagement has become more pronounced; in theory, it is always with us, not least while we are using the keyboard, smartphone or iPad.

While political participation is usually the underdog in the competition for people's engagement in the online world – we are much more used to being addressed as consumers than citizens – research in recent years has underscored

that the boundaries between such identities are becoming increasingly fluid via media cultures (e.g. Bennett 2008). The public sphere and popular culture (to use a simplified but handy rubric) are not separate universes, but in subtle ways intermingle and feed off each other (see van Zoonen 2005; Hermes 2005; Street 1997; Coleman 2007; Corner 2009). The political can manifest itself in the popular, and enhancing the popular character of the political can strengthen democracy – on the condition that the pitfalls of populism can be avoided. The porousness of the boundaries derives in part from the converging media logic that both realms adhere to. The upshot of this is that aspects of popular culture need to be considered as potentially (affectively) relevant for mediated citizenship and as a port of entry into the political, particularly in the web environment, where the overall participatory ethos is strongly developed.

There are also, however, more sombre tones to this development. Authors such as Dean (2010) and Papacharissi (2010) argue that it is not just a question of people choosing politics or popular culture, but that the web environment in its present form promotes a transformation of political practice and social relations whereby the political becomes altered and embodied in the practices and discourses of privatised consumption. In this perspective there is an analytic and normative insistence on the acceptable limits of the porous boundaries: at some point they become detrimental to the health of democracy.

The Web and Participation: Contested Voices

An important attribute of the web is its capacity to facilitate horizontal communication: people and organisations can directly link up with each other for purposes of sharing information as well as affect, for providing mutual support, organising, mobilising, or solidifying collective identities. This feature makes it a potentially strong facilitator of civic culture, helping to strengthen engagement and participation. Digital networks, in the form of polycentric nodes, offer a communication structure which can foster democratic social relations, as Castells (2010) and Fenton (2012) demonstrate, impacting on how civic agency is enacted and how politics gets done. It is important to underscore the social character of such activity: the networking involved helps to avoid the debilitating consequences of isolation, promotes interaction, and helps to forge collective identities.

The digital media are embedded in the larger social and cultural world, intertwined with peoples' lives online and offline; they are central to the functioning of groups, organisations, and institutions. Thus, they manifest enormous sociological complexity (see Couldry 2012) and give rise to much debate. If many observers side with Sunstein (2008) in regard to how the participatory "wisdom of the many" (as manifested, for example, in Wikipedia and the blogosphere) is producing new and better forms of knowledge, others such as Keen (2008) warn of the dangers of participatory Web 2.0, arguing that it erodes our values, standards, and creativity, as well as undermines cultural institutions. Some critics (e.g. Carr 2010) raise concern that the logic of the web is subverting our abilities to think, read, and remember, with dangerous long-term consequences. Such debates will and should continue.

Not surprisingly, the significance of the web for politics has also given rise to a great deal of debate, with some authors leaning – based on empirical and normative considerations – towards more optimistic interpretations (for example,

Benkler 2006; Castells 2010), while others take more pessimistic views (Mozorov 2011; Goldberg 2010; Hindman 2009; Song 2009). In the extensive literature, for sceptics the limitations of the web as a democratic technology come into view. For one thing, the use of the web for political purposes (at least defined in traditional terms) comes quite far down on the list of activities, far behind consumption, entertainment, social connections, pornography, and so on. For another thing, there is a strong tendency for people to drift towards like-minded discursive 'cocoons' or 'echo chambers' on the web, where they are less likely to be confronted with views that differ from their own and develop the capacity for genuine argument. Also, although the net is a most impressive tool, it does not on its own mobilise people who lack political engagement. And encounters with those who do think differently are often characterised by a decided lack of civility.

Also, this literature reminds us that the web does not operate in a social vacuum (e.g. Loader & Merce 2012; Feenberg & Freisen 2012). It is crucial, for example, that there is sufficient online sociality to attract people to step into their identities as political agents. People continue to develop their civic practices in online settings as they find new ways to participate, using these evolving communication technologies. We must avoid reductionist thinking; policy discourses and journalistic commentary at times can lead us astray in this regard, in suggesting that just the introduction of such media technologies will offer some simple solution to democracy's problems. For example the uprisings during the Arab Spring were often simplistically framed as 'Twitter revolutions' (for more analytic views, see for instance, *Communication Revie*w 2011, and *Journal of Communication* 2012).

Yet, with all the caution and caveats that should rightly be kept in sight, the tools are becoming more and more effective, less expensive, and easier to use than in the past; access and collaboration are increasing, and we are evolving from being mostly media consumers to include many media producers – or 'produsers' (Bruns 2006). Some decades ago, Toffler coined the term 'prosumer' (1971) to reflect the appearance of a more 'literate' and engaged consumer of goods whose demands required heeding through the production of increasingly customised items. The shift from prosumer to produser now indicates that the possibility for emancipation is regarded as residing in novel modes of user-generated content production rather than in modes of on-demand personalised consumption. The web is altering the contingencies of politics and the political, and there are sound reasons to remain encouraged about its potential for facilitating democratic participation. One could say that the digital media in particular are very good in helping to promote a subjective civic empowerment, an enhanced sense of agency that can make use of many kinds of participatory activity: what we can call civic practices.

Media Literacy: Mobilising a Particular Version

One terrain of research often associated with the web's potential for democratic enhancement is media literacy (see Erstad & Amdam 2013 for a detailed overview of the literature). There are various trajectories with differing premises in this research, but we align ourselves with the critical angle underscored by, for example, Buckingham (2003; 2009) and Livingstone (2010). Thus, we emphasise that media literacy should be less an issue about technical capacities, and more oriented toward critical, normative reflection (for example, on democracy, consumption, one's lifeworld, etc.); less of an individual pedagogic issue, and more anchored in

inexorably collective contexts; less having to do with formal education, and more with democratic agency. It strikes us that genuine empowerment in the political world must be the ultimate goal of media literacy. Inherent in such a vision is also a drive towards seeking and sharing the truth as best as it can be understood, for example in the context of journalistic activities. Media literacy goes via the media, yet must also connect with the offline world, as well as link the individual's life-world to larger societal contexts. Media literacy needs to have civic practices and identities in its sights.

The optimism visible in the policy attempts in regard to media literacy to combat digital divides, to enhance knowledge, and to promote the social uses of digital media as a universal right seems to collide with a tangible pessimism at the practical level. Yet it is important to keep in mind the long-term processes by which people develop into empowered citizens, how they come to see themselves as members and potential participants in societal development. Civic interaction is the discursive practice – deliberative or not – through which individuals construct their collective sense of self and their shared memories as belonging to a group. These processes are essential catalysts for the reconfiguration of democracy. In aligning itself with and committing itself to these visions, media literacy would define its fundamental democratic raison d'être and become a central ingredient in a new research agenda.

Foundations for a New Research Agenda

The evolution of media forms that are open to user-generated content, produced at low cost and with little editorial control, pave the way for a dilution of the dichotomy between producer and consumer. In the logic of online networks, this is conducive to new, citizen-oriented participatory practices. Yet the web environment is also shaped by the logics of profit (deploying not least massive surveillance of media behaviour) and consumption, and the freedom presupposed by democracy cannot be reduced to that of the market. As we have seen, the web as an infrastructure is shaped by a number of contingencies that are problematic from democratic horizons and cannot be treated as a neutral terrain. Consumerism as a mode of engagement, as well as the pleasures of popular culture, may well offer potential for democratic participation, but the political economy and the symbolic environment of commodification present challenges to be confronted in this regard. Yet as we have contended, despite these and other difficulties, online media offer new and significant possibilities for civic empowerment in comparison to other communicative channels.

The research agenda we have in mind does not constitute an absolute break with the past, but rather a shift in emphasis to better account for the developments we have discussed. Indeed, some of the research we envision has already been underway in some corners, and we have built upon these efforts in our discussion here. What follows is both a distillation of key points we have noted thus far and a projection into how these horizons can nourish a new research agenda.

Topics and Thematics

From the above we can pull out what we see to be the main currents, and carry these forward into our suggestions for a future research agenda. We note that our

discussion has been quite wide-ranging, certainly going beyond what might be considered the normal boundaries of media and communication studies. Thus, one current that runs through our research suggestions is the need for cross-disciplinary cooperation at various points. There is much relevant pre-existing research in other fields to mobilise and build upon. Moreover, it is important to develop deeper functional research contacts, especially with colleagues in political science and political sociology who are involved in research on participation, citizenship, etc. Cultural studies, anthropology, history and other fields also have important things to offer. In a sense it is fortunate that media and communication studies is in itself quite eclectic, with many researchers coming from and/or making use of perspectives from other areas. Interdisciplinarity is often lauded – the traditional disciplinary boundaries and taxonomies have shown themselves to be increasingly constrictive. Yet one must be aware of issues of commensurability in terms of shared premises and approaches. For example, much of mainstream political science tends to focus on electoral politics and does not focus much on other forms of civic practices and their relations to identity and other cultural themes.

Our overarching angle is to prioritise research attention on what we would term 'political agency in context'. Thus, research must be adamant about specifying the forms and modes of engagement and participation as well as their contingencies. Unpacking this thought leads us to two steps in the development of a future research agenda. First we specify a key set of (overlapping) research topics, which consists of a distillation from our discussions above. These topics itemise specific research areas. To enhance the potential breadth and multidimensional character of the research agenda, we also propose four central thematics than can serve to stimulate, structure and coordinate research of a multidisciplinary character. The specific topics can inform each of the thematics in various ways. The topics we have in mind are:

Engagement (and disengagement): what are its subjective perceptions, its expressions in regard to political, identities, knowledge, and normative frameworks?

Participation (and its absences): what are its extent and modes in specific situations, and how does it relate to the key dimensions of agency (i.e. knowledge, values, practices, identities, and memory)? Embedded here is also the question of the evolving manifestations of politics and the political.

Maps and genealogies of power (and counter-power), which elucidate how power is produced, reproduced, and altered with the help of new technologies – i.e. both from a political economy perspective as well as from a perspective that focuses on the production of subjectivity.

The web's role in contributing to the development of participation via the enhancement of civic agency, knowledge, practices and identities; this includes opening up the traditional public sphere to issues that are not associated with formal politics – i.e. looking at how the web can help promote counter-democracy.

How existing engagement in popular culture, consumption, and sociality might be linked to the political.

The overarching social, cultural, economic and political parameters that impact on political participation, the contextual prerequisites and settings of such agency. This analytically weaves together aspects of social structures/institutions with communication technologies, the socio-cultural parameters of media environments, and concrete organisation and collectivities.

