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# Contents

## Theoretical Studies

- László Gergely SZÜCS*  
The Human Rights in Habermas' Discursive Democracy . . . . . 7

## Research – Case Studies

- Sergio Ricardo QUIROGA*  
Digital Journalism and Education  
How Public Authorities Lower the Voice of Citizens . . . . . 21

- Kornél MYAT*  
Upgrade Democracy 2.0? Participation, Online Decision-Making,  
and Problem Solving on the Online Platforms  
of Late-Modern Media Environment . . . . . 33

- Margarita KÖHL*  
Lifestreaming and the Pressure of Reciprocity  
Exploring Practices of Connected Presence among Adolescents  
from Taiwan and Austria . . . . . 49

## Research Notes

- Gyöngyvér TÓKÉS*  
Visual Research to Study the Digital Literacy  
and Multimodal Practices of Romanian Pre-School Children . . . . . 59

- Laura NISTOR*  
Fashion as a Communicative Phenomenon.  
Agenda Setting for a Research Project on Youth's Clothing Consumption . . . . . 73

- Patricia PRIETO-BLANCO*  
Maria's Bag . . . . . 81

## Book Review

- Márton Gergely RÉTVÁRI*  
Building a Foundation  
Hanga András (ed.) . . . . . 89



# **THEORETICAL STUDIES**





# The Human Rights in Habermas' Discursive Democracy

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**Abstract.** In my brief analysis,<sup>1</sup> I will examine the question of the role Habermas' liberal theories play in his discursive theory of democracy, with special regard to the success of classical liberal freedom providing classical liberal rights of freedom, especially prevailing private autonomy. The question is interesting in itself since, as it is well-known, Habermas' theory of discussion refers to all parts of life and everyone concerned. It is a question then whether deliberate decision-making providing a wide-scale dispute is possible to conciliate with the liberal ideal advocating the sanctity of private life, whether the results of the discussion do not affect "detrimentally" private life and the regulations of the fight for status. Before finding a more accurate answer to these questions, I will examine how Habermas positions himself, on the one hand, advocating the importance of civil dialogue from the republican viewpoint and, on the other hand, against the deliberative ideals providing a wide multifariousness, and what kind of results he deems worthy of keeping from the liberal concept characterized by him as ideal-typical. According to my preliminary assumption, Habermas deems his own idea of democracy as a kind of a synthesis of liberal and republican theories, and he thinks he is capable of dissolving the contradiction existing between liberal and republican theories within his own theory, in the first place with regard to the nature of *political process, social integration, and rights*. In the second part of my work, I will examine the strength of this idea of Habermas only according to one viewpoint: how much does democracy resolve in the discourse on the conflict of negative and positive freedom, the conflict of human rights and popular sovereignty?

**Keywords:** human rights, democracy, Habermasian theory

## Models of Democracy

Jürgen Habermas in his work *The Three Normative Models of Democracy* [Drei normative modelle der Demokratie, 1996] analysing the lessons of the works

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regarding American constitutional culture juxtaposes an ideal-typical *liberal* and *republican theory of democracy*. According to Habermas, the differences between the liberal and republican theories of democracy are based on a deep-rooted different interpretation of social and political processes. Liberals imagine society as an interaction of people having private interests, whose communication is decided by structures of social division of labour and mechanisms of a market society. According to liberal thinking, a bureaucratic state apparatus is juxtaposed against and – at least in certain cases – is likely to limit market processes and the free interaction of citizens, exempt from pressure. From this liberal viewpoint, politics is an organizing power, which is able to efficiently organize private interests, and enforces them against the administrative state power, in accordance with some “collective needs”. Liberals interpret social integration according to two paradigms, namely the models of the organization of market and administrative organization, and they also assume political organizations to be against administrative state power along market models.

<sup>2</sup> In this view, politics is a fight for position and the disposal over administrative power (Habermas, 1996a: 282): the debates experienced in public life and the parliament are the manifestations of competitive relationships of collective participants and of their opposing each other. The competition is likely to be won by those whose goals and preferences meet most of the members of the civil population: these agreements of preferences are demonstrated by the proportion of votes cast in the election.

In the centre of the republican way of thinking does not stand the social paradigm but rather a society integrated by *social solidarity*. From this viewpoint, the function of politics is not the mediation between individuals following private interests and the bureaucratic apparatus. According to this view, it is a medium in which “the nature-given groups of solidarity” recognize their interdependence in the communication and interaction with each other. According to the republican view, members of a group of solidarity clarify their common goals, interests, and values in the field of political publicity in a communicative way, thus forming a community of values, which must be defended both from the administrative state power and from the distorting effects of market structures. Political publicity and the parliament, according to the republican view, cannot be simply regarded as an arena for political competition: the formation of a political view and political volition do not follow the rules of market competition but rather “the autonomous structures of understanding-oriented public communication”. In political debates, the participants are not only strategically active or goal-oriented rational people but rather active parties, who are open to understanding each other, capable of creating consensus. With the clarification of the situation of mutual interests and with the formation of a common orientation of values, a *communicative power* is born, which differs in its structure from *administrative power*: while communicative power arises from the common

2 This view is characterized by the young Habermas as an Anglo-Saxon political concept, having a Lockean origin. See: *Theorie und Praxis. Sozialphilosophische Studien*, Luchterhand Verlag, Neuwied 1963. 63–64.



orientation of values clarified in a discursive way by the members of the society, administrative power is organized along a system-like logic (Habermas, 1996a: 282).

Out of the different interpretation of society and politics follows a different interpretation of the civil population and a different interpretation of the laws at their disposal. According to the liberal view, a citizen is an individual opposing state power, defined by his own preferences; his status is defined by the subjective laws of freedom which defend him from the abuses of the state as well as from the unjustifiable strivings for power of their fellow countrymen. Thus, from a liberal point of view, subjective rights may be regarded as *negative rights*, which provide the individual with a playground void of external pressure. In Habermas' view, the ideal-typical liberal fights for the manifestation of the dominance of negative rights of freedom, and he interprets political rights of freedom from the viewpoint of negative rights of freedom. According to liberal thinking, political rights of freedom make it possible for citizens following their private preferences to compete with people having similar preferences with other groups for the disposal over administrative power. In the liberal view, the autonomous citizen who focuses on the defence of the negative rights of freedom and his private preferences is able to make a judgement whether the power of state is exerted in the interest or against the members of society (ibid., 282–283).

The republican idea that social integration is not formed in the market conditions or in the competition of individuals having different preferences, but it can be created through a naturally conveyed or discursively conveyed solidarity, crucially defines the republican idea about the relationship of the state and citizenship. In this view, the role of the state is not the provision of the free communication of citizens of equal freedom of decision but different preferences; its *raison d'être* is rather the way it must allow the creation of the discourse opinion and volition of free and equal citizens, the creation of their solidarity. Thus, according to the republican view, the status of the citizen is basically not defined by the defence of his negative rights or how he gains his status but rather by exercising his *positive rights of freedom* – political participation, the rights of participation. Citizens – regardless of the world of politics – do not have such subjective rights of freedom or such systems of preferences from the point of which they would be able to make a competent judgment about the functioning of the state; only with the other citizens can they be in a common autonomous practice and can they become politically responsible subjects, free and equal with other people (Habermas, 1996a: 280).

## **Different Perceptions of the Law**

Differences of liberal and republican perceptions of politics and citizenship have a close relationship with the different interpretation of the notion of the law. According to the liberal view, the system of law can be interpreted as the

institutional guarantee of equal negative rights of freedom regardless of the world of politics: the system of law “is constituted based on equal subjective rights”. According to the republican view, however, we cannot characterize the system of law regardless of the value system or political relationships of a particular society: the system of law always takes on a unique, concrete, objective form, and it is formed in the decision-making of the citizens and in the specific value system of the citizens. While according to the republican view rights are realized in concrete decisions, liberals consider that unique rights are built upon “higher principles”, independently of politics and concrete decision-making.<sup>3</sup> We may formulate it as follows: while the republican way of thinking interprets the legal system based on its interpretation of the view of *concrete laws*, the liberal way of thinking interprets it from the viewpoint of the pre-political subjective rights of law before legislation.

In Habermas’ view, a purely republican and a purely liberal view can be equally problematic. This way, the theory of liberal democracy gives a wide scope of free choice of values for citizens: citizens need not explain the whys of their choices, it is enough to make compromises with several different groups of the political society (Habermas, 1996a: 284). All citizens do not have to strive for a common value orientation, the acceptance of universal human norms above the legal system is a sufficient condition of the sustenance of a political society.

However, republicans can adduce against liberals that it is hard to imagine the cohesion of the political society if the citizens are not regarded as defined by their values and by the effort to personally understand each other, but are merely acting parties in a war of competition, acting strategically. In the republican view – says Habermas –, the integration of the political society may only come true through intensive ethical discourse surveyed by common interests. The problem of this republican view is that it shows too idealistic a picture of the political society: it wrongly assumes that the common cultural and ethical background provide a consensus necessary for the integration, and it is possible to be created in pluralistic societies (Habermas, 1996a: 284). In Habermas’ view, if the republican thinking expects modern citizens to unequivocally confirm the common-good-oriented ideas of the classical republic and makes them accept the traditional ideas of a good life dominating in their own communities, it requires unrealistic expectations concerning citizens of contemporary societies. This idea unduly limits the private freedom of citizens to independently take a stand on a concept regarding a good life. From this point of view, it seems that the liberal idea – despite the problems mentioned before – shows a more realistic picture of modern societies when it interprets them not as consensual communities of

3 The juxtaposition of the liberal and the republican model of democracy by Habermas is based on Frank I. Michelman’s analyses of the American Constitution; for the juxtaposition of the idea of law see: Michelman: *Conceptions of Democracy in American Constitutional Argument: Voting Rights*. In: Florida Law Review, 1989. 446–447.

values but as a place where a competition of people with different value systems and preferences takes place.

