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ESF Forward Look

Media in Europe: New Questions for Research and Policy



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The Forward Look 'Media in Europe' emerged from a workshop initiated by the ESF Standing Committees for the Humanities (SCH) and Social Sciences (SCSS) to address the need for research initiatives that would bridge the methodological divides between the humanities and the social sciences.

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Foreword



The media are such a familiar part of everyday personal, professional and social life that it often takes a jolt of some kind to make us conscious again of their ubiquity and of the need to interrogate our relationship to them.

With the so-called traditional or ‘old’ media, such moments of heightened awareness and reflection on the power of the media have occurred on the occasion of, for example, public scandals resulting from invasions of privacy or violations of public norms of decency and taste. But old media have already long co-existed with what are still somewhat incongruously called ‘new’ media, primarily internet, mobile telephony and digital communication, which are now pervasive in so many areas of personal, social, political, economic and scientific life. These newer information and communication technologies have enriched our existence enormously – expanding possibilities for education, entertainment, industry, personal fulfilment and social connection, not to mention the invaluable resource they represent for scientific activity and communication. Many people could no longer entertain the idea of a world without internet and mobile telephones and their innumerable applications.

Nonetheless, most of us also recognise the potential for rapidly evolving media and communication technologies and applications to have unanticipated and/or deleterious effects. Some of these are already well known to us, for example the effect of file-sharing on intellectual property regimes, the use of social networking websites to abuse individuals or support extremist groups, the exploitation of personal data gleaned from internet or mobile telephone use by commercial organisations or even government, etc. Beyond these more

dramatic uses and abuses of communications media, we have become accustomed to them being at the heart of social, cultural, political and economic life. In recent decades the communications media have become ever more central in people’s activities in work and leisure, as citizens, consumers, individuals and members of publics. This centrality demands the urgent and renewed attention of researchers.

Developments in media are thus among the most important and influential of our age, but our understanding of the role and potential of new and old media alike needs urgent attention and refreshing; it can be difficult to separate what we really understand about the role of media in people’s individual and social lives from our assumptions, hopes and fears about them, and difficult too, sometimes, to keep research on media grounded in theory and connected to core disciplines.

This is why the European Science Foundation supported the proposal to conduct a Forward Look in the area of Media Studies. It is clear that we need to take stock of what we know, and to reflect on what we still do not know and what we will probably need to know in the near future. Forward Looks are designed to allow precisely for this kind of stock-taking and reflection on future research needs. This is not an instrument to predict the future and how to get there. Forward Looks allow for a joint consideration of our stock of knowledge and a concerted effort to determine what research needs to be done to fill the gaps in our knowledge, based on our best understanding of trends and patterns in the natural and social world.

This Forward Look began its life entitled ‘New Media, New Literacies’, in the conviction that critical competence in using and engaging with new

media and new applications was indispensable for every citizen. However, in the process of exploration and discovery that every Forward Look entails, it was ascertained that the issues the participants wished to pursue went beyond questions of how individuals engage with the media. In the early scoping phase, four leading and critical areas of inquiry were identified: political participation, the digital divide, the creative economy and identity formation. These topics were separately addressed in dedicated workshops during 2012, involving experts in each of the areas.

Once the critical issues in each area had been identified, and tentative conclusions drawn, the Steering Committee of the initiative met to synthesize the results from the four lines of activity and to draft an agenda for research and policy. In a final step, a conference involving a broader range of stakeholders from all sectors of society— academics, policy makers, industry, practitioners and representative associations – was convened in early 2013. This event was highly productive, generating in advance an unanticipated volume of written feedback on the draft research agenda and recommendations, which contributed enormously to the quality and relevance of the report that follows.

As a result of the sustained efforts of the Steering Committee, with the careful oversight of the Quality Reference Group, this report thus contains an agenda for research in the domain of media studies for the next five to ten years that, if followed, will equip us to deal better with existing and imminent challenges, to anticipate some of the potential pitfalls and to continue to exploit the benefits of developments in digital communication technologies. The research agenda is presented in the form of a set of twelve vital questions that should be prioritised by researchers, research funders and research policy makers.

At the same time, such a research agenda will not succeed if certain infrastructural conditions are not in place, and this will especially require the commitment and support of research institutions and funding organisations. This report therefore includes recommendations to research leaders and science policy makers and we warmly encourage them to act on these suggestions. The issues at stake are important for matters such as equality, social cohesion, political engagement, security, employment and the economy.

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Executive Summary



Media studies is a field that has grown rapidly in recent years and which will become even more important in the future, as ‘new’ media – notably digital communications, the internet and mobile telephony – become almost universal.

Given the now pervasive role of the media in so many areas of social, economic, cultural and political life, and our current context of rapid social and technological change, it is urgent to take stock of what we know, and dare to ask bold new questions about the nature and role of media and our relationship to them. Far from being an unproblematic driver and product of progress, new media and communication technologies and applications have desirable and less desirable effects on individuals and society that demand to be much better understood than they currently are.

The ESF Forward Look on Media Studies, conducted between 2012 and 2013, aimed to define, in discussion with science policy organisations, practitioners and other stakeholders, a common European research agenda that would begin to address the new research and policy challenges relating to media and communications.

Four leading and critical areas of inquiry emerged in the Forward Look process. In a period in which coincident crises of economy, welfare, political participation, and private–public provision are all creating levels of uncertainty and social disquiet unknown in a generation in Europe, the role of the media in enabling, thwarting and transforming the nature of **political engagement** and citizenship is of critical concern.

Furthermore, rather than acting as a democratising and levelling force, the diffusion of communication technologies may actually be causing what is broadly known as the **digital divide** to deepen rather than disappear; differences in access

to and use of technologies do not only reflect existing social inequalities, in fact, they may also be an element in their reproduction.

Digital media and communications technology have also been heralded as a new domain of and platform for creativity, allowing individuals to be producers and users of content and applications as never before. However, there remains much to understand about changes in **content creation and the creative industries**, and how they will influence cultural production, ownership regimes, business models, distribution systems and consumption practices, not to mention the economic implications of all these.

Media are furthermore at once a resource, an environment and a vehicle for the construction, dissemination and expression of individual and collective identities. New media forms offer new possibilities, conditions and constraints for **identity formation** and association which are potentially changing the very nature of social interaction and the relationship between the physical and the virtual. It is urgent to develop research that investigates and understands the changes taking place and how they are affecting individual or collective identities and/or promoting new forms of agency.

The broad-based and integrated approach of the Forward Look to these four key thematic areas made it possible to distil the key concerns into twelve specific research questions that demand attention in the coming 5-10 years (see Box 1). Without close investigation into and reflection on these issues, we will not be able to begin to address holistically, rigorously and reliably the great societal challenges facing Europe in the twenty-first century, in areas such as social inclusiveness, citizenship, innovation, job creation, freedom, privacy and security.

Recommendations

At the same time, the Forward Look aimed to specify the institutional frameworks that would support such a research agenda, and has done so in the form of a set of concrete recommendations for research and policy. A first sub-set of recommendations concerns research approaches, while the second relates to the infrastructure required to conduct rigorous, reliable and effective research.

Approaches

- As with so many other societal challenges, each of the key research questions identified will require **an interdisciplinary approach**. Higher education institutions and funding bodies should actively facilitate media scholars in undertaking interdisciplinary research, and on no account penalise them for this type of effort through discipline-based research assessment methods.
- It is not sufficient to take snapshots of the world if we want to understand trends and developments. Researchers must be permitted and supported to undertake **long-term (diachronic) studies**, meaning that research funders must complement their desire for immediate results with the ambition to obtain more durable and significant findings.
- As well as looking through time, we need to look across space in **comparative investigation**, mindful that the easiest comparisons are not always the most revelatory. Cross-national, but also regional and local level analysis will yield precious insights into factors affecting the diffusion, use and impact of media and communication technologies, while comparisons across social and cultural groupings, age cohorts and generations are key to understanding differential engagement with media and communications at an even finer level of detail.
- At the same time, media studies, by nature a hybrid field, should be careful to remain **theoretically grounded**. Researchers and research funders both must be attentive to the theoretical foundations of work programmes and research projects, in even the most pragmatic-seeming or policy-oriented study.

Infrastructure

- **Collaborative international research** would greatly facilitate comparative, diachronic study, but this kind of research is difficult to set up and coordinate, and would benefit greatly from support measures, such as internationally coordinated research programmes and workshops. Relevant organisations such as subject associations, the European Commission, and the members of ESF and Science Europe should take up this challenge.
- A delicate relationship exists between industry, government and academia in this area. **Cooperation between academic researchers, statutory agencies and commercial organisations**, which often hold enormous datasets of high interest to social scientists and humanities scholars, should be promoted, not least through appropriate recognition of such cooperation by universities and research funders.
- **Data management and availability** is a persistent issue for media studies. Data in this area should ideally be included in the Council of European Social Science Data Archives (CESSDA), and strategies for the collation, management and dissemination in this area should be developed.
- **Training opportunities** for doctoral and post-doctoral researchers in media and communication studies should be expanded, and dedicated long-term financial support mechanisms set up. Such training should pay attention to the need to enlarge research capacity and capabilities in international, collaborative, comparative and diachronic research, as outlined above.

The ultimate objective of the Forward Look on Media Studies was to raise awareness among researchers and science policy makers of the importance of taking up those essential questions and infrastructural challenges. We hope the ideas and challenges raised in this initiative provoke debate and assist in the development of forward-looking research and policy in these vital fields of activity. The quality of our individual and collective lives in the twenty-first century will depend on it.

Box 1: Key research questions for the future

1. What is the relative impact of technological innovation and socio-cultural context in shaping the actual uses of digital media?
2. How do key trends in markets and media industries impact on public knowledge and public culture, and how does public policy relate to market imperatives?
3. What is the relationship between cultural production and consumption, the nature and role of audiences, and economic, social and cultural stratification?
4. How and in what ways are structural inequalities associated with demographic and economic variables not merely coincidental with 'digital divides' but also both their cause and effect?
5. How and under what circumstances does mediatisation hinder or contribute to new – democratic or anti-democratic – forms of political participation?
6. How do changes in power relations relate to the role of the media in destabilising traditional definitions of identity and promoting new forms of agency?
7. How do new uses of communication technologies articulate with bodily experience, for example in the domains of healthcare, education, art, gaming culture and fashion?
8. What are the implications for privacy and the principles of democracy of the increasing use of new media technologies to facilitate everyday social transactions?
9. To what extent do different intellectual property regimes facilitate or impede different forms of creative agency?
10. How will the demands of sustainability and ecological considerations influence the development of media technologies and their uses in the future?
11. What are the prospects, problems and potentials of European and other transnational identities in a context of increasingly complex global media flows?
12. In what ways can (critical) media literacy serve to foster citizenship and enhance cultural capital and thus promote democratic engagement, empowerment and social and cultural inclusivity?

1.

Introduction



The European Science Foundation instrument called the ‘Forward Look’ is designed to develop medium- to long-term views and analyses of future developments with the aim of defining research agendas and priorities at national and European level. By assessing what we know and what we need to know, Forward Looks can identify the ways in which research can advance knowledge, and at the same time assist the development of evidence-based policy and practice.

