

# MEDIÁLNÍ STUDIA

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# MEDIA STUDIES

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## Introduction to Special Issue

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# INTRODUCTION TO SPECIAL ISSUE

## EMERGING TOPICS OF MEDIA AND COMMUNICATION SCHOLARSHIP IN EUROPE: ALUMNI OF THE ECREA DOCTORAL SCHOOL OF 2020

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Media and communication studies is a diverse field and this has both benefits and drawbacks. On one hand, the field is inclusive in its approach to different aspects of media, to different mediums, to content and practices relating to media. On the other hand, the inclusivity may result in relative distance. For example, media policy research may have little in common with an audience scholar when it comes to theories, questions or methods. European Media and Communication Research and Education Association's (ECREA) Doctoral Summer School has always sought to balance the strive for specialisation, specific themes or focuses on different corners of the media and communication studies, and the perceived need to have a general meeting place where the diverse voices could meet and at least encounter each other.

The Doctoral Summer School for 2020 was unfortunately forced to move online due to the COVID-19 pandemic and the potential for creating a joint meeting platform was challenged. Furthermore, the summer school had also to move its activities from nice European July to a frosty and dark December-February period, extending the 2020 activities into 2021. University of Tartu, instead of being able to host us in their 19th century premises, had to provide inclusive online space for our work and activities. At the same time, thanks to the online format, the summer school was able to reach out to a broad community of academic colleagues, to whom we would like to extend our warmest thank yous, as the colleagues from across the globe joined

the Big Blue Button to engage with student projects, give feedback and share their experiences.

The pandemic also made us reconsider what does it mean to do pan-European collaborations. A lot of work of the summer school related to supporting the emerging scholars, giving them space to present and discuss their work happened in smaller, more specialised groups or flows. At the same time, cross-cutting issues that bring together the field and community around us, still had an important space in the programme. For example, senior colleagues were sharing their academic life hacks and main editors of the journals were invited to share their views about academic publishing during roundtable discussions. Also, different practical workshops, e.g. research ethics, writing abstracts, self-branding in academia, and on various research methods, were held. During these sessions we really experienced how the spirit of the summer school was able to grow despite the hard conditions brought along by the pandemic. In fact, we experienced how the ideas and ideals of summer school where we strive to create spaces of sharing and caring, were expanded during those online sessions. And, to be honest, during 2020-2021, we have all needed a bit more of both.

The current special issue „Emerging topics of media and communication scholarship in Europe: alumni of the ECREA doctoral school of 2020“ contains seven articles which illustrate that the field of media studies is increasingly large and diverse, and intersects with a number of different other research fields and interests. Furthermore, we are humbled by the intelligence and curiosity of the participants of the summer school, who are willing to explore and extend the boundaries of media and communication scholarship.

In this special issue, in addition to the traditional core focus on media use and media production, the policy transfer, urban spaces, disability studies and other areas productively interact with media studies. These interactions bring attention to marginalised groups or marginalised areas corresponding to the ethos of European Media and Communication Doctoral Summer School - facilitating both productive encounters of diverse viewpoints, but also building awareness and respect to the different corners of the field. Furthermore, we really believe that the range of topics presented in the doctoral school are not only a precious indicator of the emerging objects of interest but should also be viewed as the early stage of trends for years to come. Below we will provide a short overview of all the empirical papers included in the special issue.

The first article by **Lisa Schulze** “Exploring moving interviews: A three-step approach to researching how wheelchair users navigate” makes three unique and valuable contributions to media and communication studies. First, its location within urban media spaces draws our attention to the way digital and physical spaces interconnect. The digital devices as well as analogue media provide individualised media layers that support media users in navigating the space. However, the second point that emerges from Lisa Schulze’s paper is related to the marginalised voices in media

and communication research. By working with wheelchair users and looking at the ways in which media provide a navigation layer to their lived experiences with the cities, the paper justly critiques the lack of attention on disabled media users. Taking a view that disability is socially constructed, and different from the underlying medical condition, Lisa Schulze's work brings attention to an often ignored group's media practices. The third contribution of the article is methodological. Moving interviews provide a valuable lense of looking at ways in how we can include people with diverse mobility requirements as part of our investigative practices.