These problems give us a hint that in order to somehow have a viable democratic theory we must combine elements of intellectually conceivable law of liberalism with community-based concepts of democracy of republicanism. This is what Habermas is aiming for in the development of *the deliberative theory of democracy*, about which he gives a concise summary in his work *The Three Normative Models of Democracy*. The deliberative theory of democracy shares the republican understanding of the idea that an individual cannot be an autonomous citizen of a political society without examining his goals and ethical discourse within the self-interpretation of his smaller or larger community. At the same time, he accepts the liberal criticism that the political society cannot be identified as a unified value system community. Since the political society is the arena of the conflicts of people having different interest positions and different ethical backgrounds, according to the deliberative theory, a large space should be provided for those agreements which are based on the compromises of citizens – assuming that they were created in reasonable circumstances. However, the deliberative theory accepts the thought that a reasonable agreement and mediation through different values is only viable within the conditions of comprehensive agreements. According to the deliberative theory, the road must be opened up for the diversity of discussions: in order to come to an agreement, it is necessary to have a self-interpretation discourse and a more general moral and legal discourse to clarify the conditions of a reasonable agreement (ibid., 284–286). Therefore, the deliberative theory opens up (in a republican spirit) the respect for the balancing opposition in discussions, on the one hand, and it opens up (in a liberal spirit) the road for the respect of the constitutional norms providing a higher level of understanding, with independent values of concrete political decisions, on the other hand.

In my assumption, Habermas' theory of deliberative democracy on the whole can be characterized as an aim to synthesise individual thinking, from the concrete decision-making to the theory of democracy itself through the emphasis on independent basic constitutional principles and between the republican idea thinking in the discursive communities of citizens oriented towards the common good. This effort of synthesis raises several questions: is such a concept of democracy possible, for example, which equally allows the keeping of particular traditions and the defence of universal legal theories? One which equally allows the legitimate reasoning besides providing the more general political norms, guaranteeing the rules of human rights and the rules of democratic provisions? In the following part, I will not argue for the elements of all these questions, but I would rather concentrate on one singular question: Is it possible to combine the defence of classical liberal rights of freedom within one model of democracy, the citizens' dialogue being an important part of the republican idea or rather the

discursive diversity emphasized by the deliberative idea? In Habermas' view, it is the basis of the autonomy of citizens that they are members of a public and limitless discourse the results of which are mandatory for everyone. In the next part of my study, I will search the answer for the question whether in such a political society citizens' classical liberal rights of freedom and private freedom are endangered or not.

## The Problem and a Philosophical Presumption

Habermas in his work *Faktizität und Geltung* characterizes the relationship of private and public freedom with the help of the notions of communicative action theory, and he formulates private autonomy as the liberation of the citizen under *communicative freedom*. Communicative freedom is possible between decision-oriented parties who in their *performative inclination* expect an opinion of each other regarding the validity needs arising from the discussion. The responsibilities of this communicative community arise from the intersubjective appreciation and the positive opinion of the members of the community. At first, Habermas says that when a citizen makes use of his private rights of freedom he withdraws himself from this public space based on *performative acts*, understood as the field of force of "illocutionary acts", and so he withdraws into the space of clear acting where he need not explain the motivation of his actions any more (Habermas, 1992a: 153). At the same time, in Habermas' view, only those forms are legitimate where those concerned can agree in a rational discourse – i.e. in a space although constituted by illocutionary obligations, but in a free, public place (Habermas, 1992a: 138). In other words, enjoying my private life, I will have to express the motivation of my actions, but the formal limits and subjective rights of freedom, which mark the limits of this private freedom, do belong to the subjects of a rational debate. In order to enjoy my private freedom, in the private discourse, I have to express it over and over again that I do claim it, and the communicative community has to make a decision about its public and private limits in a rational debate. Thus, at first sight, the question of public and private freedom is adversarial even within the framework of discourse theory.

This provides one of the most important questions of *Faktizität und Geltung*: how can the opposition of positive and negative freedom be dissolved and how can a political theory model be created in which public and private autonomy are inseparable sides of the same legal status? To use the classical formulation of political theory: how can popular sovereignty formulated in public debates and classical liberal rights be conciliated? Habermas' political philosophy is connected in many respects to Rousseau and Kant's experiment to show an inner connection between popular sovereignty and human rights, and thus open up a

common source of our public and private rights. Rousseau and Kant agree that only generally advised principles can be mandatory and only then can they require legitimacy. With reference to human autonomy – according to which a citizen is obliged to obey the laws that he creates for himself –, the theory of popular sovereignty and human rights were confirmed mutually following each other, and the self-justice of citizens was based on their legal equality. The guarantee of popular sovereignty and of the emergence of human rights both in the political theory of Kant and Rousseau and in Habermas' political theory means that free and equal citizens can approve of general laws relying on the same reasons. It is true even if the two philosophers meant something entirely different by approval (Pawlik, 1996: 441). In Rousseau's work, the approval of citizens is real, empirically verifiable, it does not take place inside the subject and cannot be made independent of the collective process of legislation. The "Kantian approval" goes on a "noumenal level": it is the moral capacity of the individual subject allowed to accept the general law expressed in the form of a categorical imperative.

Kant's political concept built on moral grounds seems to be a more adequate theory to understand the evaluation of modern mass democracies: it does not require a direct democracy and the result of a democratic decision cannot hurt the subjective rights of freedom of citizens. However, Habermas believes it is problematic in Kant's theory that if the citizens are personally "morally autonomous" it does not mean that they have "political autonomy" as members of a collective. In Kant's case, the basis for legitimation is the moral law based on categorical imperative, and subjective rights of law are divided equally according to a general law according to the spirit of categorical imperative. In this model of political legislation, the creators and the "addressees" of the law are divided from each other. The citizens having equal subjective rights give up their freedom of communication, they renounce the right to bring about new laws by themselves, taking into account their own interest or the interest of community values. The fact that the citizens can later, individually, morally agree to the laws does not end the "paternalism of the ruling of laws" in Habermas' view (Habermas, 1992a: 154).

In Habermas' view, the practising of human rights with Rousseau means the practising of popular sovereignty. From the premises of Rousseau's political philosophy ensues a theory which unites the theory of popular sovereignty and "the substance of human rights" in the medium of abstract laws. In Habermas' interpretation, Rousseau's democratic legislation – according to the original premises of Rousseau – only allows the legitimization of such laws which exclude non-generalization interests, thus guaranteeing the invulnerability of equal subjective rights of freedom (Habermas, 1992a: 131). In Habermas' view, it is possible to have an interpretation according to which Rousseau considered

democratic autonomy a discussion or an agreement between free and equal citizens independently of the tangible ethical-cultural context of their way of life. Habermas later characterizes this as “Rousseau properly interpreted” (Habermas, 1996b: 166).

In Habermas’ view, Rousseau’s problem is that he introduced the basic social contract on which popular sovereignty is based as an “existential act” of the political society, in which the success-oriented actors gain their public autonomy as common-good-oriented citizens. He finally divided self-legislation from individual decision-making, he connected it to the “vast subject” of legislation, and – contradicting the original premises – he deduced it from the ethical substance of the originally defined nation in his value orientation (Habermas, 1992a: 132). The “volition of the nation” has no more connection to the autonomous individual, only to the “volition of the virtuous citizen”. In Habermas’ view, Rousseau and Kant – despite the differences in their political thinking – are prisoners of the same problem of philosophical consciousness: they can only imagine the process of the creation of reasonable volition on the level of the subject. Kant’s moral ego creating autonomous laws broke away from the political community having traditions, and its laws can be in contradiction with what the subject deems right. The law decided by Rousseau’s gigantic political subject can only “force the subject to freedom”.

In effect – exceeding Rousseau and Kant’s theory –, the task is to create a political theory which is built on the inner connection of popular sovereignty and human rights providing equal emphasis for private and public autonomy, which embraces citizens not as separate moral subjects but rather as interpreters and followers of its political-legal traditions, as active developers of their laws and political guidelines, and where collective volition can be captured without reference to a “macro subject”.

## **The Approach of Discourse Theory**

The arising problems in Habermas’ view can be resolved within the frameworks of discourse theory, i.e. if the autonomy of the citizens is guaranteed by the *discourse principle*. The discourse principle states that “only those norms of action are valid with which every possible individual concerned is able to agree as a participant [zustimmen]” (Habermas, 1992a: 132). Since in rational discourse the governing principles extending individual orientations can gain legitimacy, this makes it possible for the community to experience the birth of *general volition*, in the name of which – as opposed to Rousseau’s thought – individual and minority incentives cannot be oppressed. The emergence of the principle is not merely the guarantee of the establishment of moral norms but

also a basic tenet of ethical issues regulating a concrete legal community, the validity of political guidelines, and the legitimization of legal norms adapted to the society. Autonomy expressed in the discourse principle is neutral, and it is irrelevant whether it prevails in a moral or a legal dispute (Habermas, 1992a: 154). In a society providing a large scope for rational discourse, citizens do not agree to the formulated laws, but they announce pros and cons, since they themselves are also the creators of the laws.

Habermas' suggestion for resolving this issue is built on the fact that the formulation of private and public autonomy, popular sovereignty, and the mutual declaration of human rights is only possible if we refer to the basic tenets of rational discourse between free citizens having equal rights. The practice of popular sovereignty is only possible between free citizens having equal rights. If the discourse principle prevails "in a legal form", the status of the legal person is stated in five basic rights. This time only two of them are important to us, *the equal rights of freedom to take subjective action*, which ensures formal equality, and *the basic tenets of participation in the process of the making of political opinions and volitions*, through which the citizen can gain political autonomy.