This Forward Look is about media studies, a field that has grown rapidly in recent years, although in its many varied forms it has been a focus of academic inquiry and organisation for longer than is sometimes appreciated, beginning with the scientific study of newspaper readership at least a century ago in many countries, and with an expanding scope as cinema, and later broadcasting, came to play a prominent role in people’s lives during the twentieth century. The field of media studies, broadly conceived, will become even more important in coming years, as what have long been termed ‘new media’, notably digital communications, the internet and mobile telephony, become commonplace.

It is therefore important that we – scientists, policy makers and citizens – make sure that we do the things that need to be done. We need to take stock of what research has already told us, recognise where changing social and technological circumstances require us to reconsider such knowledge, and be very clear about what we need to know and how such knowledge can be obtained in a rigorous, reliable and comprehensible manner. This ESF Forward Look aims to meet these needs by identifying a common European research agenda and specifying the institutional frameworks that

would help advance the organisational cohesion of European media research.

This Forward Look emerged from a workshop initiated by the ESF Standing Committees for the Humanities (SCH) and Social Sciences (SCSS) in response to the need for a better coordinated development of research initiatives that bridge the methodological divides between the humanities and the social sciences. Following the example of an earlier ESF Research Networking Programme, ‘Changing Media, Changing Europe’, the initiative was expected to bring together researchers from different methodological backgrounds in the humanities and social sciences, and to propose research initiatives crossing traditional borders between different disciplines in media studies.

The workshop ‘Bridging Methodology Gaps, Building Institutional Bridges: Interfaces for improved SCH–SCSS synergy and wider cross-committee collaboration in research into affective sciences, media studies and urban studies’ was a ‘mini’-foresight exercise looking at the specific field of new media and new media literacy where humanities and social science methodologies could be usefully combined. In so doing, it was expected to highlight the benefits to be reaped from closer coordination. A number of interesting topics in media research were identified which could be put on a future research agenda, such as: where are the dominant controversies in the field of communication and media studies?; in what ways have different approaches changed, if at all, due to, or in relation to, the digital media?; what policy-oriented and activist/policy strategies are associated with current communications research focused on the new media and new literacy? An ESF Forward Look on media research was deemed to be the ideal follow-up to this workshop.

In spring 2008, a Forward Look Proposal, ‘Media Studies: New Media and New Literacies’, was submitted to the ESF Directorate, with Kirsten Drotner (SCH) and Slavko Splichal (SCSS) as acting co-chairs¹, but for various reasons the initiative did not progress for the next three years.

In June 2011 a group of the 2007 London workshop participants resumed where they had left off in 2007–8. While the title of the Forward Look remained unchanged, its main objectives were redefined, so as better to relate to recent developments in media studies.

In preparing the Forward Look the concept of ‘media literacy’ was the initial guiding concept and focus. A background working paper synthesising literature on this concept was prepared by Ola Erstad *et al.* (2012), available on the Forward Look webpages. 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. This larger agenda is reflected in the choice of topics in the body of the report now entitled ‘Media in Europe: New Questions for Research and Policy’. These address political engagement, the creative economy, digital divides, and identity formation. We do not for one moment suggest that these areas exhaust all that can and needs to be known about the media in the lives of people in Europe. However, they do frame major and significant areas of inquiry which, in the course of much debate, emerged as leading and critical fields.

In the chapters that follow, a number of objectives are addressed. The first objective of this Forward Look is to define a set of key research questions that, given the challenges posed, need to be addressed in the next five to ten years. Closely linked is the second objective: to propose a new research agenda in discussion with relevant science policy organisations, practitioners, technological developers and other stakeholders from across Europe. Consequently, the report develops such an agenda in the form of a set of concrete recommendations for research.

The final objective is to raise awareness at the science policy level of the importance of taking up those essential questions and policy challenges. We

hope the ideas and challenges raised in this Forward Look provoke debate and assist in the development of research and policy in these vital fields of activity.

1. Professor Kirsten Drotner was the spiritus agens of the first proposal but unfortunately she was not able to join the FL Scientific Committee in 2011. We gratefully acknowledge her role in developing this Forward Look and her support as a member of the Quality Reference Group.

2.

Political Participation in an Age of Mediatisation



Introduction

Mediatisation is a term that 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 omnipresent element. In today's world, online media are no doubt the most significant spaces where civic cultures can flourish – as well as be obstructed; media, in short, play a key role in participation and are therefore central to democracy. As such, it may help to think of media not merely as technologies and phenomena present within society, but rather as means through which many of the transactions of social life take place. That this includes political life should not be a surprise.

This text is written against the backdrop of several concurrent crises that are profoundly shaping the historical present of Europe. The economic-financial crisis within the EU (and globally) is generating a social and welfare crisis and desperation among many people, not least among younger generations which are facing severe unemployment. This in turn is causing a political crisis, as many governments are unable to meet both the needs of their citizens and the requirements for financial equilibrium. 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. A major structural problem for participation (and democracy generally) that has emerged in recent decades is the tendency for political power to drift away from the formal, accountable political system and into the private sector, in the logics of neoliberal versions of societal development (see, for

example, Harvey, 2011). As Hay writes:

...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. (Hay, 2007: 159).

The notion of participation lies at the heart of democracy; it is axiomatic that citizens in various ways take part in the discussions and decisions that impact on their lives. Democracy is a complex, shifting and contested political order, and the contexts and modes of participation vary greatly; new forms are continually evolving. Formalised representation and voting – assuming validity and transparency – embody participation, but so do innumerable micro-contexts of citizen input. We argue that democracy needs a functioning representative system with parties as well as a viable domain of alternative, extra-parliamentary politics. Both are in transition at present. Moreover, both are shaped in positive and negative ways by media. Our horizons thus acknowledge the importance of electoral politics and we suggest continued attention to that realm, but in the light of the current crises we would prioritise a research focus on alternative democratic politics and the extra-parliamentarian domain. If citizens are without a sense of engagement, indeed if people lack an identity dimension that positions them as potential agents in the political life of society, democracy becomes functionally crippled as well as potentially delegitimised. Indeed, much

discussion and research in Western democracies over the past two decades have emphasised precisely the transnational patterns of disengagement among citizens, especially among the younger age cohorts, at the local, national, regional and global levels. This disengagement at the level of formal politics is particularly acute as a consequence of the current political and economic crises which undermine public trust and legitimacy in regard to politicians and political institutions.

Yet, in parallel with this trajectory of decline we find an opposing one: new forms of reengagement are concurrently manifesting themselves. These are usually located beyond mainstream party politics, in the broad and sprawling arena of alternative politics. Citizens are engaging politically via networks, social movements, single-issue groups, neighbourhood associations, interest organisations, and other collectivities. Often driven by frustration with the responsiveness of the established parties or even by a sense that the mainstream political system marginalises or excludes groups, many citizens are finding new routes to engagement and participation. Some forms of engagement are leading to new kinds of political practices and new ways of being citizens, effectively altering the character of politics in some contexts.

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 sides: 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.

In order to analyse the link between individuals and social agency within the informal setting of non-institutional politics, we should focus on the role of 'passions' in public space. In a time of tumultuous change it is important to highlight newer 'agonistic' (Mouffe, 1999) trends in political life, in which individuals confront relevant issues. The components of political agency appear to resonate most 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 subtle. The perspective of civic cultures and their



affordances can illuminate elements of power 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 and are crucial to curbing social discontent in the current context; however, they are often fragile and easily eroded by various strategic measures or even merely adverse circumstances.

There are a number of factors that impinge on how participation actually functions at any particular point in time for any particular group. The extent to which civic participation is present naturally depends on the initiatives that citizens themselves take, but an analytically fundamental point is that such agency is always contingent on circumstances. Our question thus becomes: what are the contingencies that shape participation today? Since much participation takes place through (new) media, they can be seen as part of these contingencies, as both enablers and inhibitors of political participation.

What research tells us: digital media enable but cannot ensure political participation

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 laudable moments it has fostered 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. However, the distancing from the ideal of objectivity, with factual content increasingly giving way to opinion, is not necessarily negative. While reliable news useable for civic purposes is increasingly replaced by sensationalism,



celebrity gossip and other trivia, the prevalence of opinion can simultaneously be regarded as a virtue and characteristic of 'citizen journalism', in which what is contested is the very notion of objective fact and disinterested observation.

Curiously, even when journalism is providing a good professional service, and when citizens are connected to the public issues via news coverage, it has been shown that journalism in itself is insufficient to facilitate participation if citizens do not feel that there are meaningful opportunities for them to engage politically (Couldry, Livingstone and 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 internet, 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 various sorts of organisations and activist/interest groups. The terrain has become bewildering and highly contested, but at the same time does allow for much more civic participation – via journalism – than before. 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 are thus of great significance for participation in a variety of forms.

An important attribute of the internet that leads to it being somewhat easily classified as an enhancer of democracy is its capacity to facilitate horizon-

tal 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 consolidating 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) demonstrates, 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 social capital, and helps to forge collective identities.

This digital lubrication of the social is also essential for the emergence of the political, for 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. The tools are 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 'prosumers', in the current jargon. In short, the digital media in particular can be very good at helping to promote a subjective civic empowerment, an enhanced sense of agency that can make use of many kinds of participatory activities, or what we can call civic practices.

The newer digital media are of course a part of the larger social and cultural world, intertwined with the offline lives of individuals as well as with the functioning of groups, organisations and institutions. While many proponents enthuse about how this new world of information is having an immensely positive impact on everything from personal development to the nature of our civilisation, other voices raise serious questions about the relationship between the internet and democracy. In fact, there has been an extensive literature on this theme since the mid-1990s. A key motif from this literature that we underscore is the importance of avoiding technological determinism in how we view media (Curran *et al.*, 2012). There is nothing automatic about their social consequences, and they should not be seen as offering some simple technological panacea to democracy's difficulties. 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, some of which are

problematic in regard to participation. New media are not simply neutral conveyors, since market logics condition our access to information online. Not only is the internet dominated by a few companies such as Google, Yahoo, Microsoft, Apple and Facebook, in what amounts to concentrated corporate control, but also personalised filters in search engines tailor search results on the basis of past search history and geographical location. Issues of surveillance and privacy undercut shared, social knowledge, with marketers benefitting from access to personal information.

Further, in public sphere contexts, we should bear in mind that the density of the internet environment in the contemporary media landscape results in an intense and incessant competition for attention. It is easy to express oneself, but difficult to gain an audience. It is also the case that the use of the internet 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. The internet does not, by itself, politically mobilise citizens who may lack engagement. Moreover, for those who are engaged, there is a strong tendency to drift towards like-minded discursive ‘cocoons’ or ‘echo chambers’ on the internet. There people are less likely to be confronted with views that differ from their own – or to develop the capacity for genuine argumentation.