In what ways can media literacy be linked to the notion of democratic engagement, especially among young citizens and how can it be connected to their lifeworlds?

Where and how – beyond the classroom – can media literacy be taught? By whom? For whom?

What kind of social and media policy is needed to foster the democratic potential of the digital media?

Our four thematics become:

(1) Panoramas of society, democracy, and the media landscape;

(2) Profiles (macro) of media use;

(3) Portraits (micro) of political agency;

(4) Perspectives: mediatisation and political participation.

The distinctions between them are in part schematic, but taken together these thematics also signal a specific strategy of research organisation, which will hopefully help facilitate and coordinate the goals of research initiatives. Throughout the four thematics issues of methodology can become pertinent, as we discuss below. The first three thematics can in a sense be seen as comprising knowledge that is important on its own yet also contribute as prerequisites for the final thematic area. Thus, these first three address the contexts and highlight the contingencies that become embodied in the final thematic, 'Perspectives'. This thematic can be seen as the most ambitious one, yielding analytic results that can be directly useful for policy and regulation.

Panoramas of Society, Democracy and the Media Landscape

This thematic comprises broad vistas that serve as background, anchoring the historical specificity of the more detailed topics to come. It is based less on original data gathering and more on compiling, synthesising and analysing existing literature having to do with basic power arrangements in regard to social structure, political economy and the distribution of resources, both material and symbolic, emphasising shifts across time and manifestations of crises. This work of contextualisation, focused on national, local and transnational levels (including the EU and beyond), would have two basic points of focus:

1. The State of Democracy. This would include issues of representation and accountability, leadership, and perceptions of trust and legitimacy in regard to politicians and democratic political systems. The focus would also have in its sights structural opportunities for participation in formal politics, as well as the state of counter-democracy and alternative politics.

2. The Media Mandscape, Especially the Web and Social Media. The goal would be to try to develop a clear picture of the (ever-shifting) media landscape, in terms of its institutional, economic, technological and discursive dimensions. This would certainly include the institutions of journalism and their practices, which constitute an important – and rapidly evolving – dimension of the media landscape. Journalism also takes on relevance for participation (see below). We know that the extent of such research varies considerably between countries, and therefore the extent of complementary research required would vary.

Profiles (Macro) of Media Use

Here we envision on the one hand a largely descriptive strand that would consist chiefly of compilations of existing and ongoing survey research. The aim would be to put together overarching profiles of media usage within the population as a whole as well as for strategically selected groups. The web and mobile media would be in focus, but these would have to be situated in the context of the larger media landscape. Such research would also include the evolution of use patterns, socio-cultural impact on daily life and institutions.

A second, more analytic strand would no doubt require more original research; the aim here would be to illuminate media use in relation to social connections, collective identities, social capital, and so forth, in order to map the discursive flow of power and opinion formation. For this strand we make a case for the methodology of social network analysis (SNA) in particular (Monge & Contractor 2003; Wasserman & Faust 1994). SNA consists of a methodology that attempts to map out the macrostructures that arise from the individual tendency to more frequently link up with people with whom we share similar group interests. By drawing attention to the location of individual agents in the network – i.e. whether they are to be found in the centre or periphery of the network, the extent to which they establish direct or indirect connections between centre and periphery – SNA can be helpful in tracing the relations of power that condition network information flow.

According to Benkler's (2006) theory of the networked public sphere, the vast distribution of the web promotes the democratisation of public discourse, allowing the latter to distance itself from control by any elite. However, although any point of view can be expressed online – amounting to what Benkler terms 'universal intake' – it will only be 'carried upward' in the network if other discussants find it interesting (Etling et al. 2010, 1227). As such, public discussion online undergoes a process of 'collective filtration', the upshot of which is to distil and clarify public opinion. Such clarification bases itself on the premise that that which is most appealing to a majority is that which will be taken up by the network.

Different methodological approaches may be useful in analysing how power is produced and reproduced through the web, both internally as well as externally, i.e. by use. If SNA allows us to trace prevalent power relations on the web, by mapping out subject positions online with regard to the degrees of connections established between centre and periphery, other methodologies, for example ethnography, can help focus on how individuals use the web in their daily lives so as to perpetuate or resist subject positionings. As such, both methodologies can complement each other: if the first permits that we examine political economy hegemonies by focusing on how nodes of discourse link up to large corporation websites, etc., the second contemplates a more individualised perspective on how 'micro-publics' become active agents in their use of the web to promote both individual and collective identities.

Both of these methodologies, aimed at the larger patterns of web use, must be complemented with sociological studies that make visible how and to what extent power sharing and networking in the online domain translate into offline power relations. In particular, research needs to link media use with the mechanisms by which citizens are included and excluded from genuine participation. The online domain is distinctive in its own way and thus must be researched accordingly,

but the social world today and the issues of power and participation comprise the inseparable interface of on- and offline domains.

Also, we must add a very cautionary note in regard to SNA: such research readily becomes entwined with what has come to be called Big Data, i.e. the socio-technical phenomenon where huge amounts of data are routinely gathered about people and their behaviour, especially in regard to digital media. As noted above, this is the core business strategy of social media platforms and has become increasingly contested because of surveillance and privacy violations (see Boyd & Crawford 2012; Oboler, Welsh & Cruz 2012). Thus, it must be approached by critical research in a careful manner, with sensitivity to the ethical and political issues involved. Also, such data must be used selectively, given the enormous costs involved.

Portraits (Micro) of Political Agency

This thematic, using both survey and qualitative/ethnographic data, is aimed at illuminating the concrete aspects of engagement/disengagement, as well as highlighting the subjective components of participation and non-participation, including their modes, strategies, and practices/skills. Practices are evolving all the time, especially in tandem with new technological affordances; thus, the realm of participatory journalism is one which has emerged very strongly in the past decade as a particular mode of participation – both in the media, and in society via the media. While exploring subjectivity at the individual level, the target is not isolated individuals, but rather meaning processes as they relate to forms of collective identities, organisation, networking, and the relationship between the personal and the political. Research must take in both the repressive and productive dimensions of power, and connect them with agency, looking at which types of agencies are repressed and which are enabled or produced by the use of the web.

Within this panorama one would also address the themes of public spheres and popular culture, consumer and civic practices, and the boundaries and blending between them. Research here would be alert for: new conceptions of politics and the political; new forms of practice and skills; new kinds of experience that are relevant for participation.

Perspectives: Mediatisation and Political Participation

As mentioned, it is intended that this final thematic, a sort of integrated, analytic payoff, would be the one most relevant for policy and regulation as well as civil society and its various actors. It builds upon, incorporates and extends the knowledge and insights from the previous three thematics.

A main premise from the start has been the avoidance of technological determinism, which has led us to emphasise contingencies, and the factors that make possible, shape, as well as delimit and deflect political participation. The interplay of media with their social, economic, cultural and political settings, as well as the overarching attributes of social structure and power relations, thus play a central conceptual role. Concretely, we advocate researching existing examples of counter-democratic groups and their media use, in order to extract useful lessons from their experiences that could be applied in other contexts. In so doing, we would bring to bear results, conclusions and insights from the previous thematics.

To begin with, such research would have to target participation understood in very broad terms, as we mentioned earlier: from the classic hard-core political,

to newer kinds of issues and areas of engagement. While some attention must be devoted to electoral politics and the vicissitudes of voter subjectivity and practices, the emphasis would be on the wide-ranging fields of alternative politics. One would select a broad range of arenas of involvement, from networks, movements and activist groups, to transitory issue mobilisation. Various corners of civil society, popular culture, and consumption would be targeted in search of new modes of the political. Even examples of questionable, deviant expressions of political disposition would be included. Further, in the light of the fragmentation of the public sphere and the increasing personalisation of information via digital media, a key question to be addressed is that of shared public knowledge. This notion has traditionally been a pillar in the study of politics, but how is it evolving in the new media landscape?

Also, effort should be made to include both more and less well organised versions of political involvement; further research would include those who in various ways might be deemed successful (based on some set of criteria), as well as those who are less so. Empirically one would select respondents visible in a variety of contexts – networks, movements, discussion groups, social media, etc. As a complementary and comparative dimension, one would also target various sets of individuals who may seem to be participating in some way, but appear to be doing so in the absence of any larger social context.

Further, in understanding civic agency, its practices and identities, a sense of the historical is important. This becomes especially significant when seeking to understand where and how political memories and meanings cohere and are sustained and how this may change in a digital age; and also in understanding why certain contexts result in certain political desires or passions coming to the fore (when they are haunted by a particular politics of the past). The key analytic components would include the specifics around communication technologies, organisation, civic agency and its practices/skills, prevalent discourses, and identity processes. The establishment of these (or related) sets of concepts would help enhance consistency and possible comparative dimensions in future research.

We have mentioned that 'media' are not a singular and unified phenomenon and that attention must be paid to the specific definitive attributes. There are many possible ways to classify media, but certainly it is essential to chart uses and strategies that combine different media and platforms, including between mainstream and alternative, and even digital and non-digital (Mattoni 2012). Any categorisation scheme can of course only be a starting point, since in the modern media landscape we are seeing an increase of hybridisation, where media forms combine and/or cross boundaries (see Bailey, Cammaerts & Carpentier 2008). Moreover, each particular situation or political struggle has its own circumstances (see, for example, Cammaerts, Mattoni & McCurdy 2012), though lessons can of course be shared.

While items on the longer list of concrete topics will no doubt continue to inspire specific studies in the years ahead, it is our hope that the four thematics – the panoramas, the profiles, the portraits and the perspectives – will help give rise to coordinated and integrated research programmes that can critically address the processes of mediatisation and political participation, as well as illuminate their significance for the health of democracy.

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THE AGENCY OF CONTENT CREATORS

IMPLICATIONS FOR PERSONAL ENGAGEMENT AND MEDIA INDUSTRIES

OLA ERSTAD

Abstract

The aim of this article is to discuss some key challenges of content creation as a social and cultural practice, with agency as the analytic lens. The agency of content creators has partly been related to tensions around personal engagement using digital media, and partly about the growth of creative industries and the present economic crisis as ways of understanding transformations of content workers and employment options of young people today and in the years to come. Contemporary media developments represent both opportunities and challenges for people as content creators and the growth of creative industries and a participatory public.

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Introduction

In knowledge-based societies, the ability to interact, collaborate, shape and share content through media is increasingly crucial to ordinary people's employment options, to their citizenship and socio-cultural forms of networking (Drotner & Schrøder 2010). In tandem with these contested transformations, the media landscape itself undergoes fundamental, if divisive, changes in terms of technological digitisation, global forms of distribution and ownership and rapid uptake of online services for social networking. As such, digital media have created affordances for content creation of a scale and type never seen before in cultural history.