By such deduction of basic rights it is possible to circumscribe the status of human rights in Habermas' discursive theory of democracy. Equal subjective rights of freedom are the preconditions of rational discourse between citizens, which provide formal equality for the members of the discursive community. Habermas states it several times that the connection between popular sovereignty and human rights means that the legal system institutionalizes the conditions necessary for autonomous legislation (Habermas, 1992a: 113; Habermas, 1992b: 615).

On the other hand, the connection between popular sovereignty and human rights can be interpreted in such a way that subjective rights of freedom are not pre-political norms, they cannot emerge without the other basic rights, namely the basic rights in the participation of political opinion forming and volition forming. From among classical liberal rights, Habermas mentions the right to human dignity, personal freedom, the right to life and physical invulnerability, freedom of movement, the right to property, and the right to the invulnerability of the place of living. These rights – which appear to the citizens as "protection rights" (Habermas, 1992a: 156) [Abwehrrechten] against the abuse on the part of the state –, in fact, gain their form in the interpretation of political decision-making, with the practice of political rights, and can become a reference base. The political integration of a community is not built merely on basic universal tenets but on the appreciation of the basic rights and a common interpretation dependent on the contexts of the forms of life given about these basic rights (Habermas, 1992a: 156). Therefore, the basic rights are not given to the citizens in their transcendental clarity, but the liberal rights of freedom can become tangible in the legal discourse of the political community.

## The Example of Feminism

In a later work by Habermas, in *Die Einbeziehung des Anderen*, this side of the connection of popular sovereignty and human rights become more emphatic, i.e. subjective rights of freedom cannot prevail without the practice of public autonomy. The analysis of feminism in equalizing politics, which was published several times (Habermas, 1996c: 243–245; Habermas, 1996d: 303–305), shows that if a given society provides the freedom of citizens merely by the provision of private autonomy that will lead to lack of freedom. The equality of women came into being in Western legal systems with the help of liberal legal politics; women gained the same subjective rights of freedom as men: the gaining of a status became independent of gender and female roles. The actual inequality of women, their social disadvantage became more noticeable, and the welfare states answered to this by a regulation which tried to help women by the observance of traditional women's roles, e.g. childbearing and divorce. These interventions led to further inequalities between men and women because of the payment of social benefits the risk of employing women enhanced, and poverty became feminized. The concerned legal communities, comprising men and women, could not exercise their public rights entirely, they could not clarify in a public debate what the viewpoints are which make relevant the injurious differences connected to equal rights of subjective freedom, experience, and life situations. The equalization took a paternal form, and the private rights of women became impaired (the fight for status) because decision-makers considered private rights the source of freedom.

Summarizing the analyses of private autonomy and human rights, we can come to the following conclusion about the liberal rights of freedom: *The liberal rights of freedom are created by a legal community, their interpretation depending on the contexts of those subjective rights of freedom, which – within the framework of a democratic rule of law – are necessary preconditions of the institutionalization of legal codes and of the discursive practice of political autonomy.* According to this legal view, classical liberal rights – which we can intuitively consider one of the most universal rights of humankind – have a universal core to them indeed: the basic right of equal subjective freedom. But the particular legal communities have to undergo long debates in order to recognize that property, the invulnerability of the human body, the right to human dignity, etc. belong to the subjective rights of freedom of citizens. It might cause a theoretical difficulty that it is hard to believe about these liberal rights of freedom that they gain force by contributing to a discourse at the level of the rule of law and by practising political autonomy. It is reasonable to think that human rights mean more than the conditions among which “means of communication necessary for autonomous political legislation can become institutionalized” (Steinhoff, 1996: 454). Habermas' idea for solving



the problem suggests that the validity of equal rights of subjective freedom come from the fact that by institutionalizing legal codes they contribute to the institutionalization of a rational discourse concerning the whole rule of law, and not the fact that the individual as a value in itself deserves protection.

There is another problem arising from my definition of “liberal rights of freedom” relating to Habermas. In the first part of the study, we could see that according to the ideal-typical liberal – who respects human rights as our natural rights – an autonomous member of a political community can judge whether in another part of the world human rights prevail or not and whether the private sphere of the citizens of this foreign country is entered into rightfully or not. From a Kantian view, we can say that as a moral being I make a monological judgment about the laws of a country, which can be hurtful to a moral person, equal to me, living in another part of the world, capable of making laws for himself. In Habermas' case, this question is hard to answer. The perfect judgment of whether in the given foreign country human rights prevail or not and whether the state enters the private sphere of a person or not – as we saw – is not a monological but not even a moral judgment. It is a question whether a person is competent enough to judge if in the other state there is a violation of privacy or it is the legal community paying attention to the context of life forms and the claims of its members that is competent to judge in a discussion how universal rights can be asserted

In summary: From many points of view, Habermas convincingly argues that in a theory in which the guarantee of the citizens' autonomy is the discourse principle that the problem of controversy between private and public freedom can be solved, since private rights are the preconditions of a rule of law as well. In his democracy, it is possible to open ways to the diversity of discourse (according to deliberative and republican ideals), supposing that human rights can prevail as guarantees of rule of law. The resolution of the contrast between private and public freedom brings about hardly acceptable conclusions from the liberal point of view: subjective rights of freedom do not gain their legitimacy from the protection of the individual as an end in itself, and the theoretically universal rights can be freely interpreted in each legal community.

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# **RESEARCH – CASE STUDIES**





# Digital Journalism and Education: How Public Authorities Lower the Voice of Citizens

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**Abstract.** In this paper, we examine the educational information produced during 2014 by media organization Agencia de Noticias San Luis (ANSL), a news agency with a digital platform created in 2012 and managed by the state. This work may be instrumental for studying the macro-themed messages in what we call “educational frames”, in a province where the dominance of state media is relevant. The methodologies used are frequency analysis and the examination of texts and their meaning. In the province of San Luis from Argentina, since the advent of democracy in 1983, the ruling Justicialist (Peronist) Party had the tendency to meddle with public service media, especially during election periods, thus creating partisan content. The relevant educational topics and the main difficulties faced by education in San Luis, and key actors of the educational process were absent from ANSL agenda. The narrative of ANSL about the educational issues was dominated by issues such as computer use, Wi-Fi access, and government initiatives for all students.

**Keywords:** news, education, public policies

## Introduction

In this paper, we examine the educational information produced during the year 2014 by the media organization Agencia de Noticias San Luis (ANSL), a press agency with a digital platform managed by the state, created in 2012 in order to convey governmental information in the province of San Luis, Central Argentina.

San Luis is located in the region of Cuyo, and since December 1983 it has been governed by the incumbent Peronist Party, in the context of a widespread crisis marked by the poor performance of local political parties and the decline of the multivocal press among other factors. This inquiry is aimed at contributing to the study of macro-thematic messages conveyed by state media, in a province where its dominance is strong. The main media channels in San Luis are “El Diario de la República”, which belongs to the family Rodríguez Saá, and “San Luis Canal

13”, a state television channel. From 1983 to 2011, the province of San Luis was ruled by the brothers Adolfo and Alberto Rodríguez Saá. From 2011 to 2015, the dauphin of the political group Claudio Poggi took over the power.

## **Journalism and Public Information**

This research comes at a time of redefining the role of journalism. Many stakeholders are beginning to ask questions posed by key journalistic issues. We might ask who is now a journalist, what journalism is, what its future is, how many consumers get breaking news, or why journalism is still relevant in the new digital environment. Barros and Duarte (2004) use the term “journalism” as defined by Beltrao, a great Brazilian scholar of communication studies. To Beltrao, journalism is not limited only to traditional media, such as magazines, radio, television, and film, but also includes manifestations of modern journalism, public relations and propaganda, popular songs, tourism, folklore, and contemporary books (Beltrao, 1969).

These are topics of interest within the academia: how digital technologies are changing journalism and how such transformations are influenced by technological advances. It is precisely technological development and new patterns of cultural consumption which are changing the role of journalism and the models of production, distribution, and consumption of media industry.

Journalistic content is built now by using a wide range of digital technologies, distributed instantly through the Internet, mobile devices, and other platforms, made for comfort and the satisfaction of consumers. These are relevant and no less traumatic changes; we could argue whether journalism remains as important as ever. The media looks and multiple voices, which should be tender, have generated significant changes in the entertainment and education of society. We provide access to remote, different imaginary regions, modify our perception of time and space, and develop a sensitive role in social life, as their permanent presence influences the construction of individual and collective identities.

The new information and communications technology (ICT) significantly influences the process of creation and change of current public opinion, where, in addition, traditional media, text messages, e-mails, blogs, and other online spaces affect the daily lives of people in relation to their age, social status, level of education, and studies. Networks are increasingly part of the technological growth and social participation, reducing the space of privacy and becoming a public and globalized environment where people exchange ideas, build knowledge, establish relationships at various levels, and create ideas about reality. The dynamic of government communication and state media should be interpreted in this context. In Latin American democracies, it is sometimes useful to distinguish between

state and governmental media. The latter is characterized by the dominance of official discourses, whereas opposition voices and dissent are invisible.

The democratic state requires the management of government activities, promoting quality public information to its citizens. This implies that all citizens can have access to information through all the procedures that serve transparent governance, through dissemination of information, communicative exchange, ensuring the protection of personal data, favouring the accountability to citizens, improving the organization, classification, and handling of documents, and contributing to the democratization of society by the rule of law.

All these possibilities are required when the media in general build and develop their visions of reality, perceiving differences and similarities in data processing and in the agenda presented daily. Given the characteristics of journalistic work, the construction of the news is made daily under time pressure and urgency and episodic presentation, between the play of the gatekeepers (goalkeepers) who – according to their positions within the news organization – control sources and the information to be published.