What do we need to know? Comprehending new modes of participation and political expression

While these features must be kept in view to understand the links between the internet and democracy, the fact remains that the internet and social media are both being successfully used on many fronts for participation – and in fact altering the character of the public sphere in the process. This leads us to probe into the nature of the changes concerning participation and the traditional public sphere. Democracy is being transformed as its social, cultural and political foundations evolve, and the character of participation is a part of these large developments. With regard to the media, the term participation is often used interchangeably with access or interaction, which ignores its key dimension, namely that democratic participation must in some way actualise and embody power relations, however weak or remote they may seem. Taking into account that democratic systems offer varying

patterns or structures of opportunity for participation, we would here inquire into the kinds of participation – and power-sharing (see Carpentier, 2011) – that are afforded by the use of new technologies, namely whether they can be deemed as falling into the traditional political domain or whether they approximate a conception of participation that is essentially ‘civic’.

Where the public sphere has traditionally been associated with notions of rational deliberation, it is now increasingly linked to new multimedia communicative channels. These often privilege other forms of political expression, including the visual, the symbolic, the affective, the personal, all of which allow for an articulation of a subjective embodied experience that contrasts with collective normativity. The traditionally textual has not disappeared, but text online tends to be shorter than in print media, and shares the stage with these other communicative modes. As such, an important avenue for research in the field, which ties in with our considerations on participation, concerns how the public sphere is being altered through the use of new media, namely social media platforms, by politicians, citizens and alternative news services.

This shift to new forms of political expression may also correspond to an increasingly visible dichotomy between traditional institutional and alternative non-institutional politics. Thus, we should inquire into what extent the modes of political expression of alternative politics differ 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. This suggests that we should be alert to the different cultural patterns whereby alternative politics functions to reconfigure democracy on the one hand and traditional politics attempts to reinvent itself on the other.

In order to formulate a concrete research agenda for this purpose, we would first proceed by attempting to map panoramas of society, democracy and media which describe the background context anchoring the historical specificity of our topics of analysis. Such broad vistas would entail the delineation of maps and genealogies of prevailing power arrangements on one hand and of the ever-changing media landscape – with a particular emphasis on the web and social media – on the other hand.

This would be followed by the macro-level charting of overarching profiles of media usage within the population as a whole as well as for strategically selected groups. The internet and mobile media would be in focus, but these would have to be situ-

ated 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 more analytic strand within the mapping of media usage profiles would 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.

On the basis of the profiles of media usage, we could then draw up micro-level portraits of political agency, which illuminate the types of agencies that are repressed, enabled or produced by the use of the internet. While exploring subjectivity at the individual level, the target is not isolated individuals, but rather processes as they relate to forms of collective identities, organisation, networking, and the relationship between the personal and the political. 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. 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.

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 some contexts result in certain political desires or passions coming to the fore, especially when they are haunted by a particular politics of the past.

The interplay of media with their social, historical, economic, cultural and political settings, coupled with the overarching attributes of social structure and power relations as well as the intertwining of individual meaning-making processes and forms of collective identity, help us gain insights into the relationship between mediatisation and political participation. This leads us to effectively compare the use of new technologies with other more traditional modes of communication for political mobilisation and expression. Rather than side-lining traditional political communication, which remains a large part of political experience for many, a focus of research should thus be how the 'new' is influencing the old.

Within this remit, we particularly advocate research on concrete examples that relate to alternative politics, such as counter-democratic groups and their use of media, whilst simultaneously continuing to devote some attention to the formal domain

of electoral politics and the vicissitudes of voter subjectivity and practices. This is because alternative forms of political expression, which are particularly visible amongst counter-democratic groups, have been influencing the modes of political communication in the 'traditional' public sphere. As such, one could select a broad range of arenas of involvement, from networks, social movements, activist groups, to transitory issue mobilisation, in order to extract useful lessons from their experiences that could be applied in other contexts. Various corners of civil society, popular culture, and consumption would be taken up in search of new modes of the political. Even examples of questionable, deviant expressions of political disposition would be included.

Our focus on the vitality of alternative politics, however, should simultaneously consider the latter's coincidence with the ever greater grip of corporate power, precisely the soil in which the Occupy movement, for example, finds its nourishment. In a context of economic austerity and growing social inequality, Occupy protestors have designated the neo-liberal practices of elite corporations and deregulation of the financial market as 'the enemy' that unifies masses. Their use of social media to disseminate protest activities to virtual audiences demonstrates a tension, which research should explore, between the emancipatory potential of new technologies for political mobilisation and the market structure of social media which capitalises on non-commodified content.

Conclusion

Existing 'democracy' does not automatically guarantee extensive civic participation, either in parliamentary or extra-parliamentary contexts. Thus, any perceived lack of participation should not be seen as simply a question of civic apathy, but must be understood against the backdrop of the dilemmas of late modern democracy.

In the light of the current crises, we would prioritise a research focus on the informal spheres of daily life (lifeworld) where individuals' motivation to participate in politics is shaped. We highlight the need to research civic cultures, focusing on how individuals engage in conversation with each other to form associative/collective identities. Examining civic cultures can help us understand the elements of power that enable/disable a sense of civic self in daily life.

This perspective is important because the current neoliberal context conceives the citizen as "devoid of social bonds, out of some sociocultural

black box, ready to play his or her role in democracy” (Dahlgren, 2006). Lack of attention to the civic cultures which mould individuals’ willingness to participate in democracy can result in widespread discontent, political and social conflict, and generalised scepticism regarding the role of public sphere institutions within society. This undermining of public trust may be further compounded by growing awareness of prevalent online market logics that commodify non-profit information content and personal data, thereby restricting the right to privacy and placing surveillance in the public interest.

As a consequence of the decline in public trust, individuals may increasingly withdraw into ‘anti-public’ realms, where they use the right to freedom of expression to promote anti-democratic values (see Cammaerts, 2009). We argue that it is important to address the significance of the modes of participation afforded by new media for the health of democracy. If citizens are devoid of a sense of empowerment, they can easily resort to anti-public activities in an online context which poses serious challenges in terms of regulation.

3.

What is the ‘Digital Divide’ and Why is it Important?



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 in the ability to access the internet in terms of both physical connection and capacity to use. The range of phenomena grouped under this term is very wide and particular definitions highlight different aspects of the problem, but it is possible to begin from a non-prescriptive working description 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).

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 theme in discussions of the issue. 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 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. 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 and Bentivegna, 2010: 14-16; Livingstone and Helsper, 2007).

Whatever term is used, the issue covers a wide area of contemporary life, and it is a subject of both intellectual and policy interest around the world for precisely this reason. Economic developments have rendered what is variously termed the ‘network society’, the ‘knowledge society’ or the ‘information society’ 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 (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 pursuit of economic efficiency as well as social and political equity demands that no social group find 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.

From access to usage

The digital divide, variously conceived, has been the subject of a large number of studies. At the risk of gross over-simplification, it is possible to define three currents of thought which approach the issue from rather different perspectives. The earliest of these concentrates on the issue of the technological means of access to the internet: access to personal computers, including later mobile devices, and to appropriate telecommunication links, beginning with fixed-line dial-up and today involving mobile broadband. The second and third approaches, elaborated below, both accept these technological dimensions as foundations for internet access but also conceptualise the issue of the digital divide in terms of possession of the necessary skills and competences for using these technical affordances. In the terms employed here, these latter approaches give relatively greater weight to digital competence.

Patterns of physical access

From the earliest studies of access to technological apparatus, it was apparent that the digital divide mapped very closely onto 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, 1995), showed that among the rural poor only around 1% had access to the technology then needed to go online (i.e. a computer and a modem), while for well-off urban households the figure was around 30%. 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 January 2001, for example, demonstrated that while 6% of the lowest income decile group had home internet access, 50% of the highest decile group had the facility (National Statistics, 2001: 153). 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.

For most 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 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 have diminished. An NTIA report from February 2010 demonstrated that while 29.2% of the poorest group (with family incomes of less than \$US15,000) reported using the internet in the home, amongst those in the richest group (with family incomes of more than \$US150,000) usage was 88.7% (NTIA, 2010). This is still a substantial difference, but it is much smaller than that recorded in the first report in 1995. Similarly, Figure 1, illustrating the most recent data from Europe, shows that, at least within the developed world, national differences in levels of access persist, but are decreasing over time. By this account, the digital divide is closing and may one day effectively disappear, in the same way as differences in access to broadcast television effectively disappeared in the past.

The process is more protracted outside 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

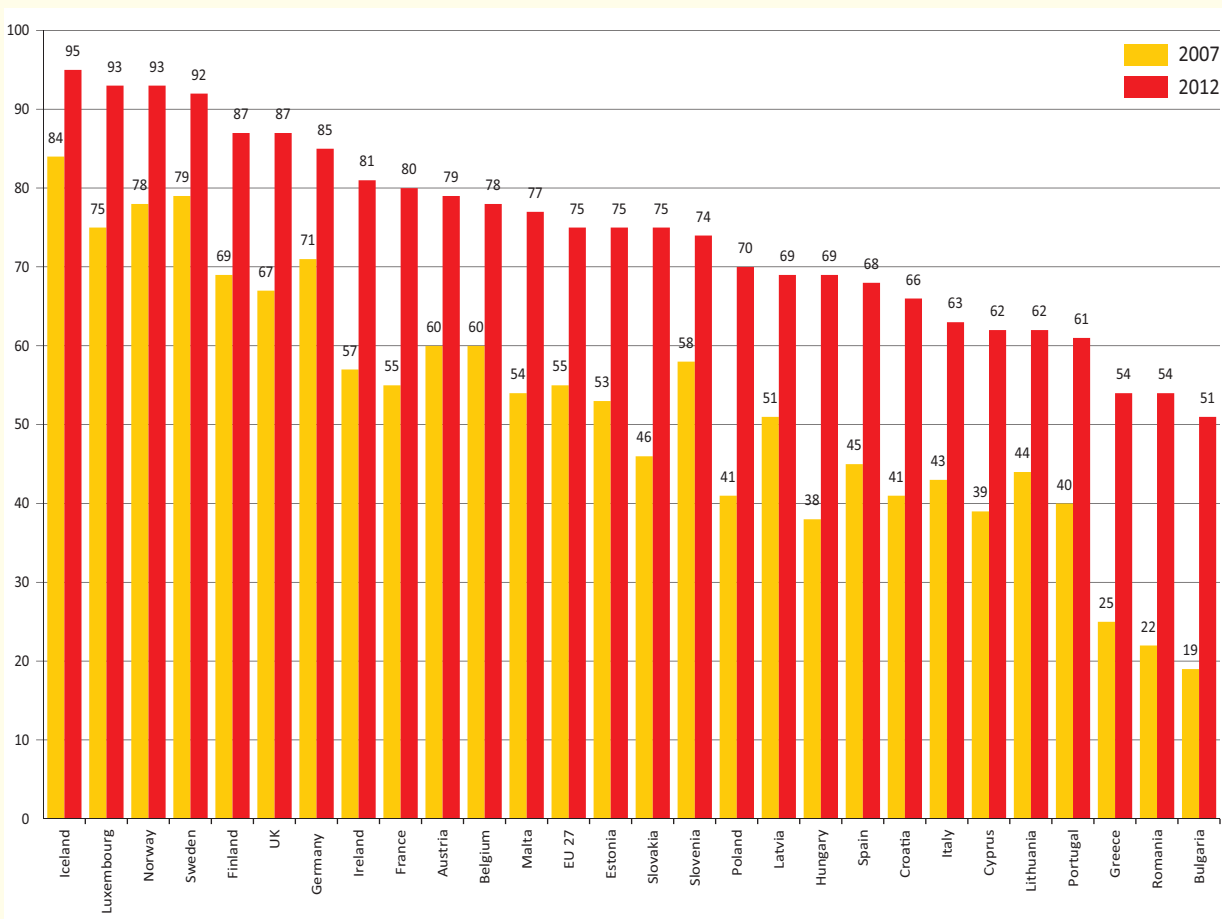


Figure 1. Percentage Household Internet Penetration in Europe in 2007 and 2012 – Source: Eurostat

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 almost 54% of the African population had a mobile connection (ITU, 2013).