Much of the traditional media-industry dominance has been deflated in the new context of networked communication and participation (Jin 2013). For instance, file-sharing networks are now an essential part of the media industry where users become distributors and generators of added value. In this sense, the boundary between producers, distributers and consumers of media goods is increasingly blurred, fuelled by creativity and through the social networking of individuals, dramatically changing traditional models of mass communication, media use and the media industries.

The social practice of content creation and people's involvement as content creators has received a lot of attention during the last decade as new ways of socialising (Ito 2010). Some also emphasise that digital media in the hands of people represent a democratic potential, engaging people in different public discourses (Cassell, Huffaker & Tversky 2005). At the same time these developments of content creation among people have had a fundamental impact on the growth of creative and cultural industries (UNCTAD 2008). This part of the economic sector has become an important area among European countries with prospects for new employment markets. At the same time this bottom-up development created through the social practices of people using new media has also led to new media structures and different corporate models feeding on what people themselves produce, for example as seen by Facebook, Google or Wikipedia.

The main focus in this article is on content creation as a social and cultural practice, with agency as the analytic lens. The agency of content creators is an issue of great importance not only in relation to personal trajectories of engagement and creative practices provided by digital media, but also in relation to public issues of employment options and democratic participation. Studying audience-as-producers opens up issues of displacement of content workers from a professional agenda to career opportunities in diverse ways for young people in general. Contemporary media developments represent both opportunities and challenges for people as content creators and the growth of creative industries, as will be discussed in this article. A key question will then be: agency and content creation by whom and for what purpose?

I will elaborate on the implications of content creation and agency using digital media on two different levels. For each I will highlight one key tension. One implication is about personal engagement, where the tension is about how large corporate structures are reusing and feeding on content provided by others in certain ways. The other implication is about the growth of creative industries, where the tension is created by the present economic crisis and the role prescribed to these industries

in contemporary societies as means for economic development. As such I am trying to combine two analytic levels (Erstad 2008) – partly about how people use and create with digital media, and partly about the mechanisms of digital media in structuring these processes. Both levels are key aspects of addressing agency and democratic engagement among a participatory public (Dahlgren 2010; Loader & Mercea 2012).

Conceptual Considerations

Agency is often located in various relationships between self and structure, or elaborated as various forms of agency, including the technological, human, and textual (Hardy 2004). The important point is that agency implies "the capacity to make a difference" (Castor & Cooren 2006) linked to certain institutional and cultural practices. The concept of agency might be perceived as closely connected to the concept of identity (Hull & Greeno 2006) rather than just defining it as bounded by structure (Emirbayer & Mische 1998, 963). In this way we might better understand how agency shapes social action. By creating content people get the opportunity to "craft an agentive self" (Hull & Katz 2006), where they actively take part in a social construction of their own identity, as shown in research on digital storytelling (Lundby 2008).

The concept of agency has regained some interest in recent years moving more towards studying its embedded complexity and relatedness. Following Emirbayer and Mische (1998) I will argue that agency needs to be viewed as fundamentally relational, process oriented and temporal, between actors and structures. Emirbayer and Mische (1998, 963– 964) explain their position the following way:

> *The agentic dimension of social action can only be captured in its full complexity, we argue, if it is analytically situated within the flow of time. More radically, we also argue that the structural contexts of action are themselves temporal as well as relational fields – multiple, overlapping ways of ordering time toward which social actors can assume different simultaneous agentic orientations. We claim that, in examining changes in agentic orientation, we can gain crucial analytical leverage for charting varying degrees of maneuverability, inventiveness, and reflective choice shown by social actors in relation to the constraining and enabling contexts of action.*

I argue in a similar way, understanding agency as fundamentally relational, between actors and structures going beyond former one-sided points of view, either with theorists of practice (Bourdieu, Giddens) or with theorists focusing on goal seeking, purposivity and judgement (rational choice, phenomenology, feminist theories). Agency as relational involving different mediational means is also supported by developments within anthropology and ethnography studying people living within different cultural worlds (Holland et al. 1998). Digital media and content creation have become important ways that people engage in agentive practices in public spheres (Livingstone 2005).

The growth of content creation as a social practice has often conceptually been linked to creativity. Creation and creativity surfaces in ways of understanding contemporary developments of media industries, cultural production and about

participation in the production, consumption and sharing of media content. Creativity has been present in political and institutional agendas since the advent of a new knowledge economy. Immersed in an ever-growing networked digital era, creativity becomes a key point, since media industries' sustainability relies, more than ever, on this competitive edge. Creativity is, however, a very elusive term, somehow praising the unique, the idea of genius and the innovative, and something it is difficult to argue against (Banaji, Burn & Buckingham 2010).

Creativity as an individual competence with resonance on collective modes of social engagement and as a key trait of media production articulates the 'the competitive edge' with economic value. This should be conceptually distinguished from 'creation' as a philosophical concept that addresses the singularity of the work of art and its detachment from common modes of production. Although the romantic overtones are not to be overlooked, the conceptual distinction between creation and creativity is theoretically useful for media studies. On the one hand, because it resists subsuming culture to commodification, on the other because it allows the productive polarity of the cultural between singularity and universality, between social engagement and individual experimentation to continue to impact the manifold ways of meaning-making in our increasingly networked societies (Jenkins 2006).

Referring to content creation as a key element of new publics and democratic engagement establishes some interesting dimensions of the implications of such social practices. Understanding agency in content creation provides us with opportunities for exploring new ways of engagement and networking where digital media play a key role. Conceptually this is defined both in the ways people use media for certain purposes in social practices, and in factors defining the framing of such practices. Conceptually, democracy would then be interpreted as ways of how people engage in public discourses where content creation within social media has become an important new space for participation. A public would gain new affordances through their media use influencing diverse social issues, as for example seen in ways that social movements like 'Occupy Wall Street' use social media to have an impact on social developments (Loader & Mercea 2012). By being involved in processes of content creation people have a possibility to mediate or to transform their own relationships to their social contexts and those of others.

The Digital Turn

Europe was, from a very early time, a cradle of creativity, spurred by competition among, for instance, small city states in Renaissance Italy and, later, between emerging European nation states and beyond, connecting the world through the first waves of global cultural exchange. The development of states, industry and modern society went hand in hand with creativity, works of art and free thinking unparalleled in the world. Even in today's world, Europe continues to foster creativity, now in fierce competition and useful exchange with most of the rest of the world.

From another point of view one might say that the power of expression is a basic element of human development. The way we express ourselves, through whatever medium available, is one of the key elements in how human beings have evolved since our ancestors started their quest for survival. Humans are now able not only

to reinterpret the perception of their world, but also to find out more about the tools they used and the impact these tools have (Wertsch 1998). Building on the ideas of the French cultural psychologist Ignace Meyerson, Bruner discusses what he calls "the externalisation tenet" (Bruner 1996, 22). This refers to the notion that the main function of collective cultural activity is to produce 'works' – or *oeuvres* in French. This can refer to larger systems such as the arts and sciences of a culture, or smaller 'works', for example a presentation of a project by a group of students in front of the rest of the class. Bruner shows how important such collective 'works' are for producing and sustaining group solidarity and how they can help *make* a community. At the same time they are important in promoting a sense of the division of labour that goes into making a product (Bruner 1996, 23).

This externalisation process represents a constant orientation towards publicness where expressive acts of content creation become shared with others. People as content creators act with agency in ways that such mediational processes using whatever media available for expression can transform conditions within society. The last century has seen many examples of how books, journalism and works of art can have an impact on society and social transformations, from the works of Karl Marx to Watergate and Wikileaks. The digital turn during the last decade represents a much broader social force in the way groups and people engage in content creation and on a different scale than ever before in history. At the same time this opening up of content creation among people in all facets of society challenges the nature and meaning of quality information for democratic participation.

In a general sense the term 'mediation' can be associated with the objectification of symbolic meaning in time and space as part of socio-historic development. However, one needs to specify this concept according to particular objects, social groups and historical periods. Another point about mediation is that it involves constraints as well as empowerment (Wertsch et al. 1995, 24–25). Any form of mediation involves some form of limitation. It frees us from some earlier limitations while at the same time introducing new ones of its own. Our emphasis is often on the new possibilities that new mediational means represent for empowerment and new actions. However, we need to keep a focus on the limitations at the same time, on how tools shape our action in an inherently limiting way.

The digital turn of mediational means in our culture represents important shifts in the ways content creation through media play a role in contemporary cultural development and in personal ways of engagement. It is obvious that digital media represent new affordances (Gibson 1977) and possibilities. However, more important are the questions of how and to what extent they represent constraints or empowerment – as ways of understanding agency in using such media for different purposes. With an orientation from traditional forms of mass media towards new forms of personal media some describe this in the following way:

> *As private individuals use media technologies to create and share personal expressions through digital networks, previous characteristics of mass media as providers of generally accessible information are no longer accurate… personal media are de-institutionalised/de-professionalised and facilitate mediated interaction* (Lüders 2008, 683).

Media institutions are in a flux of transformations and transitions from professional quality provision of information towards a situation where the public

contributes to the flow of information in society to a much larger degree, de-professionalising who contributes and relates to information. The media are to a larger extent in the hands of people and they use these media to document their lives and their social worlds in different ways, from Twitter feeds and networking of special interest groups to examples such as Current TV building on the participation of people sharing information using their own devices and sharing it online. Developments towards personal media, especially with the impact of smart phones and other mobile platforms with a constant flow of information, raise serious questions about the key role of media literacy among people in their creations of and dealings with information in their daily lives (see review article in this issue by Erstad and Amdam.)

One important development leading up to our situation of content creation today is the way music has been made and expressed in later years, with what started as sampling techniques and the role of DJs in creating music towards the end of the 1980s. Several of the contributions in the book *Sound Unbound: Sampling Digital Music and Culture* (Miller 2008) show how digital media have had profound effects on the ways music is made and distributed today, and also how this relates to broader cultural analysis of developments within art where content within one context is reused within another context. The digital media have created a new platform for thinking about music production. As Keller (2008, 135–136) explains:

> *Early sonic collage, in the analog era, was painstaking and labor-intensive…Digital recording technology revolutionizes and democratizes this recycling process, making complex manipulation of recorded fragments easy and relatively affordable. And the Internet and other digital communications media bring a treasure trove of recorded sound directly to the sonic cannibal…this cultural practice profoundly blurs the line between creators and consumers of culture, turning listening itself into a platform for creative production and performance.*

In a similar way photography and image making has become part of people's everyday practice, with hundreds of photos loaded onto hard discs or new services for photosharing where photos are deleted shortly after they are shared (Snapchat). Digital media have created different conditions for processes of making music and taking photos. To what extent people use these possibilities to create new agentive trajectories for themselves is a more open question.