The media have their own system of values, production routines, their decision-makers, quality criteria, opportunity and relevance criteria, shaping a media reality (La Rosa, 2013). Habermas (1994) recognized that when market laws were introduced in the “advertising”, the replacement persuasion exchange of arguments, and thus political communication, ceased to be based on reason, and criticism became manipulative advertising.

Considering the complexity of reality, the presence of multiple perspectives influenced by individual perception and historical subjects, the underreporting thesis of Sartori (insufficient information) and misinformation (distortion of information) are very useful (Sartori, 1998). State media is increasingly a dominant news source, a communication space in which local, regional, or national governments present their views and vision of reality. Often the political, economic, and social elites impose topics and agendas rooted in dominant community values.

## **Communicating Public Policies**

Adriana Amado (2011) pointed out that in a scheme of communicative citizenship corporate communication functions as a counterpart to the media, while media organizations produce (or should produce) supposedly more general and pluralistic information.

State modernization leading to democratic development confronts governments with multiple challenges. Governments must respond to new management standards, where the core values are efficiency, transparency, and citizen

participation. It is necessary to know how the government does manage communication. The state can become an active communicator, taking the initiative to build bridges between its institutions and citizens, and thus achieving a strengthening and deepening of democracy by ensuring access to public information and, secondly, knowledge about what their representatives do.

Public policy actions and programmes are running a government and provide the answers that the state can meet the demands of society, in the form of rules, institutions, services, or public goods. Government communication brings together a set of processes with a strategic action seeking to communicate and assert the interpretation or the frame of government on a given topic. The function of the frame is to define an issue or problem, and put it in correspondence with a solution, competing parallel with frames of other actors in the public space. Delle Donne (2011) notes that every government faces recurring situations of public exposure that causes an increase in the visibility of their decisions. Bread and Kosicki (2001) said that there was a permanent competition in the political arena to impose the perspective and interpretation on the issues itself.

There is a perspective that considers government communication as actions that formalize governments to communicate and build consensus on what they do, that is, trying to raise awareness and gain acceptance of their projects, policies, achievements, and their difficulties. Professional interventions are aimed at reducing tensions between citizen demands and priorities of governmental actions (Elizalde, 2006; Echevarria–Maurice, 2013). Undoubtedly, “governmental communication is one of the means to reach consensus” (Elizalde, 2006: 158).

The concept of “governmental communication” varies from attraction and persuasion strategies of governments to the citizens’ right for information, producing “a process of articulation and selection decisions, often contradictory, between democratizing communications, electioneering communications and management communications” (Elizalde, 2006: 146; Echavarria–Maurice, 2013). We propose to examine this phenomenon, an emerging and complex matrix of government communication that seeks to express different relationships, synergies, and complexities.

## **Actors of Governmental Communication**

Governmental communication actors are media, state actors, such as public policy makers, and citizens. Every democratic government needs the commitment and support of society. The legitimacy and representation of a government are given by the results of the electoral process, but in the management of government actions and plans there are often changes, which require state actors to communicate and constantly justify their decisions and reinforce their vision of reality.



It is through the use of governmental communication, and in this special case study, the government agency itself, which is aimed at setting the governmental agenda on a given topic. It tries to propose a vision of reality, to build consensus, and to legitimize government decisions. What happens is that the rules imposed by the government administration in general aim to seek consensus on issues of concern to the government, while silencing others affecting their interests (Brosius–Eps, 1995): some topics are more likely to be selected than others. When a fact implies greater coverage, and thus acquires greater relevance, it becomes a key event, reorganizing the coverage of the following events with the same qualities.

Tuchman (1999) believes that the information process includes organizational and personal elements like ideology, with a legitimizing power deeply rooted in society. It is also understood as a system of rational discourse that gives an explanation of reality, engaging with preconceptions (Sadaba, 1995).

## **Press Agencies**

Reporting agencies are organizations that produce news through correspondents in different places, who immediately transmit to the central unit, and spread information as quickly as possible to their customers. Agencies are usually private companies that sell information to their subscribers, who pay according to the services received: national reporting, international news, and graphic service.

The technological development – Internet, fax, satellites, telephony, fibre optics, and computers – contributed to an increasing volume of information circulating daily. International news agencies are companies that work around the clock producing information transmitted to the centre, and then to the publishers, who are in charge of checking whether the information is correct in terms of content and sources, and then writing and sending them to their subscribers. New technologies of information and communication (NTCI) have allowed the development of multiple online platforms. According to La Rosa (2013), the Internet brings into play six codes: visual language, visual paralinguistic, iconic visual, linguistic sound, sound paralinguistic, and non-linguistic sound. Each medium of communication makes a limited reproduction of reality that allows us to manage it with our own codes (Casafús, 1972; La Rosa, 2013).

## **The Value of the News Industry**

New media is covering larger areas in the value chain of the news industry by diversifying its content in different formats, for different audiences. Today, digital media have to create, produce, and distribute large amounts of information. Smith

highlights the links in the value chain of information industry that publishers should capitalize on in the future, based on packaging: presentation of information in different ways to new audiences, databases, and interactivity; building tools (mailing lists, discussion forums, chats, e-mails, etc.) to speed up the flow of content, the distribution of new products and the multiplatform content and the partnerships. The press will also create alliances with other content providers to distribute network or editorial costs and develop new platforms reusing the same content (Smith, 2000: 46; Rojo–Villada, 2006: 419–420).

In recent years, the development of communication technologies (ICT) has increased the interest of national and provincial governments to establish news organizations and news agencies with the purpose of spreading their activities and actions more directly and more conveniently, according to their interests. Persuasion and interests are key elements of the governmental media.

## **Mass Media in San Luis**

The main media outlets of the province of San Luis are “El Diario de la República” and “Canal 13 San Luis”, a state channel, which together with San Luis News Agency (ANSL) are media that disseminate government news.

The media context of the province of San Luis, Argentina, is characterized by the existence of an incipient opposition to the dominant media group, projecting an idealized, modern San Luis, with proper administration, investment, development, and a peaceful life.

From the journalistic field, the Report of the Argentine Journalism Forum (FOPEA) of 2011 mentions some indirect restrictions produced by the provincial government from the discretionary distribution of government advertising and the concentration of state media. The document also reveals data on the lack of access to public information, the arbitrary allocation of government advertising, and the job insecurity of those who practise journalism across the province.

## **Agencia San Luis Noticias**

On 23 March 2012, San Luis News Agency was created (Agencia San Luis Noticias –ANSL) in the province of San Luis, a governmental media organization aimed at providing information via a platform, with scarce resources and few journalists.

Working with about twenty journalists, ANSL produced in its first year 11,766 news articles. ANSL was organized as a website providing news content using different platforms (text, audio, image, and audio-visual production) and ensuring

access to information produced by the State and media workers, free of charge. It also provides information to media outlets in a context of limited technological development of journalistic initiatives in the province of San Luis.

ANSL as a public mass media platform was marked only by the idea of spreading and better publicizing the acts of government and the provincial administration, and of creating a means to develop content for other media outlets. Thus, San Luis News Agency has become a mass media that provided information, images, audio and video material to others, but also an instrument of political promotion of government information consulted not only by journalists and media but also by the citizens.

On the homepage (<http://www.agenciasanluis.com/>), the main menus are society, police, entertainment, sports, media, provincial policies, and contact in order to organize content and highlight the provincial policies of the state. ANSL also has a newsletter, which is distributed by e-mail on a daily basis for those who subscribe to it through the website.

## **Web-Based ANSL**

In 2014, the home screen organizer links were “today-society-show-2014-sports-world intercollegiate-audios-videos-Canal13 and more”. The first image displayed on a web portal is the first thing readers see. It is an important space because it allows the audience to decide whether to continue reading or not.

## **Methodology Used**

For this investigation, we used the thematic analysis, looking at frequency and content. We used content analysis seeking the review of the texts, with the possibility of not only learning its meaning but also acquiring information about the mode of production.

## **Educational News in ANSL**

The educational information portal of Agencia de Noticias San Luis acknowledges two main sources, the Ministry of Education of San Luis and the University of La Punta, and some alternative sources such as the Higher Education Programme of the province and other organizations linked to educational work.

## The Educational News of ANSL

The most important news flow involves various government programmes, such as Puntana Merit Scholarship, the School Stamps, Digital Public Schools, and the 20/30 Plan, which the government wants to promote, avoiding complex or controversial issues. The news stories are short in general. Some exhibition-related topics appear as educational improvement, school clubs, managerial skills, and teacher training.



Image 1. Webpage of ANSL 01/09/2014 (www.agenciadenoticias.com)

For example, on April 29, it was published that the governor of San Luis, Claudio Poggi, said that “digital public schools were fully integrated into the education of San Luis”. It was during the delivery of computers to students in primary schools “Isaac Newton” and “Albert Einstein” in the city of San Luis as well as “Nelson Mandela”, “Maestra Rosenda Quiroga”, and “Nuevos Desafíos” in the city of La Punta, San Luis Province, where teachers were also given tools to work in classrooms, books, games, and a manual to work on problems of violence.

On March 17, ANSL highlighted: “Improving Education. Education in the centre of the San Luis agenda”, a headline referring to the Plan for Measuring and Monitoring Permanent Education in the Knowledge Society, as part of the

education policies of the provincial government, aiming at improving school results in San Luis. The initiative was carried out by the University of La Punta (ULP) through a series of actions, which included assessments of language, mathematics, natural sciences, and social sciences for primary-school and high-school students.

On July 30, ANSL covered a governmental act where technological materials were delivered to a group of teachers. The article referred to “Equipment for Managers of Educational System. Poggi. The education of the highest quality and full access to knowledge are the way to progress”.

Aspects of reality aimed to be covered by the agenda set previously by the executives, called journalistic frames by Entman (1993), are promoting visions or particular definitions of the issues at stake.

