

CURRENT PERSPECTIVES ON COMMUNICATION AND MEDIA RESEARCH

Edited by Laura Peja, Nico Carpentier,
Fausto Colombo, Maria Francesca Murru,
Simone Tosoni, Richard Kilborn, Leif Kramp,
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Introduction: Current perspectives on communication and media research

*Laura Peja, Maria Francesca Murru, Simone Tosoni,
and Nico Carpentier*

1. About the book

This book, the thirteenth in the Researching and Teaching Communication Book Series launched in 2006, stems from the communal intellectual work of the lecturers, students and alumni of the 2017 edition of the European Media and Communication Doctoral Summer School (SuSo). The first part of this collective endeavour aims to shed light on key issues of the present scenarios of media engagement, and in particular on the transformations and dynamics of the public sphere (section I); on the current, multidirectional and diversified trajectories of participation and engagement (section II); and on the present passage from traditional media to networks (section III).

At the same time, the book gives an account of the work done at the summer school, and in particular the plurality of research interests and analytical perspectives that the SuSo community values as its main asset. The European Media and Communication Doctoral Summer School is in fact run by a consortium of 21 European universities, it brings together PhD students who come every year from more than 30 different European and extra-European institutions: it therefore represents an arena where different disciplinary traditions and methodological backgrounds within media studies can get in touch, debate and cooperate in order to advance our understanding of media systems and communication processes. The reader can get an insight into the richness and variety of the different perspectives on dialogue within SuSo from the second part of the book, dedicated – as is customary in the series – to the PhD projects' abstracts of the students participating in the summer school. Taken together, these abstracts represent a good sample of the ongoing research of the next generation of media scholars, and an overview of the current trends in media and communication studies.

From among the students, six (Kristian Jeff Cortez Agustin, Lorleen Farrugia, Reinhard Anton Handler, Zsofia Nagy, Alvaro Oleart, Erika Theissen Walukiewicz) have been selected to develop their research into a full paper: together with nine lectures' chapters, and three chapters from SuSo's alumni (Victor Navarro-Remesal and Ignacio Bergillos, Binakuromo Ogbebor, Aida Martori Muntsant), selected through an open call, their works comprise the first part of the book, divided into three thematic sections.

The first thematic section is dedicated to the media and the public sphere. **Fausto Colombo** opens the section, focusing on the case of an epoch-making image: photos of the three-year-old Alan Kurdi dead on the shore, to clarify the steps of cultural elaboration and a model of spreading and sharing images (photographs in particular) via the Web, underlining the differences between the circulation of images through traditional media and the circulation typical of the digital media environment. The second chapter, by **François Heinderyckx**, moves the focus of the section to the question of the European public sphere. The articulation between regional, national and European public and media spheres forms a range of complex configurations that add to the complexity of a matter which remains crucial. The subsequent two chapters are also dedicated to the European public sphere, from the perspective of European academia and university policies. **Victor Navarro-Remesal** and **Ignacio Bergillos** propose the idea that academic-related spaces, such as the Erasmus programme, can serve as success stories for recouping the European ideal and present Suso itself as a facilitator that shapes the professional identities of communication researchers in a shared European space. As such, this kind of initiative can play a key role in the European endeavour itself. Along these lines, in his chapter, **Hannu Nieminen** launches a direct and vigorous call to European universities, inviting them to defend the crucial role and identity of academia against the transformations that, in the last 20 years, have turned the democratic and culture-oriented vocation of European higher education into an increasingly market-driven enterprise. The next contribution, by **Binakuromo Ogbebor**, explores, with content and discourse analyses, the paradigm repair strategy of minimization used in media policy debates, and underlines the implications of such coverage: promoting inequality and reducing the quality of debates, this weak media policy does not seem to be able to guarantee a democratic public sphere. **Alvaro Oleart** continues the debate about the lack of a single European public sphere, highlighting how the media reporting of political issues still remains largely based on the national level, despite the wide range of competences that have been transferred from the national to the European Union level. **Pille Pruilmann-Vengerfeldt** and **Annalisa Pulga** close the section with a literature review study on the role of social media in shaping health-related social norms. The authors introduce a peculiar methodology of analysis called *Preferred*

Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA), probing its applicability in media and communication studies.