In a broader sense this can be interpreted as a new way of understanding a production mode in our culture. It is of course not new in itself and has been present within cultural studies for some time (Buckingham, Grahame & Sefton-Green 1995; Fornäs, Lindberg & Sernhede 1995). These studies show how young people take up and use available cultural resources to create music, film, and so forth. However, a major shift has happened in the way digital media have changed access to such tools and the ease by which such tools encourage content creation. Social media has only brought this further to a 'communicative mode' where content is created as a constant flow across time and space.

Of course, the copyright laws that regulate the markets of music and image production and distribution today are at stake. Legal disputes about copyright issues have surfaced more and more due to technological developments that create

new practices that evolve outside the regulated market. Lessig (2008) has been a key spokesman for the need to challenge the established copyright regime, trying to develop other means of handling copyright issues in his initiative on 'Creative Commons'.

Based on the above we might specify that "In an era of intensely networked systems, when you create, it's not just how you create, but the context of the activity that makes the product" (Jordan & Miller 2008, 97). The interesting aspect is how reusing content and manifesting new expressions can be redefined in different contexts. The ways young people experiment and explore the potentials of digital technologies are of special interest, and their potentials for creative practices of participation (Erstad 2010).

Content Creators vs. New Corporate Structures

During the last fifty years there has been an increased interest in ways of engagement among media users, constantly redefining audience studies (Jensen & Rosengren 1990; Livingstone 1998; 2005). Much research has been directed towards the consumption of media content especially by young people (Livingstone & Markham 2008). Sometimes as concerns about risks and influences from the media, other times as deep fascination with the reception and engagement by young people in ways of consuming media content, from books, cartoons, music, film, TV, video and so forth (Staksrud 2013). The ways in which we consume media have become increasingly more complex, hybrid and fragmented due to new ways of distributing media content to audiences. More interesting though are the ways audiences have become producers of content and not only consumers, and how these developments imply a re-orientation of agency among media users.

Engagement of Content Creators

Content creation is a very broad term including different ways of using media for distributing information. Still, the transformation due to the growth of digital media that is discussed in this article is partly linked to the increased engagement of lay people in productive practices as part of social life, and partly linked to the different modalities and platforms for content creation that exist today towards multi-user online communities and mobile technologies. The central question is of course to what extent such developments in content creation and creators imply a sense of agency or empowerment; is it engagement with a mission, naive participation or cultural displacement (Loader 2007, 1)?

There are a few examples of research with a more explicit focus on media production from before the digital turn, mostly with an interest in practices among young people and often done as organised activities connected to schools or community centres due to the cost and availability of equipment for recording, editing and so forth. Drotner (1991), for example, showed how a group of young people making videos were involved in aesthetic productive practices in their everyday culture. Similar examples of productive practices using different media within the context of media education are provided by Buckingham (2003).

Especially during the last decade we have witnessed a change in content production, distribution and mixing (Drotner & Schrøder 2010; Knobel & Lankshear 2010). Since the introduction of digital media and the growing access to such media

at home (DVD, cameras, mp3 players, computers and internet access), and especially since the introduction of Web 2.0 technologies that make it possible to share and build on others' content online, the interest in young people's production practices and content creation has been growing. This has created what Jenkins (2006) calls a participatory media culture. Digital media have increased the blurred distinction between production and consumption, for example as shown by Ito (2006) in the peer-to-peer exchange surrounding Japanese animation media mixes that rely on a combination of various analogue and digital media forms. We are now in a situation where potentially anybody with access to a computer and the internet can produce and distribute content, which others can reuse. The actual implications of this on cultural production and development are still in the making (Drother & Schrøder 2010).

The re-use of culturally produced content is of course not new in human history (Miller 2008), but the introduction of Web 2.0 technologies represents a dramatic change in the possibilities for content creation. Further, the growth and impact of social media as platforms for public communicative practices means that content creation is part of everyday activities, in everything from short Twitter messages, special interest groups on Facebook or posting videos on YouTube. Much of what can be seen online on sites like YouTube, Facebook, Twitter or Wikipedia, is based on activities where content is mixed in different ways. The main point is that content should not be understood as fixed and static, but rather as something that is moving from user to user and from context to context. The impact of such practices are especially seen in times of social change or crisis, as exemplified by social movements such as Attac, social upheaval in several Arab countries during the last couple of years or in the traumatic aftermath of the terrorist attacks in Oslo, where content creation using social media is both a way of communicating and a way to express opinions and emotions. As such, content creation as mediated meaning-making and communicative activity has become very important in our societies.

Youth has been a target group for most of what has been written on new media and content creation in later years (Knobel & Lankshear 2010) mainly because they are the prime age group using such media. And several authors have been interested in the ways these media developments create new conditions for political engagement among young citizens. Loader, in several of his books, has highlighted the possibilities, but also the new challenges for democratic participation within new media landscapes such as social media (Loader 2007; Loader & Mercea 2012). The opportunities for participation and letting one's voice be heard online are numerous. However, this also raises concerns about who is actually heard when so many are creating content and the level of media literacy needed to navigate and operate within these new media landscapes of content creation.

Creative practices are, to a greater degree than before, based on processes of sharing rather than producing content and, through that, developing specific communities of practice, of co-creative labour and cultures of collaboration. How this is played out in different creative practices will differ according to the contexts and objectives of such practices. There are also important cultural differences in the ways content creators are constructed. Many studies during the last decade show how young people in the USA create content using digital media to an increasing extent and with a high percentage of super-communicators (Lenhart et al. 2007; Ito

2010), while similar studies in for example Norway show a much lesser percentage of what can be called advanced content creators (Futsæter 2008).

In this sense we should also be careful in the way we describe young people as a digital generation (Buckingham & Willett 2006). Digital media are part of growing up today, but at the same time there is wide variation in how young people use these media for different purposes. Still, despite variations in amount of young people who can be described as active content creators, the ways some young people have adopted these media as creative tools raises important questions about social practices among youth and especially how these developments challenge some basic conceptions about education, schooling and learning.

The Tension

Agency is especially at stake these days where media systems are having an increased impact on ways of creating content. As shown above the implication of the digital turn has been an increased engagement of people in creating and sharing content online. Still, during the last five years another development has become more apparent. New business models and corporate media structures have evolved structuring online activities in new ways, breaking with the fundamental ideas of the internet as an open communicative space. This is seen, for example, in the ways companies like Facebook and Google are developing. Some describe this as the power of algorithms (Pariser 2011; Bucher 2012). This is of course not new since the internet has always been based on certain algorithms that structure what we can and cannot do on the internet. The new development, however, is the way these companies use the content that people provide by posting multimodal content on these online sites in order to structure our actions in certain ways and for certain purposes.

The examples mentioned by Pariser in his TED talk (Pariser 2011a) are illustrative. He refers to some personal experiences in using Facebook and Google. As an online activist he used Facebook to engage in discussions with people from the whole political spectrum, also with more conservative 'friends'. However, for a certain period he engaged less with these conservative 'friends' on Facebook, with the consequence that these friends were simply deleted from his network of discussion partners. The algorithm underpinning the way Facebook is structured had somehow erased these contacts on the basis that they were less actively connected. Pariser's other example is how he asked two friends to enter the same search word in Google, which was 'Egypt'. What appeared on their screens was very different. One received a series of links to sites for travel and holiday locations in Egypt, while the other received a series of updates on the uprising and the political developments in Egypt. The browser had adjusted the same search word to the individuals' profiles and former online activities.

In his book *The Filter Bubble* (2011) Pariser uses examples like these to address important challenges we are facing at the moment in our dealings with social media like Facebook and search engines like Google. These are not innocent and neutral technologies suited to provide for our personal engagement online. More and more these corporations are directed towards structuring and filtering our access to information and using our content creation in certain ways. The programmers and engineers developing the algorithms for how these services function have a lot of impact on our activities in using such media (Bucher 2012).

In summing up this section, content creation as a cultural practice on a personal level is developing as a tension between personal engagement in posting and sharing content online, and the structures that are now being developed within large media corporations in such a way as to define information for us, not by us. These issues have been part of the development of the internet for a long time (Anderson 2005). However, the impact and the scale of this tension today makes it a key research area for media research. A redefinition of agency (Emirbayer & Mische 1998) could be a way to analyse and understand these developments.

Creative Industries in a Time of Crisis

Another important issue linked to the developments of content creation and digital media is the growth and impact of the so-called creative industries. The Department for Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) in the UK defines the creative industries as: "those industries which have their origin in individual creativity, skill and talent and which have a potential for wealth and job creation through the generation and exploitation of intellectual property". (DCMS 2001, 4). Agency in this sense is linked to employment options created by new media developments and transformations of content workers.

The creative industries and creative economy (Howkins 2001) imply a broad set of cultural activities with economic implications for innovation and exploitation of knowledge and information. These terms are difficult to specify since they cover many and diverse social practices (Roodhouse 2006). It is also difficult to clearly define which jobs fall under the heading of creative industries, which is reflected in statistics of labour markets within this sector. Some jobs that are clearly not creative as such could still be important for a creative economy. Today conceptions of creative industries are closely related to future orientations of the work force. These industries represent alternative paths of skills and competences to traditional labour industries of the 20th century.

In turn, the creative industries and creative-economy analysis in media research imply a broad set of cultural activities with economic implications for innovation and exploitation of knowledge and information (Sefton-Green et al. 2011). These industries represent alternative paths of skills and competences to the traditional labour industries of the twentieth century. Media constitute the main sector defining these industries, not only as tools for creative processes like design and content creation, but also in the way that media corporations invest in and develop important creative industries as economic forces within our societies, such as, for example, the Disney Corporation and Pixar or companies producing computer games. The value of the creative industries is both symbolic and economic. The symbolic capital arising from these ventures strengthens the self-awareness of creative societies whilst fostering a cultural legitimation derived from the recognition of its members as the vanguard of artistic production and reflection. Hence, by joining symbolic with economic value, the creative industries are now at the forefront of policy interests in modern societies and are thus deeply implicated in the creative economy, drawing from and impacting upon the cultural tissue and the ways in which societies represent themselves and lend themselves to representation.

According to *The European Cluster Observatory Priority Sector Report: Creative and Cultural Industries* (Power 2011), the creative and cultural industries employed a

total of 6.4 million people in 30 European countries in 2009, and regions with high concentrations of creative and cultural industries have Europe's highest prosperity levels. Furthermore, most of the top 25 highest cultural and creative growth regions are small and medium-sized regions. The term 'cultural industry' used to cover most of the employment and activities within the cultural sector represented by established cultural institutions in society. The term 'creative industries' is now used to include practices of content creation that people are involved in and which have economic implications for themselves and others often as small and medium-sized firms, for example within web design.