## **Presence and Absence of Educational Topics**

The coverage of environmental education news runs ads made by various executive branch officials, based on government policies. School Stamps, Merit Scholarship, and the 20/30 Plan (a plan that allows people of up to thirty years to finish high school) are accompanied by images, audios, or videos of the officials or public events. While many governmental actions are guided by strategic plans, the education of San Luis has not yet developed a strategic plan that would address their present-day difficulties and challenges and that would be formulated with the participation of the various players involved.

We reaffirm the idea that all practices of journalism are intentional, and in the case of government communication seeks to acquire public light through the media, disseminating the plans and initiatives of management. The media serves (or should serve) to inform and enlighten the public about the development of public policy – in this case education – as an element of government transparency.

Educational news on ANSL in 2014 were sporadic, usually with governmental guidelines, especially those advertising official events, accompanied by photographs of governmental actors with students and teachers, or just images of officials. The staging, the promoting had a magnificent setting for proper ANSL coverage. The news agency providing public information on the plans released by the provincial executives rarely mention everyday teachers, their daily work, their difficulties in school, their low wages, and the problems they are confronted with in San Luis. ANSL refers to the delivery of netbooks and stamps, the Knowledge Olympics programmes, Program All about Robotics, Chess School and Language – topics reflecting a meritocratic culture, while the complex educational issues remain invisible.

## Conclusions

News coverage of educational topics reflect governmental discourses and priorities, highlighting state agencies' achievements. A permanent strategy of persuasion and marketing is at work to present governmental initiatives while hiding problems and tensions that exist in San Luis such as the construction industry crisis or school teachers' low wages.

But pursuing its own agenda, ANSL seeks to reaffirm the idea of public transparency based only on governmental sources such as the Ministry of Education and the University of La Punta (ULP). While these sources reduce the scope of topics, they also ease journalistic content production cycles. This vision of a state-controlled agenda, which admits no other existing educational problems in the San Luis society, hinders citizen participation. However, education news coverage has all ingredients used by a multimedia platform, allowing text, audio materials, and images.

An impregnation of the social order is taking place with these messages, with storylines that create myths of good public administration, successful investments, educational improvements, access to Wi-Fi, unlimited progress, and a positive image of the future.

Certainly, material achievements are fully visible, almost palpable, and there are also contributions to education, but executives should take advantage of state agencies themselves to provide more information on increasing and implementing their budgets, on the situation of schools and colleges, information about where we should or should not invest, the status of teachers, and take into account the growing problem areas of education, creation and development of reliable statistics, and presenting a clear educational policy.

In consonance with Giovanni Sartori's misinformation theory, officials are overrepresented in the state provincial political news, their views and their vision of reality dominate the mediascape, while other actors may not be visible (Sartori, 1998).

Communicating governmental strategies in a transparent way would both increase the quality of education and increase citizen participation in public affairs, with all the challenges and difficulties that such complex matter raises due to the politicians and journalists.

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## Upgrade Democracy 2.0?

# Participation, Online Decision-Making, and Problem Solving on the Online Platforms of Late-Modern Media Environment

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**Abstract.** One of the key issues related to media research is how technological changes impact actual social processes. The web-based social media of postmodern media environment provide new public platforms for media users who tend to become more and more conscious users and active producers and distributors of media content. However, without developing the culture of offline social cooperation, are online platforms sufficient in themselves for making representative democracy more participative? In my thesis, I will examine the possibility of participation on the platforms of social media that emerged during the spring of 2015 in the case of DemocracyOS clone EVoks supporting the expression of opinion on social media networks and in the case of Populus online platform specialized in social problem solving.

**Keywords:** late-modern media environment, online participation, community decision-making and problem solving

## Introduction

An average citizen of the 21<sup>st</sup> century spends 20 hours online a week.<sup>1</sup> The social-network-based late-modern media environment significantly changes media consumption habits and the rules of media usage. Late-modern media environment has changed the relations between the institutions of society and also between politicians and citizens. The question is now how we, media users, can benefit from technology to make decisions and solve problems online.

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1 Ofcom Report 2015: [https://www.ofcom.org.uk/\\_\\_data/assets/pdf\\_file/0014/82112/2015\\_adults\\_media\\_use\\_and\\_attitudes\\_report.pdf](https://www.ofcom.org.uk/__data/assets/pdf_file/0014/82112/2015_adults_media_use_and_attitudes_report.pdf) (accessed on: 8 August 2016).

Following the sudden success and subsiding of the Arab Spring, Indignados, Five Star, and Occupy movements, more and more contemporary authors warn against expecting democratic transformations of social and political systems from online tools of late-modern media environment (see Mozorov, 2011; Holiday, 2012).

As the issue was raised by Zizi Papacharissi (2010), it is relevant to ask the question whether new web 2.0 online tools – as cyber-utopian elements – will democratize society or they will conserve the existing system and regime. Are they capable of creating a new public sphere or they will slightly modify the framework of the old one?

Referring to the evaluation of demonstrations in Gezi Park, Zeynep Tufekci techno-sociologist argues that in many cases technology may support, whereas, paradoxically, in other cases, it may even hinder social movements (Tufekci, 2014).

In my study, I will examine the new possibilities that the spreading of late-modern web-based social media opens up to citizens' participation. My research question is whether web-based social media supports participation in politics and the expression of opinion, that is a more participative social publicity and democratic society – and if it does, then how this is achieved.

In spring 2015, I conducted an empirical study in which I examined new Hungarian online platforms helping citizens' expression of opinion, social decision-making, and problem solving.

I conducted half-structured interviews with stakeholders, community organizers, with the creators and operators of the greatest online platforms. In order to gain a general insight into how online platforms work, I extended my interviews to international organizations too. The following online tools were involved in my sample: the Icelandic Your Priorities, the Argentine DemocracyOS, Loomio from New-Zeland, EVoks, which is considered a Hungarian version of the Argentine DemocracyOS, and the Hungarian Populus and Miotcank.hu, which are specialized in social problem solving. Besides interviews, data collection and analysis measured the use and impact of platforms both in online and offline space.

## **21<sup>st</sup>-Century Tools of Collaborative Decision-Making**

The evolving information society poses new challenges and possibilities for its more conscious media user citizens. Pia Mancini is the director of the Argentine DemocracyOS Foundation, one of the founders of the free and open-source platforms<sup>2</sup> creating the possibility of social decision-making and the expression of opinion in 2012. She refers to Marshall McLuhan when she states that

<sup>2</sup> Retrieved from: <http://democracyos.org/> (accessed on: 30 June 2015).

politics tends to solve today's problems with the tools of yesterday. "We are 21<sup>st</sup>-century citizens, doing our very, very best to interact with 19<sup>th</sup>-century-designed institutions that are based on an information technology of the 15<sup>th</sup> century" (Mancini, 2014). The free and open-source online platform developed by them intends to change this substantially by adjusting the political institution system to the needs of actual social, economic, and technological environment.

The application is available in 15 languages, similarly to the Icelandic Your Priorities and Loomio platform from New Zealand, thus creating Internet-based social platforms and offering an online tool for participative democracy by encouraging citizens' participation in politics. Citizens have the chance to discuss issues on online platforms and they can vote regarding matters related to their life. The expression of opinion based on online participation offers the possibility of continuous participation in politics instead of voting every fourth year made available by participative democracy and, through elaborating the notion of transferable voting rights, a liquid model of democracy.

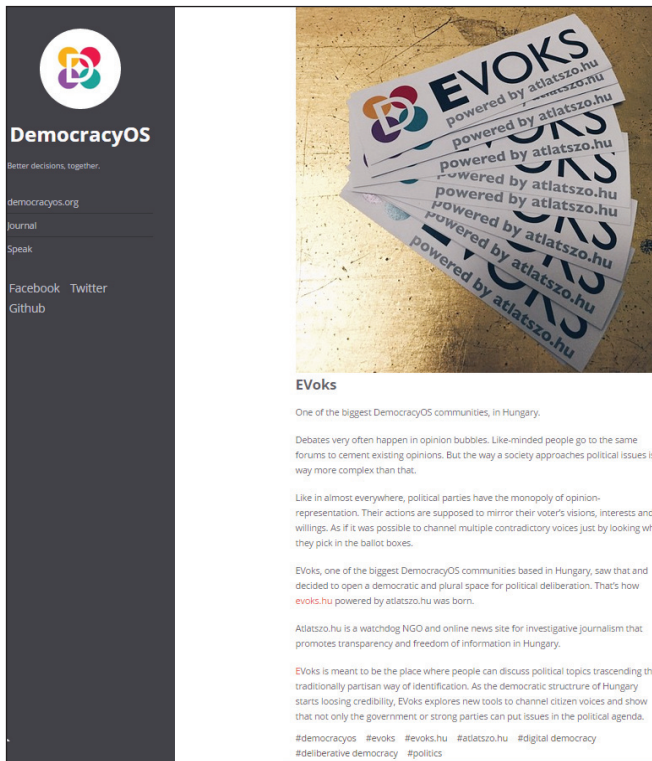
The "community of smart-arses" (see Habermas, 1989) composed of registered private individuals can discuss politics on a user-friendly platform especially designed for the expression of opinion and community decision-making. The tool fostering online participation has already been used: during the voting for the Constitution of Tunisia (I Watch)<sup>3</sup> and during the development of open government politics in Mexico. This tool was equally used in Kenya and Buenos Aires to channel citizens' views and opinions. The platform has 16 versions in the world,<sup>4</sup> one of which is the Hungarian EVoks created by the Átlátszó investigative website.

