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INTRODUCTION TO SPECIAL ISSUE

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Surely, you have heard of grandfather's axe - the one that his grandchild inherits, but, over time, the handle becomes brittle and needs to be replaced. And after some more time, the ax-head needs to be updated. But the axe is still the grandfather's axe as the spirit of the material thing is the one that gets carried across the time. And thus, the media and communication summer school has slowly transformed. From the initial idea of six European universities meeting and educating the PhD candidates over thirty years ago, the summer school has transformed into the current form of one of the critical initiatives of the European Communication Research and Education Association (ECREA). While the formats have shifted and the locations have changed, the spirit of the ECREA European Media and Communication Doctoral Summer School is the same.

The spirit of the Summer School is in the collaborative, supportive and engaged environment. While we have new students every year, new locations (as well as the digital challenges in the COVID-19 pandemic), new local organisers, and new (and returning) senior scholars - the central idea of supporting the PhD projects, giving extensive individual feedback and celebrating the diversity of media and communication studies is still at the core. Some participating professors have been summer school students and are eagerly returning to pass on the great experiences of learning and togetherness. Other lecturers are new to the experience and contribute for the first time to the supportive and warm spirit of the Summer School, often wishing that they would have had similar opportunities during their own studies.

Some would say that academia is like a cult - you have to believe in the collective as a quality assurance mechanism (thus the trust in peer-review processes), you have to believe in the greater good of your work (thus putting up with the lower pay and often unreasonable working hours), and you have to believe in collaborations. The cult-likeness of academia has a negative connotation - it is about very clever people doing things that would, in many other fields, be considered abnormal. While ECREA Summer School has a very open approach to learning, participation, and media and communication as a field, we, too, have a cult-like invitation. By becoming part of the community, the PhD candidates will hopefully want to pass on the good experiences they received at the Summer School. We are a cult that believes in friendship, collaboration, constructive critique and being there for each other. So, whenever the next social platform reminds you of your "memories", you can say - two/five/ten/fifteen

years on, older, wiser, but still going strong with the same gang - the ECREA Summer School gang.

European Media and Communication Doctoral Summer School does not have a theme or a sub-field focus that would prioritise one topic of investigation over the other. Nevertheless, we can explore some topical trends and shifts in the focus of the student work. These can be related to the shifts in global research interests but also to the perceived strengths of the hosting universities. The 2022 summer school, hosted by the University of Cádiz, had more students than usual interested in film, culture, and creative practice. In 2023, the trend shifted when Roskilde University took over the baton of organising the event. We don't know what will be the trending themes of the coming summer schools, but we do know that the essence and the spirit of the experience will remain the same.

Although the University of Cádiz had already organised the ECREA European Media and Communication Doctoral Summer School 2021, the COVID-19 pandemic caused this edition to be held online. Therefore, the 2022 edition was the first face-to-face edition that was held in person at the Cádiz Campus, located in the city of the same name. The event took place from July 24-30, and at last it was possible to exchange Moodle and Zoom for the sun of Cádiz.

This edition received 84 applications, the highest number to that date. 48 doctoral students were accepted, of whom 40 finally attended the Summer School. The students came from 33 different universities and 17 countries around Europe and beyond: Czech Republic, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Ireland, Latvia, Lithuania, Norway, Poland, Serbia, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, United Kingdom and USA. Likewise, there were 23 lecturers from many different countries participating in the Summer School: Víctor Álvarez-Rodríguez, Lucía Caro-Castaño, Miguel de Aguilera, John Downey, Ib Tunby Gulbrandsen, Nazan Haydari, François Heinderyckx, Gloria Jiménez-Marín, Jesús Jiménez-Varea, Bente Kalsnes, Herminder Kaur, Aurora Labio-Bernal, María Lamuedra-Graván, Juan Luis Manfredi-Sánchez, David Montero-Sánchez, Sine Nørholm Just, Evandro Oliveira, Pille Pruulmann-Vengerfeldt, Irena Reifova, Lorena Romero-Domínguez, David Selva-Ruiz, Andra Siibak, and Simone Tosoni.

In this edition, in addition to the feedback sessions for the students' doctoral projects, which constitute the core of the Summer School, the participants were able to enjoy an extensive calendar of seven days of activities, including seven practical workshops, six conferences, three round tables, several participatory sessions, and a social/leisure program. In addition to these intense and fulfilling days, the participants of the summer school had an opportunity to propose an abstract for the summer school special issue in Media Studies. Such an opportunity has been warmly grabbed by the early career researchers participating in the summer school as for many submitting ones' abstract for a special issue and then putting together a full journal manuscript marks their first international peer reviewed contribution to the field. They very first step on their academic road.

The papers selected for the present special issue of the ECREA doctoral summer school explore the changes happening in the present-day mediatized and digitalized society through different angles and qualitative approaches, like semi-structured interviews (Skolmeistere, Kapperler et al), mini focus-groups (Solverson), multimodal discourse analysis (Castellví-Lloveras) and thematic analysis (Martinez-Sanchez). Each of the contributions introduces fascinating new insights enabling us to make sense of the multifaceted and nuanced nature of digital resistance (Kapperlet et al), political engagement on social media (Solverson), issues related to online self-presentation (Skolmeister), or the contested nature of femininity (Castellvi-Lloveras, Martinez-Sanchez). Below we will provide a brief outline of the content of each paper.