The second article of the special issue, written by **Francesco Bonifacio**, continues the theme of understanding how media is layered on the physical spaces. An insider perspective from working as a food delivery rider, biking around Milano, delivering food and engaging with the different communities of riders has allowed Francesco to add some really rich and valuable experiences to the whole discussion of digital technologies, algorithms and changes within society. In this interdisciplinary study located at the intersection of work sociology and media studies showcases how algorithms produce urban space, and how navigating such space can have specific monetary value for the riders. Enacted decoding of the algorithmic platforms also changes the rider's perspective of time, proposes strategic actions in accepting and rejecting delivery work, and even creating clear winners and losers in the business. The paper is a valuable addition to the field of media studies to showcase how media use and understanding of mediated processes contribute to hierachies within professions not necessarily perceived as media-related.

The topic of algorithms is also explored in the third paper of the special issue where **Lydia Kollyri** makes an important methodological contribution by suggesting algorithm auditing method as a useful approach for critical studies of platformization. In the present paper, Lydia introduces the findings of three separate audits investigating the existence of a filter bubble on Instagram. The findings of the audits indicate that Instagram users are relatively likely to encounter more mainstream and commercial content regardless of their interests. Furthermore, the findings suggest that users who tend to follow soft topics, are also more likely to be trapped within a filter bubble. Thus, the paper not only makes an important contribution in the line of studies exploring the consequences of personalization algorithms, but also provides novel thought-provoking knowledge on the topic.

**Berit Renser's** paper provides insights into a Facebook group for spiritually inclined people who seek solutions and remedies to their daily worries and concerns, offering thereby a fascinating exploration of how therapeutic culture emerges on social media. Relying upon discourse analysis of posts, ethnographic observations, and interviews, Berit studies the motives and experiences of people who self-disclose in the group, the discursive framing of problems by both help-seekers and advice-givers, and the overall progress of self-disclosure. Berit's interdisciplinary study, which is located at the intersection of studies of the global therapeutic culture, (g)local sociocultural context and social media studies, contributes to the

academic discussion on self-disclosure and privacy on social media, suggesting that within some contexts the need for help encourages self-disclosure, with possibly unforeseen consequences for the participants' privacy. Furthermore, by introducing a concept "networked therapeutic culture" that refers to the dialogic and interactive therapeutic culture that has emerged on social media, Berit makes a valuable conceptual contribution to the field.

One cannot get passed the topic of social media also in the next paper included in the special issue. **Josephine Lehaff** draws upon semi-structured interviews and a card sorting exercise with 18-25 year old Danes (N=24) to report about their everyday news behaviors. Although previous research has raised questions about the impact of parental news modeling on children and young people's socialization into news-users in the era of individualized digital technologies, Josephine's paper provides interesting new insights on the topic. By employing the use of laughter as index of perceived face-loss pointing to sources of embarrassment in interviewees news repertoires, Josephine makes an intriguing methodological contribution. Furthermore, interpreting laughter as a paralinguistic facework, enabled Josephine to capture the fact that the young adults in her sample felt oftentimes uncomfortable with their parents' news habits.

**Bissie Anderson's** paper also deals with news consumption and audiences of news media. In particular, Bissie applies multi-method design to explore how is the audience interpellated in the pioneer journalism encoding process. In-depth interviews with 12 pioneer journalism producers from UK legacy newsrooms are triangulated with in-depth analysis of two artefacts with divergent interactivity options to study the process meaning production, in pioneer journalism UX design practices. The findings of this explorative study, suggest that pioneer producers give considerable thought about active audiences and aim to guide the user through a preferred audience experience. Thus, Bissie's paper proves highly significant in advancing our understanding of how journalists negotiate and maintain their authority in an age of active audiences and increasingly distributed news production.