A core issue framing the relevance of a research agenda targeting content creation and creative industries is the present crisis in Europe with its implications for transformation and change on different levels. There is a strong policy pressure at present towards defining the creative industries as a sort of 'push mechanism' for innovation in the present economic crisis. The belief is that these industries represent new initiatives for economic growth when traditional media organisations and other industries in society are struggling.

Over the past two decades, growing attention has been devoted to the cultural economy as a powerful cluster of economic development in complex and educated urban societies. Studies and policy projects that aim to understand and invest economically in the creative sector have grown exponentially since 2008, as the financial crisis deepened and investors sought economic externalities as a way out of the quagmire.

Within the EU, attention is now directed towards the impact of creative industries for economic growth and as promotion for new sectors of employment. Within media research there is a need to address the role of media in creating new economic markets and the impact of digital technologies on media ownership, on structural developments of distribution and access, as well as new job markets opened up by media developments. In a specific Communication from the EU Commission (COM(2012) 537 final, 4) it is argued that:

> *The cultural and creative sectors are faced with a rapidly changing environment driven by the digital shift and globalisation, leading to the emergence of new players, the coexistence of very big structures with micro-entities, a progressive transformation of value chains and evolving consumer behaviour and expectations. While these changes offer great opportunities in terms of lower production costs or new distribution channels, they call for action at different levels.*

Further they argue for a multi-layered strategy, implying interdisciplinarity in the research approach and where media literacy and changing skills are important factors. The implications further raise awareness of studying the symbolic value represented by the creative sector and the role of media. Old organisational structures are challenged and institutional structures are increasingly influenced by creative practices. The knowledge economy forces us to rethink and re-address drivers for economic development and change and new business models emerge, often combining old and new media. There is a need to focus our attention more towards the creative workforce than just institutions and, here, there are implications for the role of the state and of citizenship in developing the creative workforce. As such,

we move between local, national, European and global processes as well as urban and non-urban, where the creative workforce is very often an urban development.

As a field of research the creative industries are just starting to gain attention. In the opening statement of the new Creative Industries Journal in 2008 the editor Simon Roodhouse stated that:

> *The creative industries, despite being an emerging field of study, have already come to constitute an important sphere of practice, representing an important sector of the new economy. The array of artistic and cultural production and distribution enterprises that constitute the creative industries has come to be consolidated under an umbrella that bridges the nexus between culture and economy. What sets these creative industries apart from other industries is recognized to be their creativity, a largely understudied area* (Roodhouse 2008, 1).

A focus on creativity is also lifted by different initiatives focusing on young people and education. One example is the creative partnership initiatives in the UK using different media and contexts to engage young people in creative practices. Again, creativity is used to develop engagement and ultimately for employment in an innovation-oriented workforce.

In summing up this section, the growth and impact of creative industries has become a new and important field of research for media and communication studies. As an area of society defined by new job opportunities and changing features of the work force, to some extent triggered and further enhanced by the economic crisis, there is a great need for a research agenda targeting these fundamental processes of cultural development and the impact of changes in media culture and mediatisation.

A Future Oriented Research Agenda

The focal point of much ongoing research is the interconnection between different levels that creative cultural production represent, from the social practices of individuals to collective orientations in media use and macro processes of the creative economy. There is increasing interest, both within the humanities and the social sciences, in studying how social media create new spaces for cultural participation, the implications of taking part in such networks for consumption and creation, and what is really meant by digital engagement.

The aim of this article has been to discuss some key challenges of content creation as a social and cultural practice, with agency as the analytic lens. The agency of content creators has partly been related to tensions around personal engagement using digital media, and partly about the growth of creative industries and the present economic crisis as ways of understanding transformations of content workers and employment options for young people today and in the years to come. In my view agency will be an important part of a future oriented research agenda for media studies.

A future oriented research agenda on content creation and agency would also have to include methodological challenges. Part of this would be to address and present arguments for ways in which media studies can strengthen trans-border studies and response-mode collaboration between humanities and social science scholars in order to enhance conceptual and methodological innovation. Several methodological issues become important in the years to come in order to address the transformations discussed in this chapter, both related to the role of the researcher,

research designs and moving beyond dichotomies of quantitative and qualitative methods. In particular, there is a need to focus more on longitudinal research designs in order to trace developments over time concerning audiences and industries (Lemke 2000). We also need to know more about the interconnections between online and offline media practices and ways that mobile technologies support content creation across contexts and settings. In response to these developments some argue for more processual methodologies (Drotner 2013) and ways of involving research participants in data collection as participatory research designs. Digital technologies also represent important developments as research tools, as ways of collecting multimodal data and software for analysing large datasets (data mining). The growth of content creation and creative industries highlights many of these methodological challenges for media research in the years to come.

In summing up and defining a future oriented research agenda on content creation and creative industries within participatory democracies I will focus on three key areas:

1. Production Studies, Productive Practices and Creative Learning. Studies of production practices in diverse socio-cultural settings is a key area of research in contemporary and future oriented media research initiatives. These include how professionals and semi-professionals are changing their practices and ways of distributing media content both within traditional media organisations and new online services. As mentioned above, the most dramatic change in recent years is the way people in general are involved in productive media practices, from postings and messaging on social media to multimedia productions. This implies a blurring of the distinction between amateurs and professionals, reorienting the validity of what constitutes the professional within a particular creative domain.

2. Agency, Participation and Sharing within Creative Communities. The making of communities around creating and sharing content has been growing as a field of research for some time, for example on gaming communities (Egenfeldt-Nielsen, Smith & Tosca 2008), fan fiction communities (Hellekson & Busse 2006), and sharing of audio and video as DIY communities (Knobel & Lankshear 2010) and remixing processes (Drotner & Schrøder 2010; Lessig 2008). Of key importance in researching agency and creative participation is an orientation towards equality, digital divide, class and cultural capital, as part of cultural struggles related to content creation. This includes the relevance of issues of gender and age, minority/majority, immigrant populations, empowerment, and inclusion–exclusion processes of creative participation in future oriented media cultures. As opposed to more consumption-oriented studies, we need to study what people actively *do* with the media and the implications for ways of reorienting audience studies.

3. Growing Cultural, Economic and Creative Sectors. The technological developments of the digital age might raise hopes that increased production of media texts and artefacts by people outside the media and creative industries will lead to a more equitable distribution of economic assets in the development of the creative economy and new employment options. This, however, is challenged by evidence that inequality and social exclusion persist (Loader & Mercea 2012). There may be greater opportunities to become content creators, but the means of storage and mass distribution for profit are dominated by globalised companies (Pariser 2011).

Such developments also open up research orientations towards creative learning as ways of increasing young people's cultural engagement (Thomson & Sefton-Green 2011). Media literacy then becomes relevant, in particular the ability to engage in critical reflection by content creators as part of agency and public participation. Through reading and writing (multimodal authoring) we can develop social, cultural and political understandings of the world. These issues need to be critically addressed in a research agenda side by side with the economic edge of literacy. Media literacy represents a conceptual framework that includes an increased focus on issues such as creativity and critical reflection among citizens, as well as a strong emphasis on the production mode and the ways digital media impact on our cultural practices and social engagement.

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FROM PROTECTION TO PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

A REVIEW OF RESEARCH LITERATURE ON MEDIA LITERACY

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Abstract

Discourses on media literacy have evolved from concerns about how children and young people relate to media contents, towards broader issues of social inclusion and public participation. In this article we take a closer look at the main understandings of media literacy within media research through a review of existing perspectives and research literature. First we aim to describe the main terminology and positionings concerning media literacy. Secondly we discuss the core issues of research within the field. Three levels are discerned within the literature: the personal level, the social interaction level and the media systems level. Finally we comment on the possible development of a unified research agenda in media literacy.

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Introduction

Media literacy has increasingly been coined as a prerequisite to create a participatory public within the information and knowledge society (Rassool 1999; Kellner & Share 2005). Our aim in this article is to show how the conceptual understanding of media literacy has evolved from a rather narrow perspective of training individual skills for media protection, towards a broader agenda of public media competences within democratic societies. This is mainly due to the impact of digital media on different levels within our societies and the new opportunities they represent for participation and citizenship, raising questions about the kind of skills and competences that are needed in our dealings with media in our daily lives.

This article is a review of existing perspectives and research literature on media literacy. The primary focus is on initiatives within Europe, but other country and regional initiatives will also be included. The presentation consists of two main parts. In the first part, a summary of terminology, definitions and positionings within the field of media literacy is presented. The second part consists of a discussion of different concepts and issues, within both research and policy, concerning media literacy within the literature. This part is divided into three sub-sections indicating different target levels of media literacy.

In our search for and collection of relevant reviews on media literacy, we found that the reviews were created with different purposes – some are more policy oriented, some are oriented towards practice and some are more clearly defined as research reviews. Accordingly, we tried to group the reviews together based on their purpose, and then analysed the reviews for key issues and ways of presenting these issues. In addition, we have included what might be termed 'meta-texts'; articles with a special focus on media literacy, special issues of journals, and books and reports that are comments on the field of 'media literacy' as such (European Commission 2007; EuroMeduc 2009; Danish Technological Institute 2010).

Conceptual Struggles

Before we discuss the core issues of reviews on media literacy, we want to briefly introduce the terminology, main definitions used and positionings in this field. This will provide a frame for the further discussion of core issues.

The Terminology

In a special issue on media literacy published in the *Journal of Communication* in 1998, the editor Alan Rubin starts by wondering: "For several decades we have been debating issues surrounding media literacy. It is somewhat perplexing why we really understand so little about the subject" (Rubin 1998, 3). Although the literature on media literacy, more recently described as digital literacy, has increased tremendously, and more about this subject is now understood, it is fair to say that we still struggle for a coherent understanding of the term 'media literacy' (Tyner 2010). Brown argues that:

> *The term media literacy means many things to many people. Traditionally, it has involved the ability to analyze and appreciate respected works of literature and, by extension, to communicate effectively by writing well. In the past half-century it has come to include the ability to analyze competently*

and to utilize skilfully print journalism, cinematic productions, radio and television programming, and even computer-mediated information and exchange (including real-time interactive exploration through the global internet) (Brown 1998, 44).

This was written at a time when digital media were still in the beginning phase of major transitions. However, we are still relating to many media, both analogue and digital, and as such 'media literacy' covers many different media with different ways of representation.