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% of the population remains 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 in March 2010, 29% of US households did not have internet access at home. When asked the reason for this, by far the largest group (47%) 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% 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. 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. 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 divergences in the social capital available to actual and potential users which would allow them to enjoy ‘meaningful’ internet usage (Gangadharan and 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, internet usage is less and less a matter of physical access and much more a matter of the skills and resources available to users (Guerrieri and Bentivegna, 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 both 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. The authors argue that the main reasons for the differences in what they call ‘e-Inclusion’ have to do with the level of economic development and social inequality. From this perspective, the aim of digital inclusion can only be realised if 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 and Bentivegna, 2010: 139).

Internet usage and social reproduction

The third approach, best exemplified in the work of van Dijk and van Dursen, shares a great deal with the second, but accords even greater importance to social inequality and shifts attention further away from physical access. The focus shifts from seeing inequalities of access and usage as *resulting from* social inequalities 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 and 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: 15). 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. On this account, far from fading away, the digital divide will persist and may well deepen.

Towards a research agenda

On all three of these accounts, the digital divide remains a live issue for social scientific investigation and for public policy. The technology and the skills involved change rapidly. The short history of access has involved a shift from fixed-line dial-up, through fixed-line broadband to the evolving technologies of mobile communication. The skills required to use these technologies have changed just as quickly. Both the relevant technologies and the social resources needed for their utilisation are likely to continue to change in the foreseeable future. Understanding the drivers of these changes and the complex relationship between the technical and the social factors involved will be a problem for many years to come.

The normative foundations of research

For a variety of 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 a programme of “driving digital participation” (Department for Business, Innovation and Skills, 2010).

Such coercive rhetoric may be appropriate in policy proposals but an unreflective normative approach is an obstacle to a properly social scientific research agenda. The motivations and pleasures of social groups who choose not to have physical access to the internet, and those who 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.

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 (Campbell and Carlson, 2002). It is argued that government and business gain unprecedented knowledge of citizens and customers, and thus are able to exercise more effective political and marketing control. In its extreme form, it is argued, we are all implicated in this process through our acceptance of such technologies: 'The ultimate public panopticon can be achieved by convincing the population to spy on itself.' (Kietzmann and Angel, 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. The 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.

All researchers bring normative frameworks to their investigations. These need not cause problems provided they are acknowledged. What is problematic is when the overall agenda of research into a complex human phenomenon is subordinated to one single normative framework that is, in turn, closely linked to policy. Any future research programme will prove more fruitful if it is open to the questions that arise from a plurality of approaches.

The problem of social inequality

All three of the currents identified above demonstrate that the classic sociological indicators of social inequality are central to understanding different patterns of access and usage and this will certainly remain central to any future research agenda. There are, in particular, competing projections as to whether these differences are relatively short-term phenomena that will pass in due course

or whether they are deeply rooted in social relations and require major policy initiatives to overcome.

To the extent to which these differences are linked to levels of competence and confidence, addressing them is partly an issue of digital competence as an aspect of more general media competence (Tuominen and Kotilainen, 2012). Alongside research into the effectiveness of measures to improve competence, there is a need to investigate different strategies for their provision. Literacy, in both its general and specific forms, has long been a preserve of the formal education system, which usually operates under the direction of governmental policies which aim at universality and inclusivity and thus have the intent of reducing digital divides. There is, however, an increasing amount of educational material produced by commercial companies and, since such material is necessarily rationed through price, it will tend to reproduce or exacerbate one of the most evident sources of the digital divide. Two major research tasks follow from such considerations. The first is to understand the comparative effectiveness of different strategies towards developing human capital, both between different countries and within the same country. The second is to examine the different outcomes for digital inclusion between public and private provision of services, and the effects of different balances between the two.

The impact of mobile communications

The issues of surveillance and social inequality are particularly evident in the expansion of mobile communication. In the last 20 years this development has changed our everyday communicative practices in fundamental ways. Mobile telephones have acquired much the same capacity and functions as traditional computers. With the new generation of 'smartphones' the user can easily access the internet from almost anywhere, as long as there is a functional network supporting the mobile broadband standards (3G, 4G). This development has enhanced the emergence of new and unforeseen modalities of social connectivity and interaction, too, with the assistance of rapidly proliferating manifold 'social media' applications (Facebook, You Tube, LinkedIn, to name the most obvious).

With the saturation of our everyday life by mobile telephony and online connectivity – especially for the younger generations – expectations of their democratising influence have developed. 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 recent years – the Arab Spring, the Occupy movement, and the Los Indignados movement. The shape and structure of these new social developments, and the role played in them by technological developments, is a major new research theme.

The balance of public and private

A further research theme is concerned with the more general implications of the increasing importance of the internet in all aspects of social life and the interplay between public policy and private provision noted above. 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 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. Tracking these developments and understanding their implications for differential access and usage will be of increasing importance as the outcomes become clearer.

Similarly, the availability of current technologies has often 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 IPv6 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. Mobile access has re-kindled debates over 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. Both these and future developments in technological hardware and the kinds of services available raise questions about their impact upon the digital divide in terms both of access and usage.



Arab spring, demonstrations in Cairo, February 2011 © iStock

Combining different research methods

The dimensions of the research agenda discussed above require a shift of focus in terms of the methodologies employed. First, it will be necessary to move away from over-reliance upon the sorts of large-scale studies that have predominated in the past. Such survey-based investigations at the national and international level remain invaluable starting points, but in order to grasp the meaning of particular behaviours, a micro-sociological approach is required. Understanding usage implies understanding the motivations and aims of the users and such knowledge can only be obtained through a much closer engagement with the world of the users themselves.

Second, much of the current discussion is based upon data derived, with some important exceptions, from national-level research. This will remain an important dimension in any research agenda, as much for funding reasons as for any other, but it must be supplemented by research both at the sub-national and the comparative, cross-national level. Research has demonstrated both that local and transnational studies can reveal important dimensions of digital usage (Newhold *et al.*, 2008; Guerrieri and Bentivegna, 2010). Particularly with regard to policy-oriented research, comparative

examinations of the efficacy or otherwise of different polices employed in different countries are likely to be extremely valuable.

In conclusion: inclusion and participation

One of the most exciting promises of the new media is that they open the possibility of much higher levels of participation in many aspects of social life. This is true of the individual as consumer, as the development of online commerce supplements other forms of purchase. It is also true of the provision of public services, some of which can be accessed more easily and cheaply through online means. More uncertain, but perhaps more exciting, is the promise of online participation broadening the role of the citizen in the decision-making processes of society. Whatever normative position is adopted towards its desirability, new communication technologies provide the possibility of sustaining and deepening democratic practices. More than this, they provide the possibility of extending the degree to which citizens are able to decide their futures far beyond the routines of periodic elections. The potential of new communication technologies for realising the promises of democratic life are perhaps the most important dimensions of the new research agenda.

4. Content Creation and Creative Industries: New Practices with Economic Prospects



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.

Creativity is, however, an ambiguous term, somehow lauding the idea of the unique, genius and the innovative, and something it is very difficult to argue against. In the literature several rhetorics of creativity and creation have been identified (Banaji *et al.*, 2010). Creativity should be distinguished conceptually from 'creation' as a philosophical concept that addresses the singularity of the work of art and its detachment from common modes of production. Content creation is to a larger extent focusing on the everyday practices people engage in when they use different technologies. The impact of Web 2.0 technologies has implications for the way people create content and share this with others, further developed by the growth of social media. The ways in which we consume media have become increasingly more complex, hybrid and fragmented.

The creative industries and the 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. 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 these sectors. Conceptions of creative industries are closely related to discourses on future orientations of the workforce in Europe.

An important context 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. Media research is of importance in targeting these fundamental processes of cultural development and the impact of changes in media culture and mediatisation, and media researchers are particularly suited to conduct research on such

kinds of mediated communication and their social consequences. Media research on 'content creation and creative industries' will contribute to ways of understanding production, distribution and consumption of content in different social domains and how digital media have changed traditional roles and conceptions of who produces and consumes media content. This chapter raises the question of what is unique for a European agenda on creativity and creation, and considers implications for policy and research.

What research tells us

During the last five years we have witnessed a change in content production, distribution and mixing never before seen in cultural history. The re-use of culturally produced content is of course not new (Miller, 2008), but the introduction of Web 2.0 technologies represents a dramatic change in the possibilities for content creation. We are now in a situation where potentially everybody with access to computers and the internet can produce and distribute content, which others again can re-use. The actual implications of this on cultural production and development are still in the making (Drotner and Schröder, 2010).

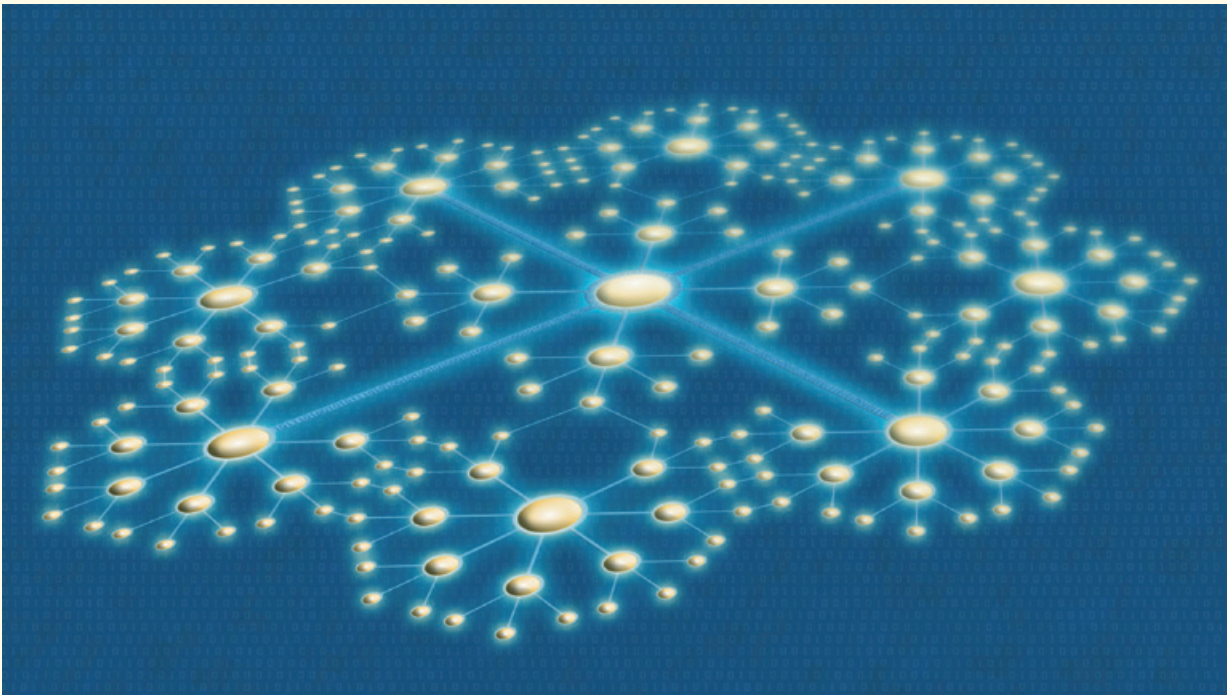
The evolving challenges related to these developments in content creation and creative industries during the last decade are relevant on different levels, from the engagement of individuals in productive practices, building communities and

communicative interaction in social media, to the growth of the cultural industries as an economic and cultural force in contemporary societies.