The second section of the book deals with the current trajectories of participation and engagement. In the first chapter, **Bart Cammaerts** presents an encompassing conceptual framework for the circuit of protest to study the role of media, communication and mediation in contentious politics, reflecting at the same time on the methodological implications and challenges of this approach. **Nico Carpentier** offers a theoretical reflection on antagonism and agonism. These concepts have in fact become popular in the field of media and communication studies, being seen as particularly apt to capture the logics of conflict, the construction of self and other, and the relationship between conflict and democracy. In the chapter that follows, **Kristian Jeff Cortez Agustin** turns his gaze to the Asian context with a visual essay that focuses on a pilot project of participatory photography done in Manila to promote and critically reflect on the recognition of an ASEAN (Association of Southeast Asian Nations) identity. **Leif Kramp** presents a journalism project carried out in the city of Hamburg, Germany, to develop innovative location-aware storytelling formats for urban reporting. These formats aim to produce, distribute to and engage audiences with local news. **Zsofia Nagy**, in turn, move her focus to Hungary, where research in 2015–16 focused on three different activists' responses to government anti-refugee propaganda and politics: 1) a counter-billboard campaign criticising the government, 2) a grassroots humanitarian movement and 3) a local protest movement against a refugee camp. The findings show that the application of mediation theory to contentious action in illiberal democracies allows for a nuanced and multi-layered understanding of opportunities and constraints of such action. The last contribution to this second section, from **Erika Theissen Walukiewicz**, is based on in-depth interviews with documentary subjects and addresses participation in Swedish television documentaries, looking beyond professional ethical frameworks to propose a receptive and context-sensitive reflection on media ethics.

The third and last section of the book offers insights into the present paths from traditional media to networks, opening with research on pre-adolescents' understanding of risks in digital media, conducted by **Lorleen Farrugia**. The research is based on six focus groups with Maltese children aged 9 to 12. Using Social Representation Theory, the analysis shows evidence of cognitive biases in the way children situate themselves and others, and this helps to identify the digital literacy skills that children need to learn. In the second chapter of the section, **Reinhard Anton Handler** takes a critical look at networks as a research axiom. Focusing on the margins of networks and personal entry points, the author reflects on his own research practice using digital as well as ethnographic methods. **Aida Martori Muntsant** describes the situation of public local television in Catalonia

with regard to adaptation to the digital era, using a qualitative methodology based on the analysis of official documentation, interviews, non-participant observation and a focus group. The results demonstrate that local media have less capability to respond to current social and political challenges, especially due to the lack of funding to develop new technologies and strategies. In the following chapter, **Michael Skey** investigates the 2014 Eurovision Song Contest, held in Copenhagen, drawing on ethnographic materials and focusing on the production of an event as a specific type of TV format. Moving beyond textual analyses, the author pays particular attention to the struggles that take place between different interest groups (organisers, producers, participants, fans) and expands the understanding of the significance that media events have today. **Simone Tosoni** and **Valentina Turrini** close the section and the first part of the book, presenting preliminary findings of an ongoing case study of female solo-travelling in Italy. Proposing some methodological considerations vis-à-vis addressing media activities in social practices, the chapter seeks to contribute to the attempt to decentre media studies advocated by authors like David Morley, Shaun Moores or Nick Couldry.

The second part of the book opens with the lyrics of a song composed by Yellow flow students for a joint-flow presentation on the score of Abba's famous *Mamma mia*. The song is published here to give a taste of the creativity, camaraderie and intellectual fun that Suso always stimulates, creating an ideal environment for networking among and between students and lecturers.

