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Introduction to Special Issue

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INTRODUCTION TO SPECIAL ISSUE

CURRENT TRENDS IN EUROPEAN MEDIA AND COMMUNICATION RESEARCH

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SPECIAL ISSUE BASED ON THE SELECTED PAPERS FROM ECREA MEDIA AND COMMUNICATION DOCTORAL SUMMER SCHOOL 2022

As many stories online will tell you — life as a PhD student is hard. It is wrought with challenges of complicated theories, long nights in laboratories and poor pay. However, every year, large number of brightest students still choose this hard road to high academic specialisation as the life of a PhD student can also be rewarding. In September 2021, 46 of these people currently pursuing their PhD in media and communication or related areas combated Zoom fatigue and challenged themselves to building life-long academic networks of support and encouragement. The ECREA European Media and Communication Doctoral Summer School has changed forms and format, moved from one country to another and combated COVID-19 induced isolation by bringing people together online to joy of learning, belonging, and recognition. Thus, the 2021 Summer School was organized by the University of Cadiz and the Interuniversity Doctorate in Communication but, due to the pandemic, it had to be held online. Despite these circumstances, it was attended by 46 doctoral students and 36 doctors from 26 different countries throughout Europe and the world.

The ECREA Doctoral Summer School has many strengths, among which is that doctoral students at European universities who attend this event can maintain close interaction (even held online) with experienced researchers from different points of Europe. Thus, they can enrich their approach to their objects of study. They also interact directly with other young researchers, so they are able to contrast their respective lines of research and even establish long-term academic relationships.

But another of the indisputable strengths of this Doctoral School is that the different researchers who participate in it, both the senior ones and those who are in an

earlier phase of their research career, can thus obtain a certain panoramic view of the lines of research which are being currently used by young researchers in European universities, since around fifty doctoral projects are presented at the ECREA Doctoral Summer School every year. The doctoral projects selected for presentation and discussion in this Doctoral School constitute a sample, not representative but indicative, of the lines used by research in Europe. The objects of study built by young people in the development of their doctoral theses show the enormous diversity of phenomena included in the extensive field of media and communication studies, and also highlight the essential role that communication have in our societies. In addition, these objects of study, as well as the focuses and methodological approaches with which they are addressed, reflect the orientations that have enriched research in communication science during the last decades. But, at the same time, the creative curiosity of young researchers to scientifically examine and understand the communication phenomena of our time — inscribed in the contexts of their daily lives, whose examination benefits from contributions and perspectives from other disciplinary fields which illuminate and broaden the understanding of contemporary communications, should be highlighted. And, sometimes, they do so with innovative methodological orientations — especially, with those that result from the application of computational methods to communication phenomena largely conditioned by their digital dimension.

This special issue gives a small selection of fresh voices from today's European media and communication scholarship. We hope that this special issue brings to you some insights of the high quality, interesting, relevant and timely research done in different institutions. Some of the papers are written by the students themselves, others co-authored with colleagues. This too reflects the current state of the media and communication research. It is not only about the solitary journey to academic excellence. Co-authoring shows that often PhD projects tackle research questions and issues that require pooling together resources, collaboration in question positioning and analysis. A PhD is also a journey from apprentice to mastery and these days, increasingly mastery means also to be able to work together.

The papers in this special issue have been through rigorous double-blind peer-review process, but in this instance, we have also seen how academia is slowly changing. Instead of unreasonable and narcissistic Reviewer2-s who have become another symbol of academic life, we hope our authors have encountered thoughtful, considerate and helpful reviews that have accomplished the goal of lifting up what is worthy and valuable in the papers. We, as editors, are grateful to many colleagues and proud of the process that has managed to remain supportive and encouraging despite exercising also rigorous quality control.

It is hard to find a unifying label to cover the diversity of scholarship presented in this special issue, so hopefully you will find that these “Current trends in European media and communication research” are both inspiring and encouraging. The special issue contains six papers with a broad variety of topics and approaches and coming

from different European countries. Below you will find a brief overview of the six papers.