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

The main reason for the increased emphasis on content creation as a common term for quite diverse social and cultural processes is, therefore, the new condition for production, distribution and consumption that digital technologies represent. However, such a broad conception of creativity, encompassing almost all kinds of content generated by people, gives rise to serious concerns about what this term really implies or includes, and threatens to give the term a positive association with development in general or to make it a policy slogan. Still, the terminology around creation and creativity has implications for the future direction of research into the media industries, cultural production and participation in the production, consumption and sharing of media content.

Content creation has been present in political and institutional agendas since the advent of a new



knowledge economy. Immersed in an ever-growing networked digital era, content creation becomes a key point, since sustainability of the media industries relies, more than ever, on this competitive edge. 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 the subsumption of 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).

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 competencies to the labour industries of the twentieth century. Media form the main sector defining these industries, not only as tools for creative processes such as 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, as, for example, the Disney Corporation and Pixar. According to the 'The European Cluster Observatory Priority Sector Report: Creative and Cultural Industries' (Power, 2011) firms within the creative and cultural industries, in 2009, 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 regions in the top 25 highest cultural and creative growth regions are small and medium sized regions. In the past, 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 refer to practices of content creation which have economic implications for the practitioners and others, often in the framework of small and medium sized firms, for example within web design.

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 being at the vanguard of artistic production and reflection. Hence, by combining 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.

The focal point of much ongoing research is 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. There is increasing interest, both within the humanities and the social sciences, in studying how social media create new spaces for cultural participation, the implication for consumption and creation of taking part in such networks, and what is really meant by digital engagement. Further, there is increased attention to different forms of communication within such communities and the interrelationship between online- and offline participation. Important aspects of this are new ways of integrating different modalities in textual expressions (multimodality), both of remediation from former genres and a constant remixing of content, and sharing, collaboration and network relationships.

Creative practices are, to a greater degree than before, also 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 contexts and objectives of such practices. Research literature also links notions of empowerment and agency in the way people are engaged in and develop certain creative practices (Lundby, 2008).

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

Within the EU, attention is now directed to the impact of creative industries for economic growth and for the promotion of new sectors of employment. It is necessary for research 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 on new job markets opened up by media developments. In a specific Communication from the EU Commission (COM 2012: 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, the document argues for a multi-layered strategy, encouraging interdisciplinarity in the research approach, where media literacy and changing skills are important factors.

The implications further raise awareness of the need to study 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 mass media with more personal media (Lüders, 2008). 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, while the creative workforce is very often an urban development.

Based on the above we can identify key areas of knowledge and the 'state of the art' of ongoing approaches in media research on content creation and creative industries in three interrelated dimensions:

i) Production studies, productive practices and creative learning

Studies of production practices in diverse socio-cultural settings have become a key area of research in contemporary and future oriented media research initiatives. This include how professionals and semi-professionals are changing their practices and ways of distributing media content both within mass media organisations and new online services. 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. There are tendencies to blur distinctions between amateurs and professionals, reorienting the validity of what constitutes the professional within a particular creative domain.

Such developments also open up research orientations towards creative learning as ways of engaging young people in culture (Thomson and Sefton-Green, 2011). As such, media literacy is a key component of such a research orientation (Thomas, 2011). All aspects of media literacy are important, but, in particular, there is a need to focus on the ability to engage in critical reflection on media texts and practices. Through reading and writing (multimodal authoring) we can develop social, cultural and political understandings of the world. Questions concerning critical media literacy, therefore, are at the heart of any research agenda in the years ahead.

ii) Participation and sharing within creative communities

There is an urgent need to focus research on creative participation as embedded in people's everyday lives, building on former ethnographic traditions in media research. Of key importance in dealing with creative participation is a research orientation towards equality, digital divides, class and cultural capital, as part of cultural struggles of 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. The making of communities around creating and sharing content has been growing as a field of research for some time, and will increase in the years to come. Examples of such studies are game studies and online gaming communities (Aarseth, 2004), fan fiction communities (Lankshear and Knobel, 2006), and sharing of audio and video as DIY communities (Knobel and Lankshear, 2010) and remixing processes (Drotner and Schröder, 2010; Lessig, 2008).

iii) 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 working outside the media and creative industries will lead to a more equitable distribution of economic assets in the development of the creative economy. This, however, is challenged by evidence that inequality and social exclusion persist. There may be more opportunities to become content creators, but the means of storage and mass distribution for profit are dominated by globalised companies.

What we need to know

It is crucially important not to look forward without looking back, in the sense that trends and fields of media studies need to be understood as developmental processes. Some areas persist, some change and some become less relevant. Based on trends and changes at a contemporary European level, certain research themes and areas become apparent within the framework of this chapter. It is important to stress the need for critical research that examines the underlying implications of ongoing processes.

The conceptual approach to media literacy as “the ability to access, understand and create communications in a variety of contexts” (Livingstone *et al.* 2004) is deeply traversed by creative processes and frames as well as contemporary modes of knowledge production. These issues need to be critically addressed in a European research agenda side by side with the economic edge of literacy. Consequently, ethical concerns also provide an important frame for the interaction between the creative industries and media literacy and allow for (an)other understanding of collaboration versus appropriation; dissemination versus media bullying; resistance versus repression.

Looking ahead, there are various challenges to be addressed. Below we have grouped some of the important research questions and key challenges:

i) Structural transitions

To what extent will creative industries initiate changes in media structures, ownership and business models? How, and to what degree, will this evolve as fundamental changes within media industries depend in part on the resources allocated to them by existing and new industry actors? Will states legislate or regulate in this area, such as copyright legislation? How will industries manage a sustained media distribution system when we witness a paradigm shift on sharing practices of media content?

ii) New audiences

In a context where accessibility to content becomes a key point, what are the new roles that participant audiences play in the multiplicity of media landscapes in terms of production and distribution? To what extent is ‘the participation’ of audiences in part a reflection of the ‘technical formats’ that enable such participation? Can audiences, through networking and participation, add value to the development of content creation and lead to iterative innovation and creative processes through ‘customer’ feedback or even via hacking?

iii) Transformations within media cultures

Which are the key transformations of our media culture today? The mediatisation processes of cultural production are changing our ways of relating to texts and genres, as well as the spatial dimensions of participation in culture as seen in the growth of social media. Also, to what extent will contemporary media culture be influenced by user-generated content creation?

iv) Methodological

How do we study the growth of new media audiences as part of creative culture, conceptually and methodologically? We should 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 appropriate to a digital environment. Further, several methodological issues become important in the years to come in order to address the changes discussed in this chapter, both related to the role of the researcher and 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, and as ways of following families, communities and creative industries during different timescales. 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. Online research is still early in development and new methods are needed. 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 an important development as research tools, in ways of collecting multimodal data and software for analysing large data sets (data mining). Of course, these methodological issues raise several ethical challenges, for example for the role of the researcher, ways of getting access to public and private content, and ways that data can be used for non-intended purposes. The growth of content creation and the creative industries will generate many methodological challenges for media research in the years to come.

Conclusion

The relevance of the above sections will be drawn out for two domains in which we address some key questions.

Scientific:

We might ask about the scientific capacities of media studies to take on the theoretical and conceptual challenges posed by media literacies in general and creative aspects of these in particular. For example, is the field of audience studies in a position to advance a systematic and holistic approach to media literacies, given their increasing relevance for (in)equities of employment, in addition to the better-rehearsed citizenship-consumer options? Are critical/cultural studies an option for investigating digital creativities that often transcend binary oppositions between critical reflection and creative expression – binaries that critical/cultural studies still employ?

Policy:

For policy makers in the area of cultural production there is a need to develop holistic and multi-layered approaches that include and interconnect the different aspects and actors of content creation and creative industries. Agencies funding media research will also need to re-orient thematic priorities along new challenges and evolving research areas. Such areas would include: cultural transformations due to content creation, economic initiatives as part of media developments, democratic participation in a creative culture, text production and new forms of distribution of texts, audiences as part of production and consumption, creative learning as part of educational trajectories. An important point concerns methodological re-orientations, as media research needs to develop new methodological approaches in order to study such developments within cultural and media sectors.

5.

Identity Formation: From Facebook Groups to Institutional Forms of Cultural Heritage



Introduction: 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 from within and without, 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 (Bennett *et al.*, 2011; Livingstone, 2005). In many ways, 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 are 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. One’s sense of being as well as one’s perception of reality is contingent on the ability to access and use media, from on-line newspapers to participation in social media, and from texting to on-line gaming. 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 and new forms of linguistic and cultural identities which 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. Moreover, it involves the aspect of *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.

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. 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.

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 compe-

tence 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. This raises questions of who is considered to be literate today and how liberating media competence is in relation to identity formation. Can it really be argued that increased and facilitated access to media use and media content further enables the individual to form identity in a more informed, responsible and critically aware manner? Or is perhaps the opposite true: that ‘democratic’ access to media use and content further fixes the subject in set identity formations which may appear fluid and boundless but are often new forms of oppression taking the form of invasion of privacy, victimisation or abuse, or even simply appearing as identification effects (which the subject cannot necessarily be aware of or control) through the affiliation with one identity group or another? Issues of media competence and identity formation always implicate issues of power, where there tend 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).

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). There is, therefore, an urgent need for joint European media research 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.

A reasonable balance must be upheld so that the social effects of new media technologies are fully

acknowledged but not overestimated. 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 (Elliott and Urry, 2010; Hayles, 2012; Hepp *et al.*, 2008; Morley, 2006). The Arab Spring offered ample evidence on 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 (Bolter and 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. Such considerations must be kept in mind when formulating policies for meeting the present media situation.

Moreover, we need to take into account that in a media-saturated world, audiences are bombarded with messages and information. However, it remains to be seen how much media content we, as audiences, actually absorb and how much we 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 we have been placing too much agency on technology and we need to reconsider how institutions and individuals cope in a media-saturated world. In addition, if we are to accept that each of us processes information through a filter bubble, then perhaps we need 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', 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 mediated society involves the more and more 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.

What research tells us: past and present approaches to mediated identities

Whereas in the late twentieth century the field of media studies was divided by deep and often antagonistic differences, one may today discern more convergences and dialogues between perspectives. Instead of mutually hostile camps, there is more often a dynamically interweaving set of currents that sometimes reinforce and sometimes contradict each other (Fornäs, 2008). This is for instance true of textual and contextual approaches. A number of *cultural* turns have paid greater attention 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. These cultural and contextual currents seem to contradict each other, as they either expand or limit 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.