In the first paper of the special issue, the co-authored team, led by the Summer School student Kiran Kappeler, investigated the manifestations of digital resistance among Swiss adults. In their paper “A Mix of Paranoia and Rebelliousness’—Manifestations, Motives, and Consequences of Resistance to Digital Media”, they demonstrate that digital resistance is more accessible for individuals with higher digital capital. Digital resistance can manifest in different ways. In their article, Kappeler and colleagues identify niche resisters, situational resisters, and discontinued resisters. Resistance is motivated by personal well-being but also by resistance to being subjected to surveillance and data capitalism. It is hard to say ‘no’ when digital technologies are deeply entangled with everyday life, and digital resistance must be thus seen as a privilege. Considering resistance as a privilege does have policy-making consequences as the digital-first public service provision needs to be sometimes challenged, and Kappeler et al. provide valuable insights into the practice of resistance.

“Assessing Worthwhileness of Political Contributions on Social Media: A Study of Young Adults in Norway”, by Elisabeth Solverson, is the second paper of this special issue. It delves into the manner in which young adults evaluate their interest in political content disseminated through social media platforms. Conducted through qualitative mini-focus groups, the study reveals a multifactor worthwhileness equation that influences users’ decisions on engaging with political contributions. Participants considered factors such as personal goals, contextual fit, and perceived contributor intentions. The study emphasizes the complexity of these assessments, influenced by individual values and circumstances. The author introduces a worthwhileness equation, encompassing aspects like public connection, entertainment value, discursive value, impact, contributor intention, and contextual fit. The findings contribute to understanding how individuals actively negotiate and assess political content on social media, highlighting the intricate dynamics of online political engagement.

In the paper titled “Authenticity and Multiplicity: Understandings of Authenticity in the Era of Social Media”, Velta Skolmeistere explores the intricate relationship between authenticity, multiplicity, and social media. Conducting 20 semi-structured interviews in Riga, Latvia, the study delves into how individuals perceive and define

authenticity in both real life and in the context of social media. The research reveals nuanced perspectives on authenticity, challenging the dichotomy between „the real“ and „virtual self“. It highlights the impact of social media on self-presentation and the complexity of authenticity, emphasising the need for empirical evidence in understanding the interplay of these concepts. The study concludes that social media, while challenging the representation of one’s essence, offers the potential for authenticity in expressing one’s thoughts.

The paper “‘Just kidding... or not?’: Ambiguity, failure, and humor in the representation of influencers’ successful femininity on TikTok” by Maria Castellví-Lloveras explores the role of humor in the self-presentation of three top-ranked Spanish TikTok influencers. The findings of the empirical study, based upon the qualitative analysis of humor techniques used in 300 Tiktok videos, reveals that humor is not only used as a technique for fostering more authentic and relatable self, but also a way to “navigate gender expectations connected to the ideal of the successful femininity” (Castellvi-Lloveras 2023: 120). In addition, Castellvi-Lloveras’ findings indicate that studied influencers were not only using humor to cope with negative comments and hate speech but also made use of self-mockery, irony and irreverent humor when covering controversial topics (e.g. explicit sexual desire), helping thereby to expand the limits of ideal femininity.

The final paper of the special issue is also exploring the views on gender and femininity. In the anglo-american literature, there are plenty of discussions of how commodification and consumerism are strongly entangled with post-feminist ideas. However, the paper by María Martínez-Sánchez fills the gap of missing knowledge of the Spanish-speaking world. In her study “Valentine’s Day and Post-feminism in Vogue Spain’s Coverage” Martínez-Sánchez illustrates how the holiday is an active celebration of consumerism, expanding the idea of love from narrowly couples-oriented concept to celebrating singlehood as well through self-love and related purchases of beauty and self-care products. Similar to previous studies, Martínez-Sánchez finds that even in Spain, Valentine’s Day is mainly for upper-middle-class heteronormative couples who have distinct gender roles and thus distinct preferences for presents - beauty and fashion for women, sports and tech for men. In the entanglement of post-feminism with neoliberal ideals, women are “allowed” to buy their own presents should there not be a significant other, and they should indulge in self-care if it means they will be able to purchase the necessary gifts for themselves.

We thank the authors of these five interesting contributions and the whole Media Studies team for providing us this perfect venue for sharing this scholarship. We also thank all the anonymous reviewers for their expert feedback and for contributing to the summer school spirit.

We hope that the media and communication studies community will find this special issue informative and useful. Furthermore, we hope that these articles excite your imagination and enthusiasm about the future of media and communication scholarship as they did ours.

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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

Andra Siibak (andra.siibak@ut.ee) is a Professor of Media Studies, Deputy Head of Research and Development at the Institute of Social Studies, University of Tartu, Estonia. Her research focuses on opportunities and risks surrounding internet use, datafication of childhood, dataveillance in education, and issues of 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 is a member of Film, Media, and Visual Studies section of Academia Europaea and currently serves as the General Secretary of European Communication Research and Education Association (ECREA).