For the first paper of the special issue, Dorien Luyckx, PhD student from ECREA summer school, and Amber Verstraeten carried out a survey study among Flemish journalism students to understand their position and preparedness for future in entrepreneurial journalism. In this paper, the entrepreneurial journalism is investigated through three aspects: capitalization — being involved in turning assets into capital, innovation — building innovative solutions to current challenges of news media, and individualization freelancing and self-employment. They conclude that innovation is still seen mostly as technical, thus less in the domain of journalists. Students see that the lines between different departments and different roles are blurring, but it is yet not clear how this will affect their future work life. The schools in Flemish-speaking Belgium prepare them for multi-media, social media, journalistic and writing skills, but they are less prepared with business, marketing and technological skills. While the surveyed students believe that it is also their future role to innovate to help journalism to survive, they are less equipped to tackle innovation as a business-challenge. The students seem to have realistic understanding of job opportunities — freelancing is by many seen as inevitable part of their careers, but they have a less clear connection with the idea that being self-employed may also mean that they will need to market their own skills. This important study highlights some discrepancies between job-market realities and student expectations while also demonstrating levels of reflexivity and awareness among the future journalists.

The second author in the special issue is Mihhail Kremez, a PhD student of media and communication at the Institute of the Social Studies, University of Tartu (Estonia). In his paper “Dividing and Uniting News Frames: Framing Russia-related Border Issues in the Estonian, Latvian, Finnish, US Public Service Media and Chinese State Media”, he examines the frames of Russia-related border issues in the public service media of Estonia, Latvia, Finland, the US, and the state media of China, which had or have territorial disputes/conflicts with Russia. This work underlines the importance that past and present tensions between Russia and its neighboring countries can be reflected in frames that increase the differences between them. Although positive frames were also detected. Hence, the responsibility that frame-setters have in this regard is relevant.

Ona Anglada-Pujol is a PhD student in Communication and a member of the MEDIUM research group at the Communication Department of Pompeu Fabra University (Barcelona, Spain). Her paper on “ ‘Our fans are gonna go crazy when they know we are together’: fandom identities and self-representation in YouTubers slash fiction” explores slash fiction written about four gaming YouTubers. Namely, texts that narrate fictional romantic and sexual stories between two male characters or celebrities who define themselves as heterosexuals. She use the thematic analysis to examine the fandom self-representation, their role and identity as fans, and the portrayal of the relationship with the YouTubers. Ona Anglada's study deals with a type

of subject that has not yet been deeply studied, relying on certain scientific orientations. The results show, among other issues, the interest of youtubers in slash fiction and the high degree of acceptance among the majority of fans of LGTBQ+ identities, compared to a minority of toxic fans. Fans give themselves much agency to intervene in the YouTubers' lives and expect transparency and authenticity from them.

The research of Daniela Jaramillo-Dent focuses on the mediated (self)representations of immigration on social media platforms including Instagram and TikTok. She is a Doctoral Candidate pursuing a joint PhD in Communication at the University of Huelva (Spain) and Erasmus University Rotterdam (Netherlands). In her paper, entitled "Algorithmic (in)visibility tactics among immigrant tiktokers in the US and Spain", she explores migratory narratives of othering, belonging, identity, and minority celebrity on TikTok. More specifically, the paper analyses the specific challenges faced by immigrant content creators on TikTok and the way they use their knowledge of platforms to negotiate their algorithmic positioning. Drawing from a 14-month digital ethnography involving content created by 53 Latin American immigrant tiktokers in the US and Spain, Jaramillo-Dent analyzes 80 videos to identify the strategies deployed in order to having their content promoted by TikTok's algorithmic feed. The author detects well-known tactics, such as the use of specific hashtags, but also more subversive schemes. Jaramillo-Dent is Key Regional Leader in the TikTok Cultures Research Network and a member of FemLab, a research collaborative focusing on the Feminist approaches to labor collectives.