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 to 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.

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.

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, despite 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; this analysis should not be neglected nor left to dedicated musicologists or other sound specialists.

One may also discern a *material* current, whereby 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 extra-textual material actors or as 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.

What we need to know: mediated identities into the future

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 (a) how mediated identity formations are changing today; (b) why these changes take place; and (c) what their main consequences are.

How mediated identities are changing today

The *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. 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 genres, it appears relevant to examine the way that 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.

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, chatrooms, blogs, information websites, etc. There is furthermore 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 public spheres.

Why key modes of identities have changed

The *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.

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. Here we must study 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 contradictory and ambivalent processes of exploration, exploitation, institutionalisation, disciplining and normalisation.

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’.

What are the consequences of the creation of new modes of identity formation?

The *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.

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 (Arslan *et al.*, 2009; Uricchio, 2008). 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 have 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.

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 limit 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.

Conclusion

Considering all of the above, it is of vital importance that future research take into account the complexity, the fluidity, the materiality as well as the performative aspects of identity formation and examine it both as a consequence as well as a cause of engagement with media-related technology and production. In a media-saturated world it is imperative to examine aspects of how and why identity formations are changing and to investigate the consequences of such changes across the spectrum of identity variables such as gender and sexuality, race and ethnicity, age and (dis)ability, to name but a few. Research undertaken in this area may have direct impact, and its results can find practical application, in the domains of healthcare, education, art, gaming culture and fashion. The complexity of media flows as well as the increased use of media technologies make a re-examination of identity formation urgent, suggesting both a need for a new theoretical framework to be articulated and also, importantly, for the implementation of the

results in areas essential for an active participation in a mediatised world. Failure to do so will not only prevent the theorisation of identity from advancing alongside a constantly evolving and rapidly expanding technology which has a direct impact on identity formation, it will also hinder progress in influencing the material manifestations in all areas of society and culture in a constructive manner.

6. Conclusions



The preceding four chapters outline the key defining features of the issues we regard as demanding priority in the field of media studies in Europe in the years ahead. In each chapter we have explained why the issue is important, what research has already revealed, and how changes in social and technological development demand that new questions be addressed, both to take policy forward and to enlarge our understanding of these critical institutions and processes. We do not, of course, suggest that these observations exhaust the research priorities or possibilities in this field, but they do represent a range of urgent and important questions. In this chapter we set out a number of important questions that arise from this discussion and which can be translated into research tasks. In the subsequent chapter we outline some recommendations as to the infrastructure and support for research which would allow these objectives to be met. Chapter 6 is thus addressed primarily to the research community and those responsible for developing research strategy. It summarises the key issues identified in the Forward Look discussions as priorities for the medium-term future of media studies, intellectually, socially and culturally. For such research to be undertaken however, attention to the organisational and logistical bases for research is required, and Chapter 7 addresses these questions.

In Chapter 2 we assessed the ways in which political engagement needed substantial investigation to reflect changing times and technologies. Writing in a period in which coincident crises of economies, welfare, political participation, and private–public provision are all creating levels of uncertainty and political dilemmas unknown in a generation, the means by which knowledge and information about policy are disseminated, and political action

mobilised, are of essential concern. The very notion and practice of citizenship in a democracy, in other words, are at issue, with the media in all their forms and changing nature at the heart of engagement and empowerment.

The chapter suggests that we need a renewed research focus on the nature of alternative democratic politics. It also outlines the importance of mediatisation, the saturation of political communication of all kinds by media. The chapter questions 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. The chapter suggests prioritising research that considers ‘political agency in context’ and sets out a number of thematics that would follow from such a perspective.

In Chapter 3 we return to the vexed question of the digital divide. Large political and social questions of equity and efficiency do not disguise the fact 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 a transient condition. As the chapter concludes, the digital divide may well be deepening, as it is not only reflecting pre-existing inequalities but coming to be an element in their reproduction. Thus it remains vital to map the contours of social disadvantage and inequality onto to the use and ownership of communication facilities. One important task within this is to address evident differences between national experiences. What might we learn from rigorous and well-structured

comparisons across national policy boundaries that could enlarge our understanding of, and hence ability to address, the digital divide in all its forms? A further task lies in investigating the different implications and outcomes of public and private provision in digital services.

In Chapter 4 we consider the research questions arising from examination of the creative industries. 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. For all these reasons the chapter sets out three dimensions, in media literacy and creativity, in social practices of audiences, and in the impact of technological developments on the creative and cultural economy, that form key areas for new research emphases and priority.

Chapter 5 is concerned with identity formation, recognising the many ways in which the media are both a resource for the construction of identity and a means for its dissemination and publicisation. The chapter considers the contradictory and dual meaning of identity, in emphasising both individuality and difference on the one hand, and sameness and commonality on the other. New media forms offer changing possibilities for both, while in some fields, notably in visual formats and especially aural ones, we have only limited research and data on which to draw. It is thus urgent to develop research that investigates and understands changes in identity formation, not least through the emergence of new types of subculture associated with the media themselves. Equally urgent is research that uncovers the ways that social interaction itself is changing to generate new possibilities for association and identity formation – the very means of sociability may be changing in ways as yet only imperfectly understood. Finally, research is needed that recognises and unpacks the emergence of new forms of trans-cultural identity, understanding the complex ways in which people relate to entities other than

the nation state or locality, through new 'contact zones', whether through practice or the consumption of both fictional and non-fictional forms.

All these debates of course contain within them the seeds of innumerable research questions and approaches. But we can now attempt to distil some of the more urgent themes into a set of priority research questions.

Key research questions for the future

1. What is the relative impact of technological innovation and socio-cultural context in shaping the actual uses of digital media?

Throughout its history, media research has grappled with an often stereotyped simplification referred to as technological determinism. At its simplest, this idea suggests that innovations in technology – printing, the cathode ray tube, wireless, the internet, mobile communications goods – are the drivers and enablers of major social changes, indeed their determinants. Caution against this view will often note how inventions are taken up some time after their appearance only when the social conditions are 'right' for their widespread adoption and application. This debate has become much revived in recent times because of the prevalence of the 'new media', although it is becoming understandably commonplace to note that we must soon stop speaking of the internet, mobile telephones, and the like as 'new' when they are part of the natural environment to growing fractions of the population. Formulations such as 'the information society' suggest that so prevalent are such technologies, their centrality in social, economic and political process enables us to speak of having moved into a new social formation – whether termed late capitalism, the knowledge society, or in some other conception. Empirically, we do not have enough understanding of the ways in which people actually use digital media, and how this varies in line with other and more familiar lines of differentiation, some of which are opened up in Question 2.

2. How do key trends in markets and media industries impact on public knowledge and public culture, and how does public policy relate to market imperatives?

The kinds of communication technologies available to citizens, the price at which they are available, and the uses to which they may be put, are the result of a complex interaction between the economic objec-

tives of the industrial organisations that produce the commodities and services, and the policy objectives of governments and supra-national organisations that attempt to regulate the terrain in the interests of social policy objectives. One primary concern of industrial organisations is economic survival and this may lead them to privilege the provision of certain services over others, or to adopt pricing policies that make access and utilisation difficult for certain sections of the populations. Governments and supra-national organisations, on the other hand, tend to be concerned with issues of equity in provision and access. These two sets of priorities may be either complementary or antagonistic but the relations between the two are inevitable determinants of the technologies and services that citizens may utilise. One of the central preoccupations of debates over telecommunications services, for example, has long been the degree to which universal service is achieved and the costs and nature of the facilities that are provided under this rubric. Elements in the emerging new media landscape, for example the debate over net neutrality, demonstrate that these factors will continue to influence profoundly the facilities that citizens may employ.

3. What is the relationship between cultural production and consumption, the nature and role of audiences, and economic, social and cultural stratification?

The study of consumption has long been considered a field of economics that has been largely disregarded in favour of production and distribution. Consumption was seen as unproblematic because it was either considered to be based upon rational individuals buying goods to maximise their satisfaction or seen as determined by production aims. Digital media individualised cultural production and consumption. Focusing on the consumption of culture rather than exclusively on production points to the importance of diverse uses of mass-produced cultural goods and experiences in which mass-produced commodities can be customised and ‘localised’ rather than ‘globalised’. Investigating new trends in cultural production and consumption across the world is necessary to be able to build the future policies needed to promote creation and access to knowledge. In addition to studies of interpretative aspects of cultural consumption, the study of the relationship between cultural production and consumption should take into account the wider social, economic and political context in which cultural products are being produced and consumed – globally, regionally and nationally as well as locally.

4. How and in what ways are structural inequalities associated with demographic and economic variables not merely coincidental with ‘digital divides’ but also both their cause and effect?

The widening availability and use of communications technologies has opened up new means of receiving and disseminating communications for many groups in society. However, the identification of a ‘digital divide’ alerted us to the extent to which this was experienced variably by different groups. Much research has pursued this question by deepening our understanding of the ‘digital divide’, not least by expanding its meaning so that we understand there to be multiple such divides. Nonetheless, a persistent feature of such analysis is that there are variations in access, use and experience that relate to familiar social and economic characteristics such as age, education, location, and income. These characteristics persist in a way that suggests they are not transient but embedded in the nature of communication technologies, and find their roots in enduring features of social inequality. Thus, age effects are cohort rather than generation effects – differences will not disappear as widening use becomes commonplace among populations now youthful but maturing along with the technologies. Equally, as communications goods and services are commodities to be bought and sold in the market place, people’s relation to that market place – their disposable income and household circumstances – play a major role in their use and experience of communication goods and services.

These relationships have been little explored, especially on a comparative and diachronic basis, and require once again the return of communications and media research to some of the key concepts and concerns of their parent disciplines in the social sciences. If we are to understand the connection between structural inequalities and communication practices we need to re-import into communications research some of these classical concerns with structural inequalities.

5. How and under what circumstances does mediatisation hinder or contribute to new – democratic or anti-democratic – forms of political participation?

Media research has given much attention in recent years to the concept and meaning of mediatisation. The core of competing definitions and approaches is a focus on the extent to which the media have become central to political life, and indeed have become so important to the political institutions and practices of a society that they are intrinsic to

them. In that sense, the term 'saturation' is often associated with discussions of mediatisation, implying that the media have advanced to a point where major, especially political processes, are unthinkable or even impossible without them. This process is common in most European societies, with evidence of increasing disengagement from traditional political processes, such as voting and party membership, especially among the young, with only sketchy evidence that such engagement is migrating to newer and different forms of political activity or communication.

Research is needed that takes forward some of these debates to understand the dynamics of democratic action and participation. We have seldom gone beyond the aggregate data of political mobilisation and action to understand more fundamentally how democracies may be changing, if indeed they are, with the widespread adoption of media both for political communication between political actors and the governed and for political mobilisation among citizens and social and political groups.

6. How do changes in power relations relate to the role of the media in destabilising traditional definitions of identity and promoting new forms of agency?