The book includes a series of photographs taken during different activities at the summer school. Our special thanks go to François Heinderyckx for the photographic material.

2. Background of the European Media and Communication Doctoral Summer School

The summer school was established in the early 1990s by a consortium of ten (Western) European universities, being initiated by the Universities of Stendhal-Grenoble III (Grenoble, France) and Westminster (UK). From then on, these participating universities have organised annual summer schools for PhD students in the field of media and communication studies, lasting for one or two weeks and taking place in a wide range of locations, including Grenoble, Lund, Barcelona, London, Helsinki, Tartu, Ljubljana and Bremen. In 2016, the summer school moved to the Università Cattolica del Sacro Cuore in Milan, where it was also held in 2017, from 24 July to 5 August.

Including the Università Cattolica del Sacro Cuore, Milan (IT), 21 universities participate in the consortium: Ankara Üniversitesi (TR), Universitat Autònoma

de Barcelona (ES), Universitetet i Bergen – UiB (NO), Universität Bremen (DE), Eötvös Loránd Tudományegyetem – ELTE, Budapest (HU), Helsingin Yliopisto (FI), Jönköping University – JU (SE), Univerzita Karlova, Prague (CZ), Univerza v Ljubljani (SI), London School of Economics & Political Science – LSE (UK), Loughborough University (UK), Lunds Universitet (SE), Roskilde Universitet (DK), Université Stendhal-Grenoble III (FR), University of Stirling (UK), Tampereen Yliopisto (FI), Tartu Ülikool (EE), Vrije Universiteit Brussel – VUB (BE), Vytauto Didžiojo Universitetas – VMU, Kaunas (LT) and University of Westminster (UK). In 2017, the affiliated partner of the programme was again the European Communication Research and Education Association (ECREA). ECREA also supported participation in the summer school with the award of two grants for students.

The central goals of the summer school are:

- a. to provide innovative mutual support for doctoral studies in the field of media and communication, with additional support from the European Communication Research and Education Association (ECREA);
- b. to stimulate bilateral and multilateral cooperation between consortium partner universities in the areas of doctoral studies, teaching and research;
- c. to provide a forum for critical dialogue between academics on the cultural and technological challenges posed by media globalisation and convergence, focusing on the sociopolitical as well as the cultural implications of these challenges;
- d. to promote a respectful but critical dialogue between academic researchers and representatives of civilian society, the media industry and government institutions.

The summer school adheres to a number of principles: student-orientedness is the most important one. The PhD projects of participating students are the kernel of the summer school, and its main aim is to enhance the academic quality of each individual project. In contrast to many other summer schools, the main task of instructional staff is not to lecture, but to provide support to the participants on their PhD trajectories.

The summer school provides this support through structured, high-quality and multi-voiced feedback on the work of each individual PhD student, combined with numerous opportunities for informal dialogue. The feedback consists of a series of extensively elaborated analyses of the strengths and weaknesses of PhD projects, which allows PhD students to structurally improve the quality of their academic work. Although the feedback is provided by experts in the field of media and communication studies, these authoritative voices never become authoritarian, and the autonomy of the participants is never ignored. Moreover, feedback is always multi-voiced: different lecturers and participants contribute to the analysis of each

individual PhD project, enhancing the richness of the feedback and allowing a diversity of perspectives to be articulated.

The summer school combines a constructive-supportive nature with a critical perspective. During feedback sessions, the evaluation consists of a balanced overview of the qualities and problems of a doctoral research and publication project, in combination with options that can be used to overcome these problems. Moreover, the workshops and lectures are intended to support the future academic careers of participants by allowing them to acquire the necessary academic and self-management skills. The atmosphere of the summer school is fundamentally non-competitive, as the talents of all participants are acknowledged, and participants and lecturers act as peers, cherishing academic collegiality and collaborative work.