In the final article of the special issue, **Marina Rossato Fernandes** investigates the perception of European Union in the Latin-American context within two institutional frameworks - the South American trade bloc Mercusor and RECAM, its supranational institution in charge of audiovisual sector. Although both institutions were inspired by the European Union, their perception of European Union as an actor differs, which in turn influences policy transfer and policy implementation processes. On the basis of qualitative document analysis, and semi-structured expert interviews, Marina shows how Mercusor's undefined image of European Union reflects in uncritical policy transfer process, while RECAM's operations are guided by its perception of the European Union as a strategic partner, seeking cooperation with mutual benefits. The article shows that the different perception of the European Union influences the process of policy development and implementation (e.g. the

bottom-up approach of RECAM and top-down approach of Mercusor) and results in limited practical implementation of stated policy goals.

Organizing the ECREA doctoral school was possible thanks to the support of many institutions. We are grateful for ECREA for offering several scholarships for the participants and for providing invaluable support for this initiative. We also want to express our gratitude for the support of the Baltic Association for Media Research (BAMR), the institute of Social Studies at the University of Tartu, and the Doctoral School of Behavioral, Social and Health Sciences. We are also thankful to Dr. Tae-Sik Kim, the editor-in-chief of *Mediální Studia/Media Studies* and the whole team behind the journal, for fruitful co-operations. We are also deeply grateful for all the participants of the doctoral school - doctoral students and senior scholars - who despite the ongoing pandemic were able to invest their time, energy, and expertise into making the 2020 ECREA doctoral school and publishing this special issue into a success.

**Andra Siibak**, member of Academia Europaea, is a Professor of Media Studies and Program Director of the Media and Communication doctoral program at the Institute of Social Studies, University of Tartu, Estonia. Her main field of research has to do with the opportunities and risks surrounding internet use, datafication of childhood, new media audiences and privacy. Together with Giovanna Mascheroni she co-authored a monograph “*Datafied Childhoods: Data Practices and Imaginaries in Children’s Lives*” (2021) published by Peter Lang. Andra was the main local organizer and one of the flow managers for the ECREA doctoral school in 2020.

**Pille Pruulmann-Vengerfeldt**, member of Academia Europaea, is a professor in media and communication, Malmö University since November 2016. She comes from University of Tartu where she obtained her PhD and worked last as a professor. Her research interests have focused on questions of cultural citizenship and participation in various online and offline contexts. She has studied engagement in museums, libraries and within the context of public broadcasting. She has also worked internet users and social applications of new technologies. She is currently the international director of European Media and Communication Doctoral Summer School and has been engaged with the summer school as student, teacher, and organizer since 2004. She has participated and been a leader of different national and international projects. She has published over a hundred articles both in journals and as book chapters and has been part of the editorial team for more than ten books.

**Risto Kunelius** is a professor in Communication Research and the director of Helsinki Inequality Initiative at the University of Helsinki. Previously he has served as a professor of journalism research and the Dean of Social Sciences and Humanities at University of Tampere. His research interests include theoretical questions of media and power, mediatization and social theory, the changing role of journalism and development of public sphere(s). He studies these issues as they intersect with contemporary, complex social and political problems. Most recently he has published on

global climate change coverage and on surveillance and journalism. He has participated in numerous doctoral summer schools as a lecturer and mentor.

**François Heinderyckx** is full professor at Université libre de Bruxelles (ULB) where he teaches media sociology and political communication. His research interests include journalism and news media, political communication, audience studies and media literacy. He is a member of Academia Europaea and a Fellow of the International Communication Association. He was among the founding members of the European Communication Research and Education Association (ECREA) in 2005 and was the President of ECREA from its creation until 2012. He was also the 2013-2014 President of the International Communication Association (ICA). He is the Series Editor of the Wiley Blackwell – ICA International Encyclopedias of Communication and a member of the Advisory or Editorial boards of a dozen international academic journals.

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