It is frequently argued that the sheer range and diversity of media provision, including fiction and entertainment as well as factual information, make available an unprecedented variety of modes of expression and communication which may be 'borrowed' or deployed by recipients in constructing their own identities. One formulation of this idea suggests that the media have created the opportunities for a postmodern flexibility, in which such is the array of identities and modes of expression available that consumers are able to change and reconstruct their identities endlessly, whether deliberately or inadvertently. Ideas of this kind are often richer and more widespread than solid empirical investigation to assess their accuracy. The media themselves may deliver new sources of power over and above traditional resources based on wealth or position and rooted in newer forms of status, such as that arising from celebrity. How far this is true, and which particular forms of communication production and consumption are involved in the 'destabilisation' or reformulation of identity, have been little explored.

7. How do new uses of communication technologies articulate with bodily experience, for example in the domains of healthcare, education, art, gaming culture and fashion?

The profusion of digital technologies enables consumers to transform and communicate their bodies across time and space (e.g. digital characters in a virtual world that consumers can create and customise, such as avatars in 'Second Life'), to 'move' beyond their physical location and to establish a sense of shared presence among separate individuals or members of a group (telepresence, for example, by cell phones or video conferencing), and even to 'merge' their bodies with technological tools (e.g. pacemakers). These interactions reveal a complex negotiation occurring at the boundary between the body and technology. They challenge the formerly-prevailing assumptions in explaining consumers' construction of online identities suggesting that a simple dichotomy exists between the online self and the physical self (i.e. whether the 'virtual identities' are reflection of the 'real identities' or constructed independently of them), and that a singular mapping of the individual self onto a single biological body is possible. The ubiquity of digital technologies and diversity of consumers' interactions with them erased clear boundaries between the body and technology, which raises basic questions about what it means to communicate in the out-of-body experience.

8. What are the implications for privacy and the principles of democracy of the increasing use of new media technologies to facilitate everyday social transactions?

Until recently, discussions of the right to privacy largely ignored that privacy rights that are related to personal choice, association and expression are necessary to democratic government but, with the advance of communication technologies, these issues became particularly contentious. Changes in communication technology and its social uses shape, often in controversial ways, the diffusion of power relationships in society. Public communication legitimises human actions but it may also limit personal and organisational – physical, intellectual and informational – privacy. Publicity not only makes things democratically visible, and thus suppresses censorship, it can also impose visibility on an individual's actions and thus intrude on the individual's privacy. Although 'disciplinary visibility' represents the major threat to democratic communication, secret forms of privacy invasion infringe the personal right to privacy even more dangerously. Contemporary systems of video surveillance,

monitoring and electronic remote sensing may develop into tyranny over private citizens and their normatively-assured privacy. Commercial corporations design, control and own large sections of the internet's architecture, which enables comprehensive control over internet access and web filtering, and the ability to harvest information on users' web browsing and downloading activities, instant messaging, and e-mail activities. Website providers thus make profits on users' online activities by tracking, accumulating and selling data on their lifestyles, interests and habits. In these conditions there is a need to find the 'right' balance between individuals' self-determination, public interest (especially in terms of public safety), and market demands.

9. To what extent do different intellectual property regimes facilitate or impede different forms of creative agency?

Intellectual property (patents, copyright, trademarks) is often compared to physical property rights but knowledge or 'immaterial products' are fundamentally different. Intellectual property can be bought and sold, but should it be considered a commodity like other goods that can be bought and/or sold? Together with labour, land and money, which Polanyi (1944) described as 'fictitious' commodities, intellectual property belongs to the world of commodities which are unsustainable within a self-regulating market system and thus necessitates specific 'protection' and regulation. In contrast to Polanyi's 'fictitious commodities', however, immaterial intellectual products can only become profitable commodities with government intervention. The technological developments of the digital age might raise expectations that, in industries where the basic production equipment is widely affordable, an increased cultural production by people working outside the 'creative industries' will lead to a more equitable distribution of economic assets in the development of the creative economy. This, however, is challenged by evidence that inequality and social exclusion persist. There may be greater opportunities to become content creators but the means of storage and mass distribution for profit are dominated by globalised companies. How the differing interests of the original creators, the intermediaries (producers, publishers) and the end-users (consumers, citizens) should be balanced globally and regionally as well as nationally in this new environment is still unclear.

10. How will the demands of sustainability and ecological considerations influence the development of media technologies and their uses in the future?

On one hand, the demands of sustainability and ecological considerations refer to the critical ecological footprint of ICT: the network society is based on the increasing use of scarce natural resources (strategic minerals, etc.) without proper recycling procedures; the use of ICT is very energy-dependent and energy-intensive. On the other hand, digital information and communication technologies are important in shaping sustainable solutions for the future of our planet, advancing education and the spread of knowledge, building a green economy, and bridging the digital divide. Social media, in particular, may play an important role in democratising information at all levels in our highly-interconnected world and thus achieving the goals of sustainable development. 'Media Ecology' promotes the idea that information and communication technology, modes of information and codes of communication play a leading role in human affairs by assigning media users specific roles, structuring what they see and say, and specifying what they are permitted or expected to do. This (soft) deterministic perspective of how media technologies may shape human demands of sustainability should be supplemented by questioning the social conditions that help to shape the ways in which the available communication technologies will be used, and influence the direction in which they will be developed and changed.

11. What are the prospects, problems and potentials of European and other transnational identities in a context of increasingly complex global media flows?

In a situation of increasingly complex and multi-levelled global media flows, there is a need to better understand social, cultural, political and economic impacts that the social dynamics of transnational groupings have on their members and on others. They are emerging as key players in globalisation processes, which are largely decentred from specific national territories and take place in a global space, in contrast to transnationalisation processes, which transcend one or more nation states but are still anchored in one or a limited number of them (such as transnational corporations). Globalisation fosters a re-organisation and re-negotiation of nationally-framed identities and creation of transnational identities, supranational institutions and global networks of interaction that facilitate international cooperation and global governance, but it also faces the growing emergence of multiple identities such as

ethnic, religious, linguistic, environmental and gender identities. In order to understand the complexity of these processes, it is essential to understand not only what identities are but also from where those identities are derived and how they relate to the 'otherness' inherent in identity construction. How social identities are shaped by transnational interaction (e.g. changing the balance between transnational/European, national and sub-national identifications) is an important area of investigation.

12. In what ways can (critical) media literacy serve to foster citizenship and enhance cultural capital and thus promote democratic engagement, empowerment and social and cultural inclusivity?

Media literacy in its various constructions is explored in the background working paper prepared for this Forward Look which is available on the ESF website (Erstad *et al.*, 2012). At its core is a description of the ways in which consumers are able to understand the means by which the media work to convey images, ideas and information so that the consumer can respond critically and actively. Equally, the term denotes the growing ability of consumers to also be producers. In part, this is enabled by the spread of so-called social media and the phenomenon of citizen journalism. This begins to deflate decades of assumptions about the professional capacity of mediators, and questions both the need for and occupational ideologies of such groups. On the other hand it can also be argued that the power of professional communicators, for example in the form of large media corporations, has never been greater, so that far from empowering, new technologies have been co-opted and colonised by previously-existing concentrations of power and control in fairly familiar forms. These forces are plainly in tension, and both are active at one and the same time. Comparative research can examine what factors take us in one direction or another. In the background paper we examine the varying approaches to the concept of media literacy, and also the related but far from identical notion of critical media literacy. Research should develop to examine to what extent media literacy is indeed critical, and thus empowering, rather than merely functional, enabling use and consumption, but not necessarily enlightenment or critique.

7.

Recommendations



1. Research approaches

1.1 Interdisciplinary investigation

Media studies is a field rather than a discipline, even though it has evolved its own infrastructure in the form of higher education programmes, scholarly conferences, specialised journals, subject associations and so on. The advantage of such structures is that they nurture deeper investigation into specific areas and foster the independence and sustainability of the field. The danger is, of course, a degree of intellectual myopia or amnesia that, at worst, leads to much ‘reinventing of the wheel’ or development of ideas which are artificially constrained and defined. In taking the field forward we would press for an openness to the range of work in cognate areas that, in the arts, humanities, and social sciences especially (but not only), should be of value and pertinence to many of the questions raised in this document. This argues particularly for teamwork in which there is at least some participation from beyond the closed world that media studies have occasionally become.

Recommendation 1.1

In order to mitigate this inward-looking potential in media studies we recommend that:

- a. Universities and higher education authorities facilitate interdisciplinary investigation, scholarship and training in relevant fields, and that the various forms of research assessment at the very least do not penalise such inter- or cross-disciplinary work.
- b. Funding bodies ensure that their programme and committee structures do not discourage such work, and provide researchers with clear guidelines where work that challenges traditional disciplinary boundaries might best be directed.

1.2 Diachronic investigation

Time is the key variable in so many of the processes we have been describing. Investigating behaviour through the use of panel studies is expensive and, by definition, time consuming. Results frequently only become cumulatively valuable as time goes on. Inevitably, for these reasons, such studies are rare, leaving us bereft of substantial investigation exploring the dynamics of media production and consumption. Studies of content comparing earlier with later periods are much more common, but the methodological reason for this is plain – old newspapers do not forget or disappear (except in occasional library floods!). Despite popular fascination with the speed of change in the media field, whether the very rapid spread of so-called social media or fast-changing habits in the use of mobile media, understanding such changes needs research which attends to shifts in behaviour over time. With rapid technological change we desperately need diachronic panel studies to distinguish cohort from life-stage effects.

Recommendation 1.2

We recommend that funding bodies recognise the need for long-term studies and do not succumb to the temptation to restrict their support to work which provides swift and even instant snapshots of communication behaviour. This requires some boldness and imagination on the part of funding bodies, which should be willing to sustain such work even if provisional and periodic results are required. The reward would be research of far greater profundity and significance.

1.3 Comparative investigation

To understand what is happening in one place often requires comparison with another to make clear the significance of what is being observed. Comparison does not always mean of one country with another. Much media production and consumption data is generated at national level, making cross-country comparisons more readily accessible than other forms of comparison. Re-analysis of Eurobarometer data, for example, has become something of an industry, and indeed such work furnishes valuable insights. However, the differences between rural and urban areas, rich and poor, young and old, can often be made more comprehensible and significant if these distinctions are used across national boundaries, slicing the cake differently to the normal way of doing it to reveal patterns and profiles otherwise masked. Two related recommendations follow from this observation.

Recommendation 1.3

Following from this observation we recommend that:

- a. Funding bodies within nation states support work which addresses comparisons other than those most readily and prominently available, usually at national level, for example the ones listed above. This requires support for collaborations across national boundaries (see Recommendation 2.1).
- b. The designers of major work programmes within Horizon 2020 recognise that research underpinning the future of Europe in job creation and technological success in the communications field will depend on imaginative support for work programmes investigating comparisons in experience and development across not just the regions and nation states of Europe, but across its divergent social and cultural communities. For example, a focus on comparing nation states will not capture one of the key features of communications development, namely the relative differential engagement with communication changes between age cohorts and generations. This will be a vital area for policy and research which has scarcely been addressed, and needs urgent investigation and analysis.