## Evoks

On 5 June 2015, Gábor Vágó, a former LMP MP, announced at a Brain Bar Budapest event that the beta version of EVoks, the first platform encouraging community-based decision-making had been launched. "As a member of Parliament, I had the experience that the political structure and culture are very problematic for several reasons... This is not a critical approach to the opposition. This is a new way of democracy. This is not against the government but for affairs and citizens" (Vágó, 2015). According to the self-definition also published on Facebook, the

3 Retrieved from: <http://vot-it.org/> (12 June 2015).

4 In July 2015, the following 16 mutations of the DemocracyOS platform are available: Congress of Buenos Aires; The Net Party; DemocracyOS Chile; DemocracyOS India; DemocracyOS Peru, Guanyem Barcelona; Councillor Ben Kallos (US, New York); Councillor Nadeem Mazen (UK, Cambridge); PAMI (Health Insurance, Argentina); Eu Voto (Brazil); DemocracyOS France; Government of Mexico; Podemos Party (Spain); DemocracyOS Colombia; Supervisor Mark Farrel (US, San Francisco); EVoks Hungary. Retrieved from: <http://democracyos.org/democracies> (accessed on: 4 July 2015).



**Figure 1.** The presentation of EVoks on the website of DemocracyOS

Source: <http://blog.DemocracyOS.org/> (accessed on: 5 July 2015)

platform makes it possible for citizens to discuss political matters and vote regarding important public issues.

The objective of the EVoks website is to launch a real social debate on important issues and regarding matters that a lot of people are interested in; the aim is to provide a public platform where anyone can put items on the agenda of media and politics which mobilize many people. The platform gives opportunity to involve layers of society and social groups to discuss politics who have become disappointed and lost interest in the political system but have a strong opinion regarding some issues. Besides raising issues, conversation and convincing will be important elements on the EVoks platform; votes can be changed during and as a result of an argument or discussion. Our objective is to give weight to arguments and opinions (Facebook.com/evoks.hu).<sup>5</sup>

5 See the Facebook page of EVoks: [https://www.facebook.com/eVoks.hu/info?tab=page\\_info](https://www.facebook.com/eVoks.hu/info?tab=page_info) (accessed on: 4 July 2015).

**Table 1.** EVoks issues and the number of participants in July and October 2015

<b>Order of appearance</b>	<b>Topic</b>	<b>Status</b>	<b>Number of participants/ person 4 July 2015</b>	<b>Number of participants/ person 8 October 2015</b>
1	Should people aged 75+ be limited in driving a car?	closed	403	403
2	Should people who damage advertisements of the government be punished?	open	314	497
3	Should Budapest organize Olympic Games?	open	370	682
4	Should the people crossing the borders of Hungary without a passport be automatically arrested?	open	188	385
5	Should Paks II be constructed?	open	272	547
6	Should shops be closed on Sundays?	open	253	554
7	Is it the task of the state to improve the infrastructural facilities of Hungarian football?	open	185	444
8	Should death penalty be introduced again?	open	106	404
9	Would you radically simplify spelling rules?	open	63	335
10	Should homosexual couples be granted the right to marry and adopt children in Hungary?	open	0	438
11	Should an Anti-Corruption Public Prosecutor be set up in Hungary?	open	0	419
12	Is governmental intervention required to improve the situation of Hungarian sync?	open	0	260
13	Should there be a siesta in Hungary during summer months?	open	0	177
14	Should smoking be allowed in certain clubs and pubs?	open	0	176
15	Should there be a referendum concerning Hungary's application for the 2024 Olympic Games?	open	0	120

Order of appearance	Topic	Status	Number of participants/ person 4 July 2015	Number of participants/ person 8 October 2015
16	Should studies on ethics and morality and basic theological studies be obligatory in schools?	open	0	149
17	Should the European Commission put forward the idea of greater transparency for member states' corporate taxation?	open	0	54
18	Should registered gambling addicts be banned from casinos?	open	0	43
19	Should the state sell its agricultural land to the farmers?	open	0	46
20	Should Hungary change its time zone?	open	0	114
Total			2,154	6,247

Source: the author's own collection (evoks.hu)

Registered users (a total of 6,247 people) had the chance to discuss topics and submit their votes regarding 20 topics during the 4 months since the start of the website (see *Table 1*). The first issue that was discussed and voted on was closed on 3 July 2015. 403 registered users participated in the discussion of the first issue, that is the issue of driving limitations concerning people aged 75+. During the period of one month, 398 votes were received and more than 120 contributions were made. 252 people (63.3%) voted against the limitation, 114 people (28.6%) voted for the limitation, and 32 people (8%) abstained.

Registered users had the chance to vote on several policy issues that were on the everyday agenda of politics and media. Presently, 682 people are participating in the vote on the issue whether Budapest should organize Olympic Games in 2024 and 547 have submitted their votes regarding whether the new block of the nuclear power station in PAKS should be constructed, but users equally have the chance to express their opinion on restoring death penalty, closing shops on Sundays, the radical simplification of spelling rules, or even on the introduction of siesta during summer months in Hungary. However, more than 6,000 activities and the above mentioned hot issues did not prove sufficient for the website to thematize mainstream mass media and political agenda and for having an impact on decisions of real importance.

By October 2015, the initial, not so high activity and participation rate had dropped and the newly posted issues were commented on by only about

50–100 users. According to one of the project owners, the key for starting the platform would be the activation of citizens and the involvement of politicians – a possible way of achieving this is to start the discussion of regional matters on a local, small-community level. This would be the first step, to start with regional issues; however, offline community development has not yet started until this day.

Half a year is a short period of time, it is difficult to achieve a great breakthrough. However, the low and ever-decreasing activity in the case of EVoks can be explained by the unfavourable mutual presence of several factors. The most important and most significant of these factors is political apathy and a general lack of citizens' participation in politics, the lack of the culture of community-level cooperation. Added to this, there was no introductory media campaign; due to this, even the small group of active and media-conscious citizens did not receive sufficient information related to the launch of the site. Finally, an important factor to be considered is that the platform is operated by the editors of the investigative website *Átlátszó* labelled as one that is supported by the opposition. Contrasting the present status of the votes and general political discourses, we can state that users mainly represent opinions formulated by the opposition. It can be stated with high certainty that the users of the platform primarily represent the views of the left-wing liberal voting group. Thus, instead of creating a new publicity, a possible platform of community decision-making is lowered down to one of the channels of political demonstration/opposition, keeping away independent, conscious media users who have become disappointed with political issues but have their own opinion, just as media users who voted for the ruling political party. This way, neither real discussion nor social discourse are realized, which would be required and indispensable for the democratization of society – as it was presented by Gábor Vágó.

## **Populus, a Community Problem-Solving Platform**

On 16 April, the website Populus was launched by Zsolt Várady, the founder of iWiW.<sup>6</sup> This community site was dedicated to solve public affairs online.<sup>7</sup> The declared objective of the community platform exempt from politics that entered its second phase of development in October 2015 was to create solutions for problems related to public affairs based on the active participation of citizens,

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6 iWiW (International Who is Who) was the greatest Hungarian social media site: it functioned between 2002 and 2014, it was the most visited Hungarian site from 2005 to 2010, and by 2008 the site had had 4 million registered users.

7 Retrieved from: <http://vs.hu/magazin/osszes/elindult-az-utcai-ellenzek-facebookja-0416> (accessed on: 4 July 2015).

so it mainly focused on the collective solution of problems that we were facing in our offline life but which were revealed with the help of an online tool. The umbrella platform fostering the solution of our own matters tries to provide a surface, community, and pattern for the successful solution of public affairs. With its educational contents, it aims at awakening a sort of self-consciousness in citizens and in the long run it aims at encouraging a shift towards participative, liquid democracy.

Let's stand up together to solve local, regional, or national public affairs that are not working. Let's experience it together that instead of just talking about it we can really take action together and we can achieve great results. Populus.hu provides online tools and platform for this objective (Populus.hu).<sup>8</sup>

There was a great expectation preceding the launch of the website. The press releases and news announcing its kick-off<sup>9</sup> told about a new community website being launched instead of the popular iWiW counting several millions of users. The great initial enthusiasm was evident: during the first week, 50 thousand individual visitors looked up the site and 400 new suggestions were received for new affairs to be discussed, but it is also very important to note that only 5 users volunteered to take responsibility and become an owner of a certain affair.

Since the start, there have been two main topics: one of them is the issue of wheel clamps, while the other thematizes the problematics of tax and duty payment. Related to the issue of wheel clamps, the participants of the social website would like to reduce the number of wheel clamps put on vehicles in unclear traffic situations, due to the lack of traffic signs, by collecting these places and sharing them among themselves. This way of revealing problems and listing them collectively is not a novelty, this is the principle on which website jarokelo.hu is based. This site is specialized in traffic problems, where any such problem can be posted anonymously: a missing lid on public utilities, damage, garbage, or dangerous road problems, which are checked by the administrators of the site, and following the check-up they forward it to the competent authorities. Problematic issues are listed on the website according to their solution status.

Concentrating on the affair of wheel clamps, the administrators of Populus submitted a petition to request data concerning the number of wheel clamp affairs, and based on the number of users they collect the problematic places. The members of the community can provide a short description and upload photos, and they can mark these places on a map. Allocated to each and every

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8 Retrieved from: <https://populus.hu/> (accessed on: 4 July 2015).

9 Retrieved from: [http://index.hu/belfold/2015/04/16/az\\_iwiw\\_atyja\\_elinditotta\\_uj\\_szajtjat/](http://index.hu/belfold/2015/04/16/az_iwiw_atyja_elinditotta_uj_szajtjat/) (accessed on: 4 July 2015).



affair, there is a description detailing the possible phases of solving the problem. After the specific problematic places have been collected, they are looked up, and the local competent authority is contacted.

Users uploaded 15 such places until mid-July, and in many cases they started to eliminate problematic places. Zsolt Várady, the owner of the website, said that based on the collected material and the wheel clamp map they had written a letter to the competent local authority in which they had requested the elimination of problematic places.