Helena Dedecek Gertz is a PhD researcher at the Faculty of Education of the University of Hamburg and a lecturer in Media Studies at the University of Groningen; Florian Süßer holds an MSc in Psychology from University of Hamburg. In their paper "Migration and educational projects online: a topic modelling approach of discussions on social media groups", they discuss the prevalence of topics relating to education in information exchanges on Facebook groups of Brazilians migrants to Germany. Against the background of the mediatization theory, social networks and transnational education research, they conduct an explorative quantitative study based on a text-as-data approach on the terms of conversation of this Brazilian that live -or want to live- in Germany. This paper by Helena Dedecek Gertz and Florian Süßer explores the topics of conversation that certain communities that are seen as unidimensional in our societies maintain; in this case, the community of Brazilian migrants related to educational issues.

The final paper of the special issue by Nils Wandels, PhD student from ECREA's summer school, Jelle Mast and Hilde Van den Bulck employ Weberian theoretical framework and concepts of bureaucratic ideal type, Herrschaft and Lebensordnung to examine the organisational properties of two international media conglomerates to discuss limits to journalistic autonomy. Wandels and his colleagues argue that such analysis helps to understand how independent modes of production are affected. They have interviewed chief editors to understand how autonomy is influenced by the authoritative control exercised in organizations (Herrschaft) and how

rational-legal authority of bureaucracy is playing being internalised in a particular organisational rational (Lebensordnung). They find that formalised rationality is present in targets and evaluation procedures, budget allocation and division of labour. The central management does not control what journalists write, but they are present and embedded in the organisational structure, expressed via functional synergy, cross-functional harmony and internal budgetary competition. The chain of command is top-down and news organisations are highly bureaucratised. The centralised management's focus on economic or business rationale is at odds with the professional logic, but continuous exposure to this organisational rationale means that newsrooms nevertheless are compliant with the rationale. Key performance indicators are used to supposedly measure journalistic quality and confirms the similar boundary blurring that was discussed in Luyckx and Verstraeten's paper. We believe that the paper makes a strong case for further investigations of newsrooms with the help of Max Weber's analytical framework.

We hope that this special issue provides an interesting overview of some of the research proposals coming from the fresh blood of media and communication scholarship that participated in the ECREA Doctoral Summer School 2021.

David Selva Ruiz (david.selva@uca.es) is an associate professor in advertising and public relations and coordinator of the Interuniversity Doctorate in Communication at the University of Cadiz. He holds a PhD from the University of Seville with a thesis about music video as a commercial communication tool. For his thesis, he received the SGAE / Author Foundation Research Award and the PhD Prize from University of Seville. His research focuses mainly on the intersection between new trends and tools in commercial communication and popular culture, with dozens of academic publications in books and journals. Therefore, his research addresses topics such as music video, videogame, the use of data for creativity, or advertising applications of virtual reality.

Miguel de Aguilera (deaguilera@uma.es) is Professor of Communications at University of Malaga. He has been Dean of the School of Communication Sciences at University of Malaga (1996-2002) and General Director (Deputy Rector) of Communication and Information at this University (2004-2011). He holds (2006) the International UNESCO Chair on Communications at Universities of Grenoble and Lyon (France), has been Visiting Researcher or Visiting Professor at several Universities (San Jose State University -California-, Paris 8, Sheffield, Vienna, and others). General Secretary of the Research Committee on Communication, Knowledge and Culture of the International Sociological Association from 1990 to 1994. Member of the European Institute for the Media (Manchester-Düsseldorf) (1994-2000). He has researched, taught, advised and cooperated with Spanish, European, American and African universities. Author of more than 100 publications with editorials and

journals from Germany, United Kingdom, Italy, France, Cameroon, Burkina Faso, United States, Mexico, Brazil and Austria, as well as Spanish. His research focuses in digital culture, popular culture and its users.

Pille Pruulmann-Vengerfeldt (pille.pruulmann.vengerfeldt@mau.se), a member of Academia Europaea, is a professor in media and communication at Malmö University. Methodologically, she takes a critical, creative and action-oriented approach. Her research examines how digital technologies and their impact on our everyday lives are co-created through cultural, professional and interpersonal contexts. Much of Pille's recent research efforts are dedicated to understanding datafication of people in museums and media. She is treasurer of the European Communication Research and Education Association (ECREA) and the international director of the European Media and Communication Doctoral Summer School.

She blogs at <https://pillepv.voog.com/> and tweets @pillepv