Some definitions have made a mark in the media literacy literature. In 2003, Ofcom was charged with the responsibility to promote media literacy in the UK. Ofcom's role has primarily been as a market regulator, rather than a content regulator. Ofcom's definition of media literacy: "the ability to access, understand and create communications in a variety of contexts" (Ofcom 2005), derives from an older US definition by Aufderheide (1997). The Ofcom definition has been widely adopted internationally. Ofcom in 2005 commissioned two literature reviews with different focus areas, one written by Buckingham et al. (2005) and one written by Livingstone, van Couvering and Thumim (2005). Buckingham later commented on Ofcom's position:

Of course, this comes packaged as a democratic move – a move away from protectionism and towards empowerment. But it is also an individualising move: it seems to be based on a view of media literacy as a personal attribute, rather than as a social practice. Indeed, it could be seen to place a burden on individuals that they might not necessarily be disposed or able to cope with. And while it gives people responsibilities, it does not also extend their rights: it positions them as consumers rather than as citizens. It has become the duty of all good consumers – and, when it comes to children, of all good parents —to regulate their own media uses (Buckingham 2009, 16–17).

Livingstone also commented in a later report that this definition by Ofcom pays far more attention to skills of access and use than to critical or creative skills (Livingstone 2010, 40–42). As Livingstone (2010, 42) points out: "Behind the debate over definitions … is a fundamental debate over the purposes of media literacy."

This fundamental debate becomes obvious when looking at some of the other main definitions of media literacy. One dominant definition comes from a US-based tradition focusing on skills and information processing, based on a cognitive approach. In *Media Literacy*, Potter uses the following description:

Media literacy is a perspective that we actively use when exposing ourselves to the media in order to interpret the meaning of the messages we encounter. We build our perspective from knowledge structures. To build our knowledge structures, we need tools and raw material. The tools are our skills. The raw material is information from the media and from the real world. Active use means that we are aware of the messages and are consciously interacting with them (Potter 2001, 4).

This definition can be said to follow the individualising move Buckingham points out above. Buckingham's own definition is more representative of a UK-based cultural studies approach. In his book *Media Education: Literacy, Learning and Contemporary Culture*, he writes:

> *Literacy is not seen here merely as a kind of cognitive 'tool kit' that enables people to understand and use media. And media education is thus rather more than a kind of training course or proficiency test in media-related skills. For want of a better term, media literacy is a form of critical literacy. It involves analysis, evaluation and critical reflection. It entails the acquisition of a 'metalanguage' – that is, a means of describing the forms and structures of different modes of communication; and it involves a broader understanding of the social, economic and institutional contexts of communication, and how these affect people's experiences and practices. Media literacy certainly includes the ability to use and interpret media; but it also involves a much broader analytical understanding* (Buckingham 2003, 36).

Within a US context, Tyner indicates a similar division between a tool orientation of literacy and a more reflective social process in her book *Literacy in a Digital World* (Tyner 1998). This fundamental difference in the scope and purpose of media literacy also becomes evident in the positionings described below.

Towards the end of the 1990s, media literacy became connected to the term 'digital literacy' (Gilster 1997), which has since become the most commonly used term. The reason is of course the impact of digital media and a need to rhetorically raise issues of ways of handling technological developments and the role of education in our society. 'Media' and 'digital' literacies have evolved from different traditions, with the first more closely linked to media studies, and the second to informatics and technology developments. Still, these two terms have more similarities than differences in the issues raised, and in that they reflect media developments, especially in convergence. Consequently, terms such as 'computer literacy', 'ICT literacy' and 'internet literacy' are more closely linked to instrumental and narrow conceptions of the interconnection between media and literacy, understood mainly as skills in handling the technology.

In the German language discourse, the term 'media competence' receives far more attention than 'media literacy' (Baacke 1996). Similar emphasis on media competence rather than media literacy can be found in the Nordic countries (Lankshear & Knobel 2008). The word formation *Medienkompetenz* has spread in Germany from the late 1980s. Baacke connects the term communicative competence to critical media theories within mass communication, especially Habermas (Baacke1973, 333). Later, he develops this concept further to 'media competence' (see e.g. Pietraß 2007, 3). According to Baacke, media competence is the ability to include all kind of media into a person's repertoire for communicating and acting, in order to actively appropriate the world. It is the ability to use media in a goal- and needs-oriented way (Baacke 1996). Baacke distinguishes between four dimensions, each comprising further sub-dimensions: media criticism (analytical, reflexive and ethical), media knowledge (with an informational and an instrumental-qualificatory sub-dimension), media use (use through reception, offer interactivity) and media creation/design (innovative, creative and aesthetic). Against the original idea, the term 'media competence' is often used in a narrow way, being restricted to technical skills or to a solely critical media usage, leaving out the media-critical or socio-critical aspects, and ignoring the action-oriented pedagogical understanding, which is dominant in most media educational concepts (e.g. Grafe 2011; Tulodziecki 2011).

On a European level, the term 'digital competence' has been used as an overall term, and quite similar to a general understanding of media literacy as individualised skills. One example is the working group on 'key competences' of the European Commission "Education and Training 2010." This programme identifies *digital competence* as one of the eight domains of key competences, defining it as:

> *the confident and critical use of Information Society Technologies for work, leisure and communication. These competences are related to logical and critical thinking to high-level information management skills, and to develop communication skills. At the most basic level, ICT skills comprise the use of multi-media technology to retrieve, assess, store, produce, present and exchange information and to communicate and participate in networks via the Internet* (European Commission 2004, 14).

Also, as part of the term 'media literacy', many more specific terms targeting specific areas and issues have been used. Examples of this are: 'information literacy', which has been used by librarians as a way of handling information and sources as part of media developments; 'visual literacy', especially by Messaris (1994), as a discussion of ways of interpreting visual representations; and 'multimodal literacy', especially by Kress (2003) and Jewitt (2008), as more complex representations. Other writers argue for more overall conceptions pointing to the fact that there are many literacies, arguing the need for concepts that include many of the other concepts within the field. Examples of this are "multiple media literacies" (Meyrowitz 1998), "multiliteracies" (Cope & Kalantzis 1999) and "metamedia literacies" (Lemke 2004). Still, we believe that 'media literacy' covers many of the other concepts used, but there is a need to emphasise this in plural, as literacies defined within different social practices.

In his critical comment on the terminology used, and the policy initiatives within the EU during the last decade, Buckingham raises some key concerns on terminology:

> *Media literacy, it seems, is a skill or a form of competency; but it is also about critical thinking, and about cultural dispositions or tastes. It is about old media and new media, about books and mobile phones. It is for young and old, for teachers and parents, for people who work in the media industries and for NGOs. It happens in schools and in homes, and indeed in the media themselves. It is an initiative coming from the top down, but also from the bottom up. In these kinds of texts, media literacy is also often aligned with other contemporary "buzzwords" in educational and social policy. It is about creativity, citizenship, empowerment, inclusion, personalisation, innovation, critical thinking... and the list goes on… But therein lies the problem… it is a form of policy marketing-speak: it is about selling media literacy on the back of a whole series of other desirable commodities... If media literacy is essentially a regulatory initiative, digital literacy is primarily about inclusion. In the documents, digital literacy is frequently defined as a "life skill" — a form of individual technological competence that is a prerequisite for full participation in society. If you lack the skills, you are by definition disadvantaged* (Buckingham 2009, 13–17).

There is obvious truth to these conceptual reflections. However, the different understandings of media literacy are mainly connected to what perspectives and positions different researchers and reviews take in discussing media literacy.

Positionings

The fundamental differences in understanding and purpose, with media protection and individual skills on one side and social inclusion, public participation and creative communities on another, can be seen as a continuum of media literacy positions rather than as two clearly oppositional positions within media research communities. This continuum can be grouped as follows:

Effect Studies. A focus on how media might affect young people paved the way for different strategies of how education and training of 'critical viewing skills' could prevent harmful effects (Brown 1991). Over the years, this perspective has been distanced from cause-oriented and one-sided approaches, from stimulus–response approaches and from considering the audience to be passive rather than active (Kübler 2010). Elements of this perspective can still be seen in ways of conceptualising media literacy as protectionism and regulation, also related to the US-based understanding of media literacy below.

Cognitive Psychology. This has been a dominant US-based perspective since the mid-1980s, focusing on cognitive skills. Much of the research within this perspective focuses on the cognitive skills needed by media users in order to critically interpret media messages (Potter 2004). As such, media literacy initiatives have been built around procedures to enable people to make critical judgments of media messages (Brown 1991).

Critical Theory. Linked to the Frankfurt school and further developed in screen theory in the UK in the 1970s, focusing on critical consciousness. However, as Kellner argues:

> *The Frankfurt School, for instance, developed a powerful critique of the cultural industries, but the critical theorists lack theories of how one can resist media manipulation, how one can come to see through its ruses and seductions, how one can read against the grain to derive critical insights into self and society through the media, and how one can produce alternative forms of media and culture* (Kellner 1995, xiii–xvii).

During the last couple of decades, this approach has been linked to media literacy through cultural critics such as Giroux (2005, 2011), McLaren (1999) and Sholle and Denski (1994) combining critical theory with "a pedagogy of the oppressed" from Paulo Freire. Critical literacy is also included in a broader cultural studies understanding, as coined by Buckingham above (2003, 36).

Cultural Studies. Since the latter part of the 1980s, this has been the most influential perspective on media literacy, especially in the UK and the Nordic countries. Buckingham's work has been important in setting the agenda for studying young people's cultural practices as a fundamental aspect of media literacy, with emphasis on production practices combined with critical reflection. Further, this tradition has historically focused on media language, semiotics and representation and how children and youth can and do interpret or understand, share and use media messages in creative ways as part of their identity construction and social development (Buckingham 1998, 2003).

Media Bildung Studies. This has been a dominant perspective within German-speaking countries since the 1970s (Baacke 1973). It implies studying media competences in a broad sense and in association with communicative processes, citizenship, public participation and critical reflection (Hug 2011). It relates partly to socialisation theories about young people and society, for example Thomas Ziehe, and social theories like Habermas on communicative action. These conceptual developments have also had an impact in the Nordic countries focusing on citizenship and participation (Vettenranta 2007).

New Literacy Studies. During the last decade, this has become an influential perspective in both Europe and the US. It is based on classical studies in the 1980s that emphasised the need to study the social practices of literacy and the impact of different media on these social practices (Coiro et al. 2010). Partly this deals with how digital literacy differs from traditional print literacy (Merchant 2007), and partly about the visual turn in much research on practices of using digital media, for example within multimodal theories as expressed by Kress and Jewitt. This also builds on a long tradition of studying moving images within media education (Bazalgette, Bevort & Savino 1992), and on studies on creative communities like fan cultures moving into the digital age (Jenkins 2006).