In the other case, the community's objective is to achieve that they do not have to transfer the sum of different taxes and duties to a separate bank account – having to pay a separate transfer fee in the case of each payment – but that the authority would have to select them from a collective bank account.

The present beta version of the platform is going to be updated soon; user activity measured on the site had significantly decreased by autumn 2015, initial enthusiasm flagged shortly afterwards, and thus collective community problem solving is implemented only to a small degree online.

Drawing the conclusions of the experiences made during the 6 months preceding the kick-off, the project developer will transform the platform as part of a second phase of development.

One of the significant changes is that it will be possible for the users to launch new affairs on the website, and they will channel other issues and problems that were posted for solution on other platforms by civil users. Another great novelty and innovation is the publication of infographics on the website: these professional contents provide a background for solving social issues, they serve educational objectives. Besides this, in order to increase participation, the tools of community development and organization have to be used more intensively. The objective is to acquire 1,000–1,500 visitors on a daily basis by the end of the year and to extend the number of affairs from 2 to 5–10.

As a great Hungarian example of community cooperation and problem solving, it is worth mentioning *Miutcank.hu*, an initiative that was launched during the summer of 2014, aimed at media users living in cities. This late-modern platform designed to build a community of neighbours to solve problems and communicate with each other – having had more than 30,000 users during the summer of 2015 – uses the new form of online presence in order to provide a space for solving everyday issues and problems that they are facing locally in their neighbourhood. The objective of the platform is to use online tools to bring people closer to each other in the offline world as well. The website enjoys an ever-increasing user community and is about to go through a next phase of development. It is not a confidential information that the site is a business enterprise as well: besides providing an online space, it organizes

offline community programmes in order to provide personal experiences and create commitment, thus strengthening its user community.

## **Hot Questions of Online Participation in Hungary**

Hungarian online platforms destined to make participative democracy more participative based on countless successful international initiatives and the best practices taken over from abroad – which I am not going to present in this paper – could be good tools to channel citizens' opinions. However, it is difficult to make these platforms widespread and popular.

Their application is hindered by numerous obstacles. The greatest problem is that the political elite of empty participative democracy is not interested in promoting these initiatives. They are entirely satisfied with the group of voters convinced by marketing campaigns instead of real election programmes and with so-called consultations. It is not in their interest to put their authorization to the test by participative tools, such as referendums. However, there is another difficulty that hinders this process: citizens do not have enough experience in participation and cooperation, they tend to reject politics, and they mistrust politics in general. The limiting factors of the lack of digital competences and that Internet penetration and the access to technological tools is only 74% (Nielsen, 2015) are, however, negligible when compared to the above mentioned phenomenon. I will present this in the following chapters.

### **1. Involving Citizens – the Question of Political Apathy**

The key to increasing the success of both online and offline citizen consciousness and participation is how they are able to restore citizens' trust and faith, change fixed bad habits, the concept of a citizen who is exposed to the power of the state and has no means to take action. The results of a survey<sup>10</sup> carried out among 1,600 respondents during the Citizens Participation Week organized by civil organizations confirm my idea about the situation of civil organizations in Hungary: the trust in them is weak, but it is becoming stronger and stronger.<sup>11</sup> Another important statement of the survey is that the positive impact of online tools on community organization is evidently perceivable.

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10 2014 Common Trust Survey: Retrieved from: <http://reszvetelhete.hu/wp-content/uploads/2011/08/K%C3%B6zbizalom-2014.docx> (accessed on: 23 June 2015).

11 As illustration: while only 2.1% of the population has a strong trust in politicians, 12% trust in civil organizations. The quoted number shows the results in percentage of "Very much" answers to the question "How much do you trust politicians/civil organizations?".

Political apathy is more and more widespread in representative democracy, it puzzles *spin doctors* and provides an exciting field of research for sociologists. At any rate, it is important to examine the role of the media. According to Pippa Norris, the political communication of media and political parties that are often accused of being scapegoats in this matter does not increase the apathy of citizens related to politics; moreover, in some cases, it even increases the interest in politics; it is rather the deeply rooted deficiencies of representative democracy that are to be blamed for the existing apathy. Instead of the *media malaise* theory, it draws a virtuous circle (Norris, 2000).

Far from a negative impact, the most convincing picture to emerge from this study is that attention to the news media acts as a virtuous circle: the most politically knowledgeable, trusting, and participatory are most likely to tune into public affairs coverage. And those most attentive to coverage of public affairs become more engaged in civic life (Norris, 2000: 6).

An interactive late-modern media environment that is independent of the political elite and aims at a well-balanced equity could foster conscious media users' participation; however, we cannot talk about anything like this in Hungary now. It seems nowadays that mainstream mass media is a communication tool for the political elites of different interest and it operates as the only unidirectional communication platform for the big political parties and for the population.

The creators of platforms supporting community decision-making explain the ever-increasing political apathy by the fact that in representative democracy citizens consider their votes as something weightless and they evidently blame the existing political culture for this. Pia Mancini, one of the founders of DemocracyOS, summarizes this in an interview as follows.

The challenges that we have to face today are rather cultural challenges, not technical ones. We have to change people's mentality; they think that they are not able to decide regarding important issues affecting their life. This mentality and approach has been an integral part of our personality for several thousands of years, and thus it will be very difficult to change it (Botás, 2015).

In her view, political apathy is characteristic of the younger generations.

I think it is not at all surprising that young generations do not want to deal with politics since they do not have a say in the matter, in how things are going in their country. What do they profit from such a system and why would they feel that their interests are represented? It is not enough to deal

with politics on the occasion of elections, we have to become part of the process, not as the consumers of pre-defined political choices but as active creators. I think that a tool aimed at facilitating direct democratic expression of opinion such as DemocracyOS would be useful for society to participate in decisions of common interest (Botás, 2015).

Lucia Csabai, the community developer of the Icelandic *Citizen Foundation* and the developer of Your Priorities platform, highlights this with the following words:

I think that we can overcome political apathy on the level of small communities, but I am this sort of short-paced person with “slow” principles and mentality. We are talking about situations when, for example, Joe Public realizes that his opinion is important, his views count at a villagers’ reunion, and he is willing to take action for the sake of the village’s and the neighbourhood’s development, just like any other people, and he equally listens to others as part of a pleasant conversation (Csabai, 2015).<sup>12</sup>

The key to participation is that citizens shall experience that their word, opinion, and action are taken into consideration and have a direct impact on decisions regarding their own life. In the long run, it is only the voice of these conscious citizens that can change the present political culture. Well-organized online social actions that have repercussions in offline space are good incentives, only for short periods of time though. A good example for this is the series of demonstrations that were held during autumn 2014 against the Internet tax that the government intended to introduce, calling several ten thousands of people to the streets and forcing the government to withdraw the planned measure. This initiative won the European Civic Forum European Democratic Citizenship Awards<sup>13</sup> in 2015.

## **2. Involving Decision-Makers**

It is a determining factor both in the case of online and offline community projects how these systems can influence the political elite making actual political decisions and how they can thematize political discourse. In accordance with the principle of critical masses, the higher the number of stakeholders who share their opinion, the higher the number of local opinion leaders that can thematize political discourse and the higher the chance that political decision-makers will

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12 Source: Research Interview with Lucia Csabai, 2015.

13 Retrieved from: <http://civic-forum.eu/wp-content/uploads/2015/09/Campaign-of-the-Year-100-000-against-the-Internet-Tax.pdf> (accessed on: 23 October 2015).

take into consideration citizens' opinions and demands in order to preserve their political position. However, the truth is that presently in Hungary we have a civil society that is very weak in validating its interests and they are rather insufficient for creating such an impact. Neither online nor offline tools are sufficient for mobilizing critical masses and thus become tools that can bring about a change.

International examples show that political decision-makers are involved in online decision-making in different ways. DemocracyOS is applied in several countries<sup>14</sup> in decision-making processes related to public affairs,<sup>15</sup> which had an impact on political systems and involved different players of the political elite. Your Priorities platform is one of the important decision-making tools in Iceland. It is operated in the interest of citizens, supported and financed centrally, and, among other countries, it was successfully used in Estonia.<sup>16</sup> In smaller communities, the issues impacting local communities can be the first stage of involving society and, parallel to this, involving decision-makers. Following international examples, the Hungarian EVoks plans to involve the local government in smaller villages, offering the possibilities of the online platform for making decisions regarding the public affairs impacting the population.

### **3. Questions of Technology**

Internet penetration is a fast-growing phenomenon in the world; however, unlimited access to technological tools is indispensable for making the platforms more popular. Computers are not a prerequisite since smart phones are fully available in the developing countries of the world, and thus they can substitute computers. According to the professionals of DemocracyOS, the digital gap will not be related to technological tools but rather to the spreading of cultural habits including participation and to the understanding of possibilities offered by the Internet. For this reason, technological tools have to be even more open and user friendly so that they can offer a real alternative for more and more people.

The online platform of liquid democracy is often criticized, namely that online systems are also easy to manipulate. This might be one of the reasons why online voting is not an accepted form of the democratic expression of opinion. Limited access to technological tools, the 74 percent Internet penetration (Nielsen, 2015), and political culture also have to be taken into consideration since in

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14 Retrieved from: <http://democracyos.org/democracies> (Accessed on: 13 May 2015).

15 DemocracyOS has been used in Tunisia to debate its national constitution; by the Federal Government of Mexico to develop its open government policy; by the youngest parliamentarian in Kenya to consult his constituency or the Congress of Buenos Aires, becoming the first experience of digital democracy on the American continent. Retrieved from: <http://democracyos.org/about-us> (accessed on: 13 May 2015).