1.4 Theoretically-grounded research

A familiar cliché has it that there is nothing so practical as a good theory. The danger inherent in much media research is that we measure what is measurable rather than what is important. All research is rooted in theory, but often this remains tacit and assumed. The world we live in is changing fast, with major alterations in the environment, in demography, in population movement, employment, and in

economic conditions. Understanding these complex changes requires theoretical analysis, without which data is simply a meaningless collection of facts – it is information rather than knowledge.

Media research, which is but miniature compared to the colossus that is market research, can too easily fall prey to the temptation to focus on the easily researchable, while the difficult task of constructing theoretical frameworks is regarded as a luxury or irrelevance. The topics we address in this report all reflect complex shifts in behaviour and social structure which can only be understood, and translated into operationally manageable research, through sound and complex theory construction.

Recommendation 1.4

- a. It is vital that theory underpin the design of research calls and work programmes. Equally it means that research funders should be aware of and invite attention to the theoretical assumptions in even the most pragmatic-seeming research.
- b. Researchers should give central place to theory when developing their research projects and plans. This requires action both by researchers and also by research funding bodies, who should require and expect a theoretical context and grounding in any application, and whose programmes should be constructed with a theoretical as well as a policy foundation.

Box 1

An example of this approach may be found in research into social network sites. Social network sites (SNS) became a major object of investigation in media studies both because of their popularity and because of an unprecedented amount of automatically generated data they provide. In traditional research, data gathering was clearly separated from the process of communication as the object of study. Internet interactions, links and profiles, and cell phone uses represent an entirely new mode of communication that combine the timeliness of speaking and the endurance of writing. Moreover, the digital(ised) communications generate ‘surplus’ information on users’ online activities that can be tracked down, explored and used by those not participating in interactions. Research datasets are created as ‘footprints’ of personal information that participants leave online while communicating, and make them (often unwittingly) available to others; they can be used to study patterns of calling and receiving phone calls,

...

sending and receiving messages, downloading and uploading files, (un)friending and (un)liking on the individual and aggregate levels. This information is generated automatically by software enabling communication itself and, thus, cannot be prevented. This kind of surveillance coupled with the massive amounts of ‘big data’ that are collected, analysed and used, not only for research aims but also for commercial or political purposes, raises serious ethical and legal issues both for research and the entire democratic community. New modes of digital communication thus challenge the belief that it is possible clearly to separate methodology from theory. It is vital that research funders, interested in the potential and growth of such networks and sites, recognise the fundamental theoretical issues raised by the vast growth in information about, for example, preferences (Facebook), consumer demand (Google), consumption (Apple), reading habits (Amazon), and mobility (Microsoft) inherent in the emergence of so-called ‘big data’. The questions raised by such proposals have become major issues for discussion in the political realm as well as for research and its support in the current period, adding to the urgency of addressing such topics appropriately.

2. Research Infrastructure

2.1 Collaborative international research

Research remains largely a national pursuit. Although scholars meet internationally, the formation of international research collaborations and teams is less common than it might be. This is partly because of the rising costs of association – travel, etc. – paradoxically inhibit collaboration when digital communication should render such ‘real-life’ meeting less salient. It is also because of the competitive dimension to research activity, each nation-state being acutely conscious of the need to demonstrate value-for-money in its support for research.

Recommendation 2.1

a. International subject associations, organisations such as the ESF and Science Europe, and the EU should support collaborative activities that bring together the talents and experience of scholars from more than one country to ensure the success and growth of international research that can transcend either the scientific or policy priorities of a single nation.

b. The relevant Directorates of the European Commission could offer valuable support for subject association collaboration (there are so far very few examples) around key themes (indicated in Chapter 6); this support should include a programme of training workshops for young researchers in developing research programmes incorporating essential cross-national collaboration.

2.2 Research beyond the academy

Media organisations undertake research to establish the size and requirements of their audiences. Such market research has a long history and represents a huge stockpile of invaluable data. Too often research by such organisations and that by researchers within the academy is undertaken in mutual ignorance. We do not underestimate the difficulties, even dangers, of dialogue. The pragmatic needs of market research can sometimes run counter to the conceptual and analytical priorities of scholarly research. In the literature the traditional distinction is drawn between ‘administrative’ and ‘critical’ research, the former designed to provide immediately useful and entirely utilitarian data to advance the needs of commercial sponsors, the latter deeply rooted in critique and theory about the contextual, social, and cultural dynamics concerned. The distinction has been much discussed, and we do not pretend that the differences are other than real and, on occasion, potentially damaging. However, researchers wish to be heard, and policy makers wish to make sound proposals. Both require research that engages the expertise, resources, and access which partners within the academy and within the industries can respectively deliver. European media organisations do not have a long track record in either facilitating or funding research in this field. On occasion their perception of research as unhelpfully or ignorantly critical, or as irrelevant to the pragmatic concerns of producers or industries, may be the cause of this – valid or not as these perceptions may be. To make a reality of this recommendation requires much more dialogue across the boundary between academic and market research.

Recommendation 2.2

a. We recommend that universities and research assessment exercises (such as the Research Excellence Framework in the UK) recognise the value in achieving such dialogue, so that the huge datasets held by business and industry complement the theoretical, but sometimes empirically under-nourished, work of academic researchers.

b. In most European countries industry-based

researchers are little, if at all, involved in the development of relevant disciplines; for example, in most countries, few are members of relevant subject associations or attend their conventions and conferences. Time, not money, is the obstacle, and we strongly advise commercial organisations to afford time for relevant staff to become so engaged. Funding could issue from such programmes as the EU-funded COST programme Information and Communication Technologies (ICT), which is rather focused on the technological dimensions to its problem area despite its declared emphasis on “treating the processing, transmission, storage, retrieval, management, usage, and exchange of information and knowledge, with emphasis on fundamental aspects”.

2.3 Data management and availability

For the media and communications field to develop as is needed a Europe-wide research clearing house would be invaluable, collating data and research outputs and accessible to the scholarly community. Its value would be in the efficiencies gained by facilitating analysis of existing data rather than unnecessarily generating new data, and in reducing unnecessary duplication. In most EU countries there are data archives for research, including media research, undertaken across the academy, usually fostered and resourced by national research councils. At the European level, the Council of European Social Science Data Archives (CESSDA) is a multinational network of data archiving institutions – an umbrella organisation for social science data archives across Europe. Since the 1970s the members have worked together to improve access to data for researchers and students. CESSDA helps the members to plan collection, management, deposition and dissemination of research data. With its transformation into CESSDA European Research Infrastructure Consortium (CESSDA ERIC), it is developing into a pan-European social research infrastructure. CESSDA ERIC is not expressly addressed to media and communications. However, it may play an important role in facilitating data collection and exchange in the field of media studies, particularly in complementing the work of the European Audiovisual Observatory, another important resource for media and communications research (see Box 2).

Recommendation 2.3

We recommend an early meeting between a representative body for media and communications studies (for example ECREA or the Media Research Network of the ESA) and CESSDA ERIC, to put the

potential inclusion of media studies data in CESSDA on the agenda, and to examine strategies for the collation, management and dissemination of data in this area, not least in the emerging regime of open access publishing.

Box 2

Set up in December 1992, the European Audiovisual Observatory based in Strasbourg is the only centre of its kind to gather and circulate information on the audiovisual industry in Europe. The Observatory is a European public service body with 39 Member States. It operates within the legal framework of the Council of Europe. As its name suggests, it is concerned only with the audio-visual industries, though it does also these days address ‘new media’. Its use by researchers in the academy is very limited, but it does represent an ambitious and laudable attempt to act as a clearing house and data warehouse for the field. Its holdings, however, are in the main data sets on such subjects as audio-visual production, cinema audiences and so on, produced by national governments.

► <http://www.obs.coe.int/>

2.4 Training and internships

While the field is growing fast, research training opportunities are few. Doctoral and postdoctoral training schools have been rare, though effective and valuable when available. The ECREA European Media and Communication Doctoral Summer School is a good example (see Box 3). The European Science Foundation Research Networking Programme ‘Changing Media – Changing Europe’ also provided opportunities for a small number of young scholars. There are other such initiatives, but support for such ventures is limited, and the cultivation of a generation of internationally-attuned young researchers is a major need for which resources are currently scarce. Among the many advantages of such training activities would be the further development of necessary analytical skills – both quantitative and qualitative. The training develops the leaders of tomorrow whose skills and networks cascade down and become accessible to a widening body of scholars.

Recommendation 2.4

It is recommended that training opportunities for doctoral and postdoctoral researchers in media and communication studies be expanded and dedicated long-term financial support mechanisms set

up. Such training should pay attention to the need to enlarge research capacity and capabilities in international, collaborative, comparative and diachronic research, as outlined above.

Box 3

The ECREA European Media and Communication Doctoral Summer School which started in 1992 is now a joint project of 22 European universities and the European Communication Research and Education Association (ECREA). Between 20 and 50 students in the mid-stage of their PhD projects have participated each year in the summer school in Grenoble (1992–96), Madrid (1997), Lund (1998), London (1999–2003), Tampere/Helsinki (2004), Tartu (2005–2009), Ljubljana (2010–2012) and Bremen (2013–). In 2006, the Summer School launched its own book series (The Researching and Teaching Communication series) for which an edited volume is produced, containing a discussion of the summer school's pedagogical project, a series of student and lecturer chapters and the PhD abstracts of all participating PhD students.

► <http://www.comsummerschool.org/> and <http://www.researchingcommunication.eu/>

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Annexes

Annex 1: **Membership of the Scientific Committee and the Quality Reference Group**

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Annex 2: **Forward Look Activities and Participants**

Scoping Workshop, 20–21 June 2011, Strasbourg (FR)

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Thematic Workshop 1 – 'Political engagement in an age of mediatisation: enablers and constraints for democratic developments' 16-17 June 2012, Lisbon (PT)

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Faculty of Social Sciences, University of Ljubljana, Slovenia

Annex 2: **Forward Look Activities and Participants**

Thematic Workshop 2 – **‘Creative economy or creative culture? Shaping and sharing of media content as a specifically economic or as a wider social resource’**

18–19 June 2012, Lisbon (PT)

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United Kingdom

Thematic Workshop 3 – **‘Digital divides and their relation to class, gender, generation, ethnicity and region’**

7–8 June 2012, Helsinki (FI)

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Annex 2: **Forward Look Activities and Participants**

Thematic Workshop 4 – **'Identity-formation: from Facebook networks to institutional forms of cultural heritage'**

17–18 May 2012, Nicosia (CY)

Co-Chairs

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Synthesis Workshop, 23 October 2012, Istanbul (TR)

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Annex 2: **Forward Look Activities and Participants**

Final Conference, 24–25 January 2013, Ljubljana (SI)

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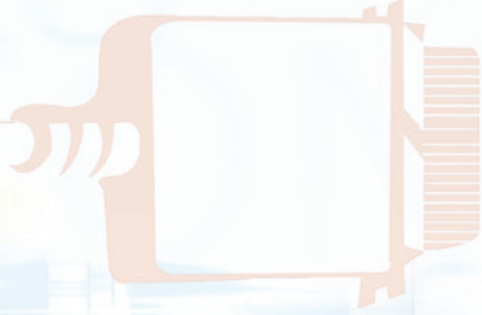
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Annex 2: **Forward Look Activities and Participants**

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