Media Literacy on Different Levels

Instead of trying to synthesise or combine the positions above under similar headlines, we have further opted to present them in more detail as ways that media literacy has been used to address social issues on different levels. The first section deals with the personal level of media literacy, about skills and competences in ways of dealing with media. The second level relates to issues of social interactions and practices of media use and media literacy. The third section deals with the level of institutions and representations within media that media literacy relates to.

Personal Skills and Competences

In the reviews, the personal level covers media effects-related issues, reception analysis, cognitive skills, and critical theory. On the one hand, an agenda of protection from risks in media use and the development of critical skills through education exists (Potter 2004; Schwarz & Brown 2005; Silverblatt, Ferry & Finan 2009); on the other hand, studies discuss empowerment and emancipation as an outcome of media literacy initiatives (Livingstone 2010; Martens 2010).

Access. As mentioned in the definition by Ofcom, access to media has received considerable attention. Literature suggests that children and young individuals already possess fairly high levels of *functional* literacy, i.e. the skills and competences required to gain access to media content, using the available technologies and associated software (Buckingham et al. 2005, 3). This research has moved away from simple conceptions of passive audiences towards obtaining a closer understanding of how people interact with media (Eintraub, Austin & Johnson 2007; Martens 2010). As shown in an EU Kids Online study (Livingstone et al. 2011) and in former literature reviews, young people are generally:

> *aware of regulatory mechanisms and systems of guidance, and take these into account in seeking to make their own decisions. The large majority*

> *of young people show some awareness of risks relating to sexual dangers on the internet; although they are less aware of potential economic risks. Several studies in this area conclude that education in media literacy may be a more effective strategy than blocking or filtering* (Buckingham et al. 2005, 3).

Skills. In both policy documents and research literature, a major theme has been the skills needed to relate to different media. This goes from operational skills in dealing with the medium itself to critically interpreting media messages (Potter 2001), and users as responsible and efficient information seekers (Buckingham 2009, 18). To a large degree, the focus is on the medium or the technology itself with the implicit assumption that using the medium is inherently beneficial. Such a focus on skills is also prevalent in recent initiatives on measuring digital literacy on a European level as different levels of skills (European Commission 2011). According to Rosenbaum, Beentjes and Konig (2008, 340), "the application of media literacy has shifted over the past few years, with a greater emphasis on health-related issues" (see Kubey 2003). Here, it is often thought to be a promising alternative to the censorship of regulating unhealthy programming or limiting media use (Bergsma & Carney 2008; Byrne 2009). As this approach often comes down to activating cognitive defences against commercial persuasive content, Eagle (2007) coins the term commercial media literacy (Martens 2010, 7).

Understanding. This is also a concept that is part of the Ofcom definition of media literacy. However, different reviews and research have highlighted other related concepts such as analysis, evaluations and critical interpretations (EuroMeduc 2009; Martens 2010). In their review, Buckingham et al. reported that research literature:

> *suggests that children's awareness of areas such as television 'language', the difference between representation and reality, and the persuasive role of advertising, develops both as a function of their increasing knowledge of the world, and as a result of their broader cognitive and social development... It is important to emphasise that these areas apply just as much to fictional material as to factual material; and that critical understanding goes hand-in-hand with the development of aesthetic and emotional responses to media of all kinds* (Buckingham et al. 2005, 3).

Another take on this is research on critical media literacy. Kellner and Share (2007), for example, combine cultural studies with critical pedagogy in an attempt to expand the notion of literacy to include different forms of media culture, in order to analyse relationships between media and audiences, information and power, and address such issues as gender, race, class and power. Using similar concepts of 'critical media literacy', there are numerous examples of teaching materials and 'tool kits' on how to teach young people to become critical consumers of media. However, there is little evidence in the research literature that such programmes really have the intended consequences on media use by students (Martens 2010).

Production and Creativity. This approach to media literacy focuses more on the active participation of young people in their productive practices using different media. This has been an issue in former studies of video production among young people (Drotner 1991) or different technological tools (Buckingham, Grahame & Sefton-Green 1995). However, due to Web 2.0 technologies and different software

tools, this issue has become core in research on media literacy during the last decade (Coiro et al. 2008). There are numerous examples of how digital media represent new ways of writing and producing content, recently termed "remixing" (Lessig 2008). Creativity as a personal ability has also come to the fore as a way of expressing oneself through competences in using different media (Drotner & Schrøder 2010). Research also suggests that there is considerable potential for media to be used as a means of communication and self-expression, not least by socially disadvantaged groups; that creative involvement in media production (particularly in the context of education) can make an important contribution to the development of critical understanding; and that new media such as online gaming and mobile telephony provide possibilities for new forms of interaction (Buckingham et al. 2005, 3; Erstad, Gilje & de Lange 2007).

Social Interactions and Practices

The literature that focuses on collective rather than personal aspects of media literacy investigates media literacy as social interactions and social practices using media, activities that people are involved in within communities and societies. The three first concepts, participation, citizenship and emancipation have traditionally been linked in discussing media literacy in media research, whilst the concept of content creation has come to the fore in later years as media technology has become increasingly accessible and affordable for most people (see Erstad 2013 in this issue.)

Participation. Media-literate individuals, it is argued, take an active rather than a passive role in acquiring new knowledge and skills. In this way, they become fully able to participate as critical consumers and citizens in a media-saturated society (Kubey 2004; Thoman & Jolls 2004). Within this context, media literacy is also often linked with public access community radio and television (Higgins 1999, Wagg 2004), citizen journalism (Lim & Nekmat 2008), and more broadly, the public sphere (Fisherkeller 1999; Papacharissi 2002; Kovacs 2003; Vande Berg, Wenner & Gronbeck 2004). Another recent link here is that of participatory culture (Jenkins 2006), shifting the focus on digital divides from questions of technological access to those of opportunities to participate and to develop cultural competences and social skills. This also shifts the focus of literacy from one of individual expression to community involvement. These understandings almost all involve social skills developed through collaboration and networking, also expressed in related concepts such as connected learning and friendship- and interest-driven participation (Ito 2010).

Citizenship. The very concept of media literacy has switched from being a mere option to being a core part of a wider Citizenship Education. This explains why the European Recommendation dated 20 August 2009 states that: "Media Literacy is a matter of inclusion and citizenship in today's Information Society... Media literacy is today regarded as one of the key prerequisites for an active and full citizenship in order to prevent and reduce the risks of exclusion from community life" (Rivoltella 2009, 44). In an age where mass media are seen as key social institutions (Silverblatt 2009), many scholars view access and understanding of contemporary media as a vital aspect of citizenship in general. For instance, Lewis and Jhally (1998, 109–113) focus on media literacy as a provider for thinking about the limits and possibilities of media systems Livingstone (2004, 11) emphasise how media literacy can reposition people from consumers to citizens, and Silverstone (2004, 48) argues that media

literacy is: "a pre-requisite for full participation in late modern society, involving as it does the critical skills of analysis and appreciation of the social dynamics and social centrality of media as framing the cultures of the everyday."

Emancipation. Traditionally, emancipation has been used as an alternative strategy to regulation. Legrande and Vargas (2001, 77) hold that "media literacy is largely about empowering underrepresented populations by giving them a language to articulate their critiques of dominant media messages and a means of producing texts that challenge the stereotypical representations of themselves disseminated by the mass media" (see also Yosso 2002; Kavoori & Matthews 2004). However, the emancipatory agenda can be seen as three intersecting projects. Livingstone explains:

> *First, equality of opportunity in the knowledge economy: in a market economy increasingly based on information and communication networks, equality of opportunity and literacy and an end to the digital divide becomes a priority. Second, active participation in a democracy: in a democratic society, media and information-literate citizens gain informed opinions on matters of the day and are equipped to express their opinions individually and collectively in public, civic and political domains, thereby supporting a critical and inclusive public sphere. Third, the agenda of human rights and self-actualization: since a highly reflexive, heavily mediated symbolic environment informs and frames the choices, values and knowledge that give meaning to everyday life, media and information literacy contributes to the lifelong learning, cultural expression and personal fulfilment that is the right of every individual in a civilised society* (Livingstone 2010, 36).

Content Creation. The role of social interaction in content creation has received increased attention in recent years. This is about how to make effective use of the myriad opportunities that digital technologies provide for creating outputs that represent and communicate knowledge and meaning in different formats and modes for different purposes, and how learners use knowledgeable others in this process. As Livingstone (2004, 8) points out: "The social consequences of these activities – participation, social capital, civic culture – serve to network (or exclude) today's younger generations." Similar issues have been raised by March (2010) in her review on *Childhood, Culture and Creativity* where she addresses literature relating to the cultures and creativity of children from birth to the age of eight (see also article by Erstad 2013 in this issue).

Media Systems and Contents

This sub-section covers the 'object of analysis' in media literacy, what media literacy is directed towards. As such it covers the whole field of media studies, of why it is important to study the media.

Content. Media literacy programmes often feature an awareness of how audiences interpret media content. Different people can experience the same media message differently. As Kellner and Share (2005, 375) quote Stuart Hall, "distinction must be made between the encoding of media texts by producers and the decoding by consumers." Martens (2010, 3) argues that media literacy studies mainly relate to four key facets of the mass media phenomenon, i.e. media industries, media mes-

sages, media audiences, and media effects. Strikingly, media literacy scholars often frame their findings in relation to contrasting applied research topics, such as active citizenship, public health, and (to a lesser extent) aesthetics. Often, media literacy researchers reason that awareness of the constructed nature of media messages is essential to a valid evaluation of media content: "Media do not present reality like transparent windows because media messages are created, shaped, and positioned through a construction process. This construction involves many decisions about what to include or exclude and how to represent reality" (Kellner & Share 2005, 374).

Aesthetics. Historically, media literacy education has often been synonymous with learning to appreciate the aesthetic qualities of mass media, especially the cinematic arts. Also, Brown (1998, 47) emphasise that an important goal of media literacy education is: "to develop selective viewers who seek out and appreciate distinctive high-quality of form, format, and content in mass media" (see also Zettl 1998; Considine 2002). By contrast, others criticise this approach for its underlying assumptions about "cultural value" (Buckingham 1998, Bragg 2006). Martens (2010, 8) points to the fact that: "apart from these few exceptions, media aesthetics seem to have disappeared from the research agenda of most media literacy scholars."

However, several scholars distinguish between media content literacy and media grammar literacy. Thus, several authors describe how "visual syntax" (Messaris 1998; Heiligmann & Shields 2005), "codes and conventions" (Rosenbaum, Beentjes & Konig 2008), "aesthetic aspects" (Zettl 1998) or "media grammar" (Gumpert & Cathcart 1985; Meyrowitz 1998) interact with content elements. In recent years, the analytical lens of "multimodality" has also become important (Kress 2003; Jewitt 2008), with clear implications for the understanding of multimodal aspects of media texts in aesthetic analysis.