The summer school also expresses the utmost respect for academic diversity. It recognizes the existence of a plurality of schools, approaches, theories, paradigms, methods and cultures within academia, which makes it suitable for conversation and dialogue, not conversion and conflict. Its commitment to diversity in approaches can only be made possible through an equally strong commitment to academic rigour, thoroughness, responsibility, honesty and quality.

Finally, the summer school aims to stimulate connectedness. First of all, it looks to build long-term academic networks, enabling future collaborations at an international/ European level. The need for intellectual exchange within academia and the importance of transcending frontiers are widely acknowledged. The summer school also cultivates a deep respect for the localized context in which it operates, at the urban and national level of the hosting city, thus avoiding disconnection from civil society, business and the state.

In order to uphold these principles, the 14-day 2017 SuSo was based on a combination of lectures, training workshops, student workshops and working visits.

The core format of the summer school is based on so-called feedback-workshops, which are oriented towards providing doctoral students with structured, high-quality and multi-voiced feedback as aforementioned. To this end, the following specific procedure was followed:

After their applications are approved, participating doctoral students upload their 10-page papers to the intranet of the summer school website. On the basis of these papers, doctoral students are then divided into three groups ('flows'), and each student is assigned a lecturer-respondent and a fellow participant-respondent. Moreover, a so-called 'flow-manager' (a member of the academic summer school staff) is also assigned to each of the flows. These flow-managers coordinate the activities of the feedback-workshop flows for the duration of the summer school.

During the feedback workshops, each doctoral student presents his or her project, which is then commented upon by a fellow participant-respondent, a lecturer-respondent and a flow-manager, and finally discussed by all participants. At the

end of the series of feedback workshops, a joint workshop is organised, where the diversity of paradigmatic, theoretical and methodological approaches is discussed, combined with intellectual lessons given at the summer school.

In addition, the training workshops are a crucial pedagogical tool. These workshops provide the doctoral students with practical training on issues related to making posters, publishing, abstract-writing, comparative research, literature reviews, oral presentation skills, communication of scientific topics to lay audiences, interactive teaching to larger groups, interrogating sources and creative online writing. They are combined with a number of lectures related to specific content, focusing on set theories or concepts. Finally, the customary field excursions give the participants more insights into the hosting country's media structures, politics, culture and history.

3. The scholars involved in the summer school

In 2017, 42 doctoral students participated in the European Media and Communication Doctoral Summer School, originating from 23 countries: Belgium (3), Bulgaria (1), Canada (1), Cyprus (1), Czech Republic (1), Estonia (1), Finland (3), France (1), Germany (1), Hong Kong (2), Hungary (1), Ireland (1), Italy (2), Kenya (1), Latvia (1), Malta (1), Norway (1), Portugal (1), Slovenia (1), Spain (4), Sweden (6), Turkey (1), UK (6). All of their abstracts, and a selection of six chapters based on their work, are included in this book.

The blue flow was joined by Yazan Badran, Dennis Braunsdorf, Federica Cavaletti, Zaki Habibi, Martin Hall, Reinhard Handler, Kira Janina Hußing, Francesca Moretti, Annaliina Niitamo, Filipa Oliveira, Gianfranco Polizzi, Myriam Raffle, Liisa Sömersalu, Erika Theissen Walukiewicz.

The yellow flow consisted of Kristian Jeff Agustin, Baiba Baikovska, Niki Cheong, Xavier Andrés Cortell, John Magnus R. Dahl, Kate Gilchrist, David Katiambo, Alessandro Nani, Alvaro Oleart, Elisa Paz Pérez, Marko Ribač, Maria Sjögren, Guillem Suau.

The green flow grouped together Marine Aznar, Yi Ding, Martina Dobosiová, Lorleen Farrugia, Pau Lluís Gumiel, Ilmari Hiltunen, Zsófia Nagy, Thais de Oliveira Sardá, Alla Rybina, Markos Souropetis, Theodore Spassov, Jeannine Teichert, Salla Tuomola, Uğur Yağan, Derya Yükses.