Systems. On a macro level, several scholars highlight the systemic aspects as part of media literacy, as expressed by Lambert:

> *research looking into the economics, sociology, history and semiology of the media. To which markets do the different types of media belong, who produced them, which public acknowledges them and how does this public use them, what histories do they inherit, which are their languages, what are their images, what part do they play, by telling the story of what happens to us, on the public and democratic scene? The media itself is the subject of all this research, which can be transferred to form part of pluridisciplinary teaching. This will allow us to understand the media, to know how to ask questions of it in its complexity* (Lambert 2009, 38).

Likewise, Duran et al. (2008, 51) argue for a holistic approach to media literacy, "one that encompasses both textual and contextual concerns within a critical framework." They argue that the person who is truly media literate is also knowledgeable of the political economy of the media, the consequences of media consumption, and the activist and alternative media movements that seek to challenge mainstream media norms.

Institutions. In his review Martens (2010) refers to research focusing on the nature of commercial mass media institutions. According to this research, media literacy programmes must concentrate on the selectivity of the producers and the notion of producers' motivations, purposes, and viewpoints (Rosenbaum, Beentjes & Konig 2008). Primack et al. (2009) describe media organisations' financial and

political motives and the way they target specific audience markets as an essential core concept of media literacy. According to Lewis and Jhally (1998, 112): "an analysis of political economy should not be restricted to a narrow set of economic relations. The media are determined by a set of social and economic conditions that involve the key dividing lines of our culture, whether they be race, class, gender, sexuality, age, or mobility."

The three sub-sections in this part have all been important in the way that media literacy education has developed over the last three decades. Media education has addressed many of the concerns and interpretations of media literacy as a way of thinking about childhood and youth in contemporary media culture. In some countries like Norway, media literacy, or rather digital competence, has moved from the margins of the national curriculum to become one of the core issues in recent years, and is considered as important as being able to read and write. Similar transformations have taken place in Europe, in core policy documents, and in international initiatives on '21st century skills'. However, much of this transformation occurs at the policy level, with a lack of substantial research backing.

Towards a Unified Research Agenda

Rassool (1999) presents an overview of different debates on literacy during the last decades that is also highly relevant for the debates within the research field of media literacy. Her point is that research perspectives on technology and literacy need to reconceptualise power structures within the information society, with an emphasis on 'communicative competence' in relation to democratic citizenship. Empowerment is related to the active use of different tools, which must be based upon the prerequisite that actors have the competence and critical perspective on how to use them for learning and development. Literacy, seen in this way, implies processes of inclusion and exclusion. Some have the skills and know how to use them for personal development, and democratic participation for that matter, others do not. Education is meant to counteract such cultural processes of exclusion.

As the research agenda on media literacy develops at the moment, there seem to be some unifying tendencies. Although there are many approaches to literacy, there is now a consensus that media literacy is a social phenomenon as well as an individual characteristic. Media literacy is interpreted as something more than a matter of training functional skills (e.g. Silverstone 2004; Erstad, Gilje & de Lange 2007; Sourbati 2009). Literacy development is also to a large extent linked to economic growth and the development of civic consciousness and political maturity.

At the same time, researchers' positions in the media research field will continue to influence both the focus on and priorities within media literacy research. (See also Fornäs & Xinaris 2013 and Dahlgren & Alvares 2013 in this issue.) The question further becomes, with Livingstone (2008, 53-54): "What are the advantages, and are there any pitfalls, of reframing the analysis of people's engagement with media in terms of literacy?"

In our view, there are definite advantages in focusing on media literacy within media research. As the term has developed, it now pinpoints the importance of focus on the developmental needs of the individual in a media-saturated society, both to be able to take part in the public sphere and to foster creative development and social change.

The main pitfall is, however, that as long as the discourse is mainly kept on a policy level, there is a certain danger of becoming instrumental in research and measurements. As Buckingham et al. (2005, 4) remind us:

> *The nature and extent of the media literacy that individuals need and develop depends very much on the purposes for which they use the media in the first place. Different social groups may also develop and require different forms of media literacy in line with their motivations and preferences in media use. As such, we need to beware of adopting a reductive or mechanistic approach to assessing levels of media literacy among the population at large.*

We need to keep the focus on all three levels discussed in this review, on personal skills and competences, social interactions and practices and on media systems and contents. After all, the literate person lives within the literate society.

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PETER GOLDING
SLAVKO SPLICHAL

NOVI MEDIJI, NOVI RAZISKOVALNI IZZIVI: UVOD

Avtorja predstavljata zaključno poročilo programa Forward Look Evropske znanstvene fundacije z naslovom *Media in Europe: New Questions for Research and Policy* (2013), ki povzema sklepe in priporočila vrste delavnic ESF, namenjenih pripravi strateškega programa raziskovanja in agende znanstvene politike na področju medijskih študij v Evropi za naslednjih 5 do 10 let. Predstavitve na petih srečanjih ter neformalne razprave in izmenjave so osvetlile pomembno vlogo medijev na različnih področjih družbenega, gospodarskega, kulturnega in političnega življenja. Pet člankov, ki temeljijo na gradivih, ki so jih isti avtorji pripravili za sestanke ESF, in ustreznih poglavjih zaključnega poročila, obravnava aktualne trende v oblikovanju medijsko posredovane identitete, vprašanja digitalnega razkoraka, politično participacijo v dobi medijatizacije, delovanje ustvarjalcev medijskih vsebin ter raziskovalno literaturo o medijski pismenosti.

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JOHAN FORNÄS
CHARIS XINARIS

OBLIKOVANJE MEDIJSKO POSREDOVANE IDENTITETE: TRENDI V RAZISKOVANJU IN DRUŽBI

Namen tega prispevka je predstaviti trenutne procese in izzive, povezane s tem, kako razvoj medijev vpliva na razvoj načinov, na katere se v sodobnih družbah oblikujeta osebna in kolektivna identiteta, in kako je od njih odvisen. Najprej obravnava pristope in definicije pojma identiteta z vidika množičnih medijev. Razprava o tem, kako so vprašanja oblikovanja identitet povezana s pojmom novih medijskih pismenosti, predstavlja prehod k trem delom, ki analizirajo trende v družbi, politikah in znanosti na tem področju. Zadnji del najprej povzema ključna raziskovalna vprašanja, nato pa ponuja nekaj več konkretnih sestavin za opredelitev možnih instrumentov za nove raziskovalne agende.

COBISS 1.02

COLIN SPARKS

KAJ JE »DIGITALNA LOČNICA« IN ZAKAJ JE POMEMBNA?

Članek se začenja z obravnavo različnih pomenov, ki so jih dobili »digitalni razkorak« in normativna vprašanja, ki so jih raziskovalci uvedli v svoje raziskovanje. V nadaljevanju proučuje tri glavne raziskovalne tradicije področja: tisto, ki izpostavlja vprašanja fizičnega dostopa; tiste, ki razpravi o tehnični razpoložljivosti dodajajo poudarek na nekatere kulturne kompetenc in spretnosti, potrebne za polno uporabo tehnologije; in tretjo, ki raziskuje situacije, ko je tehnična dostopnost skoraj univerzalna, v katerih pa igrajo družbeni in kulturni dejavniki odločilno vlogo v oblikovanju specifičnih načinov uporabe. Na temelju dosedanjih spoznanj članek v nadaljevanju proučuje njihove posledice tako za prihodnje raziskave kot za vrste politik, ki bi jih lahko sprejeli za reševanje problemov socialne vključenosti danes in v prihodnosti.

COBISS 1.02

PETER DAHLGREN
CLAUDIA ALVARES

POLITIČNA PARTICIPACIJA V DOBI MEDIJATIZACIJE: ZA NOVO RAZISKOVALNO AGENDO

Medijska krajina in njen družbeni pomen se hitro spreminjata; podobno se spreminjajo tudi osnovne značilnosti demokracije. V tem članku sta obravnavani ti dve področji, da bi orisali ozadje potrebe po novi raziskovalni agendi in prišli do predlogov glede smeri raziskovanja. V zvezi z demokracijo avtorja poudarjata participacijo, medtem ko razvoj medijev obravnavata kot medijatizacijo, ki opozarja ne le na vsepovsodnost medijev, ampak tudi na procese, s katerimi se družba vedno bolj prilagaja medijski logiki. Prvi del obravnava politično angažiranost in jo umešča v spreminjajoči se značaj demokracije. Drugi del se osredotoča na medije in dinamiko medijatizacije ter poudarja njihov pomen za demokratično participacijo. V tretjem delu so predstavljeni temelji za raziskovalno agendo na področjih medijatizacije in demokratične participacije.

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OLA ERSTAD

DELOVANJE USTVARJALCEV VSEBINE

POSLEDICE ZA OSEBNI ANGAŽMA IN MEDIJSKO INDUSTRIJO

Namen tega članka je predstaviti nekatere ključne izzive v ustvarjanju vsebin kot socialni in kulturni praksi, z delovanjem kot analitično lečo. Delovanje ustvarjalcev vsebin se delno povezuje s spori glede aktivne angažiranosti pri uporabi digitalnih medijev in delno s spori glede rasti kreativnih industrij in sedanje gospodarske krize kot načini razumevanja preobrazbe ustvarjalcev vsebin ter sedanjih in prihodnjih zaposlitvenih možnosti mladih ljudi. Sodobni razvoj medijev je tako priložnost kot izziv za ljudi kot ustvarjalce vsebin, za razvoj kreativnih industrij in za participativno javnost.

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OLA ERSTAD

SYNNØVE AMDAM

OD POKROVITELJSTVA DO JAVNE PARTICIPACIJE:

PREGLED RAZISKOVALNE LITERATURE NA PODROČJU MEDIJSKE PISMENOSTI

Razprave o medijski pismenosti so se razvile iz pomislekov glede tega, kakšen odnos imajo otroci in mladi do medijskih vsebin, do širših vprašanj družbenega vključevanja in participacije v javnosti. Članek obravnava glavna razumevanja medijske pismenosti v okviru raziskav medijev s pregledom obstoječih perspektiv in raziskovalne literature. Najprej predstavlja osnovno izrazje in pozicioniranja medijske pismenosti. Nato obravnava ključna vprašanja na področju raziskovanja medijev, pri čemer razlikuje tri ravni: osebno raven, raven socialne interakcije in raven medijskih sistemov. Na koncu komentira možnosti razvoja enotnega raziskovalnega programa na področju medijske pismenosti.

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