The summer school hosted 20 lecturers from partner universities all over Europe: Montse Bonet, Michael Bruun Andersen, Bart Cammaerts, Roberta Carpani, Nico Carpentier, Fausto Colombo, Maria Heller, Richard Kilborn, Risto Kunelius,

Anthony McNicholas, Hannu Nieminen, Tobias Olsson, Dominique Pasquier, Pille Pruulmann-Vengerfeldt, Irena Reifová, Michael Skey, Burcu Sümer, Ilija Tomanić Trivundža, Karsten Wolf. François Heinderyckx was also present, as a lecturer and ECREA representative.

In addition to the activities of the summer school lecturers and workshops, the programme included a visit to *OpenKnowledge*, an international consulting company focused on digital transformation, based in Milan. The organisers would like to thank Rosario Sica and Chiara Colombo for making it possible.

This year, Fausto Colombo was the local director of the summer school, and Simone Tosoni, Maria Francesca Murru and Laura Peja were the local organisers. The local team was supported by an international director, Nico Carpentier. In addition, François Heinderyckx handled ECREA liaison.

4. Assessment and perspectives

The evaluation was conducted in the form of a workshop including a half-standardized, anonymous survey. All participants completed an evaluation form to rate, and comment on, the lectures and workshops held during the two weeks of the summer school. Additionally, the participants formed four evaluation groups and discussed feedback on: lectures, workshops and student workshops; individual discussions with lecturers, discussions and networking opportunities with other students; the scheduling and composition of the programme; accommodation, food and coffee (during breaks), social activities; website, pre-summer school communication, the summer-school book; and the flow-managers/ summer-school staff.

The evaluation generated positive feedback and constructive suggestions for further improvements to some of the conceptual and scheduling aspects for future summer schools. The reputation, experience and teaching qualities of the lecturers present at the summer school 2017, as well as their approachability, were appreciated by the participants who, for their part, suggested adding some other more formalised occasions to speak with lecturers: discussion time after lectures was not always considered enough.

The average ratings for the lectures and workshops (1 = poor to 5 = very good) were 3.4 points for lectures and 3.8 points for workshops. In the view of the participants, the mixture of workshops and lectures in the summer school programme was very well-balanced. The balance between theoretical and practical lectures was similarly evaluated highly. The interactivity and split workshops with half of the groups were appreciated.

The overall positive and encouraging feedback was complemented by numerous comments on the social-network platforms that were used together with the

summer school website as discussion spaces and networking tools. Thanks are due here to the social-media editor of this year's edition: Valentina Turrini.

5. Final acknowledgments

The summer school is supported by a wide range of individuals and institutions. The consortium partners and ECREA all provided invaluable support to this long-standing initiative. Over past years, lecturers and flow managers have invested a lot of energy in lecturing and providing support. The doctoral students themselves have shown tremendous eagerness, which can only be admired and applauded.

The success of Suso 2017 was possible thanks to the organizational and financial support of many institutions. The organisers want to express their gratitude to: the Department of Communication and Performing Arts of Università Cattolica; Almed – graduate School in Media, Communication and Performing Arts and his director Ruggero Eugeni; Lifelong learning office and Educatt – Student Services of the same university; Sky Italy.

With its diverse sections and chapters, this edited volume shows that the profoundly changing social and cultural environment poses new challenges to media scholars. The continuous effort to analyze these transformations should be combined with an attempt to gain a deeper understanding of what is ahead of us in its variety and entirety. This is what the summer school proves year after year: strong European media and communication research is about diversity and creativeness, and about cooperation and networking, especially among young scholars who contribute fresh enquiries to the research discourse. This is what makes the summer school a unique learning and networking experience, bringing together the less experienced and more experienced from all over the world to promote a constructive dialogue from which new research horizons emerge.