16 Retrieved from: <http://www.citizens.is/portfolio/estonian-laws-changed/> (accessed on: 11 May 2015).

many countries, such as in Hungary, there is no tradition of channelling citizens' opinions, apart from some consultations which can be rather considered as a marketing campaign aimed at legitimizing the political elite.

An important question of using the platforms is identifying users. This is indispensable because checked profiles prevent trolling, and the aim is to have results which can be easily authenticated later on. In the case of the Argentine DemocracyOS, this is realized in such a way that the system is connected to the central system of the population register, and thus those who take part in elections can vote officially with the help of the platform. However, as Gunnar Grimson, one of the founders of Your Priorities put it, the more complicated the registration phase and the more personal the data citizens have to provide, the less likely they are to participate in using these technological tools.

## **Conclusions**

In the present study, I had the intention to examine the possible role of social media of the late-modern media environment in the case of platforms facilitating citizens' participation, community decision-making, the expression of opinion, and community-level solutions of public affairs. My objective was to map the actual situation in Hungary and to ask questions which are presently visible.

It is becoming more and more evident that neither the mainstream, high-ranking mass media directed by elites of different political interest since the change of the political system nor social media with its social, entertaining function – which can occasionally be used for mobilizing people and organizing events with success, but only with limited participation of people (Tufekci–Wilson, 2012) – can provide an efficient public platform for the expression of political opinion and conversation.

Specialized online community platforms promoting citizens' participation, community decision-making, and the expression of opinion might help in the long run. EVoks, which made its debut in June 2015, and the platform of Populus launched in spring to solve public affairs on a community level have not been present for enough time to draw foregone conclusions.

However, it seems to be obvious that the new technological tools will not be sufficient alone to create a more participative democratic political system, but a self-consciousness-encouraging participation and a change in the political culture will be needed as well to pose great and serious challenges for citizens, the civil sphere as well as for political stakeholders.

Similarly to the success of mass movements, the popularity of using online platforms depends on the favourable coexistence of several factors. In general, we can state that an appropriate political environment is required and a suitable

affair will launch the necessary processes. However, several factors have an impact on citizens' participation, as it was presented before: the living standards of a certain community, the level of education, the political structure, or the degree of development in the case of a civil society, just to mention the most important ones.

The most important issue of the next decade is whether online platforms succeed in involving and mobilizing critical masses in social and political discourse, thus putting pressure on politicians and draw their attention to citizens' political will with the help of online and offline tools, or whether they will sink into oblivion and contribute to stabilizing the existing political institution system. It is evident that without active, self-conscious citizens, who have the willingness to take action for themselves and are able to cooperate, any kind of online tool might fail to be useful.

In an outdated political system that is similar to Hungary's traditional system based on representative democracy, where the political elite distanced from the citizens is not interested in encouraging participation, a conscious and strong civil sphere may be an efficient counterweight. Education and community organizations aimed at awakening consciousness and restoring the trust of disappointed citizens can be proper tools to create such a civil sphere. In order to create the culture of community cooperation, offline community organizations tailored to local needs may offer a solution. Without this, the online tools are not effective enough, they only provide a way of alternative resistance for a small layer of society – that is not sufficient in itself.

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# Lifestreaming and the Pressure of Reciprocity: Exploring Practices of Connected Presence among Adolescents from Taiwan and Austria

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**Abstract.** Practices referred to as “lifestreaming” facilitated by networked technologies have become central for the establishment of social embeddedness and acceptance among Taiwanese and Austrian youth. However, the “always on” paradigm is not exclusively experienced in a positive way. Reciprocal action forming the basis for presence in non-co-present situation becomes an uninterruptable and ubiquitous task, which puts the young actors under pressure. This research note focuses on ambivalences resulting from the pressure of reciprocity in converging media environments.

**Keywords:** connected presence, Taiwanese and Austrian youth

## Introduction

Practices relating to converging media technologies have become constitutive for the construction of intimacy in contemporary societies. The increasing “mediatisation of the everyday lives” (Krotz, 2007) of the young urban middle class in highly technologized countries in East Asia and Europe has rendered the boundaries between the online and offline sphere obsolete. A new “in-between” way of being, which Licoppe (2004) refers to as “connected presence” induced by mobile phone use, has re-configured social arrangements of presence and absence. Mobile network technologies enable the users to establish and maintain connectedness with others while on the move. The complexity of this new type of presence is further enhanced as multiple social media platforms and chat applications can simultaneously be accessed via the smartphone. This bolsters “multimodal communication” (Cui, 2016: 19), supplementing co-present interaction. Practices referred to as “lifestreaming” facilitated by network technologies have become central for the establishment of social embeddedness

and acceptance among Taiwanese and Austrian youth. Nevertheless, although this connectedness can be regarded as a basic need of adolescents (Taylor, 1997: 15), the “always on” paradigm is not exclusively experienced in a positive way. Reciprocal action forming the basis for presence in non-co-present situation becomes an uninterrupted and ubiquitous task, which puts the young actors under pressure and stress (Beyens, 2016). This research note focuses on ambivalences resulting from the pressure of reciprocity in converging media environments. In this context, culturally framed social norms of reciprocity as well as technological affordances might play an essential role. The paper refers to an ongoing transcultural study examining practices of digitally mediated intimacy among young people in urban areas in Taiwan and Austria.

## **Lifestreaming – Connected Presence in Practice**

Lifestreaming is a notion referring to practices involving cross-platform mobile messaging applications, which facilitate the closed, private exchange of messages, pictures, texts, videos and audio notes (David, 2013), building the basis for “connected presence” (Licoppe, 2004), basically referring to as a condition where multiple technologies connect various actors transcending temporal and spatial boundaries.

Following the approach of polymedia (Madianou, 2014), media technologies are conceptualized as environments and their consequences for communication practices. Thus, the focus is directed towards how users treat media as integrated environments of affordances. Due to technologically facilitated accessibility and availability, seamless connectivity has become more an imperative than a choice, as being digitally present decides whether an actor is included into or excluded from a community. In contrast to traditional forms, postmodern forms of community are strongly based on affective qualities such as dedication, individual decision, and imagination (Maffesoli, 1996). As common knowledge decreases under postmodern conditions, a community has to be continuously reaffirmed by communication. In other terms: communities of communication replace communities of knowledge, as Knoblauch (2008) stresses. Reciprocity as a basic relational mechanism (Stegbauer, 2011: 24) is gaining importance in converging media environments, as it is constitutive for the actors’ existence. It is the mutual flow of information which – besides the individually perceived intensity of emotions – decides how the quality of a relationship is experienced. It will be argued that in the context of multimodal communication reciprocity defined as “mutual exchange” transforms into a mechanism regulating and measuring presence but also emotional connectedness. In the Chinese context, it is the continuum of symmetrical/asymmetrical relationships which frames the norm of reciprocity. This means that the pressure of reciprocity is higher

in asymmetrical relationships than in symmetrical ones (Lim & Lim, 2003: 35). Therefore, this paper addresses the question if practices of reciprocity vary among the Taiwanese and the Austrian respondents.

Currently, Western core concepts of sociality are challenged by new forms of object-centred sociality (Knorr-Cetina, 2001): In advanced media cultures, an increasing number of everyday social interactions take place in “synthetic situations” (Knorr-Cetina, 2009: 69) – “an environment augmented (and temporalized) by fully or partially scoped components (...)”. As Karin Knorr-Cetina (2009: 64) points out, co-presence is created by response presence. In this context, lifestreaming is regarded as scopical practice, monitoring oneself and others, anticipating possibly relevant information for interaction, and enabling retrospective observation through a synopsis of information.

Short–Williams–Christie (1976) classify media according to their potential to articulate “presence”. While media technologies characterized by high social presence are experienced as warm and intimate (Stafford–Hillyer, 2012: 293), those with low social presence are more adequate for informational exchange. The distinction between informational and affective interaction does not apply to converging media environments as diverse modes of communication merge into multimodal communication. From the perspective of “media richness theory”, chat applications and messengers can be classified as “rich” and “effective” as they enable immediate feedback and response (Daft–Lengel–Trevino, 1987). Due to the multiplication of interactional contexts, this might also lead to complications.

## **Methods of Data Collection**

This on-going transcultural study addresses the practices and meanings of lifestreaming among young people in Taiwan and Austria by examining communicative modes and figurations (Hasebrink, 2004). In the process of data collection, a triangulation of methods comprising qualitative and quantitative methods was applied. A total of 40 narrative interviews (20 in Kaohsiung, Taiwan; 20 in Vienna, Austria) and four focus groups were conducted among students between 18 and 25 years of age from 2011 to 2013 to uncover globalized practices as well as cultural differences with regard to the use of converging media technologies as lifestreaming tools. The sample consisted of undergraduate and graduate students with a homogeneous socio-economic middle-class background. After identifying and interweaving categories in the process of data analysis, the results were interpreted drawing on the theoretical background. Consequently, a standardized online questionnaire (n = 500, Taiwan and Austria) was applied to complement the results of the qualitative study.

## Results

As 3G services had already been launched in 2003, mobile Internet is one of the main methods of Internet connection among young Taiwanese users (Internet World Stats, 2015). Similarly, in Austria, it is mainly the young population who is accessing the Internet via mobile devices. As mobile access to online services increasingly dominates communicative practices, mobile-oriented applications such as WhatsApp, Line, and Facebook Messenger gain relevance for young people in Europe and Asia-Pacific. The popularity of chat applications among Austrian and Taiwanese adolescents is also documented by this survey: 75 per cent of the Austrian as well as the Taiwanese population contact their friends via a chat application. While Line is the most frequently used chat application among the Taiwanese population (83%), WhatsApp ranks first among the Austrian adolescents (76%). Using Facebook on the smartphone is still more popular among the Taiwanese population (Tw: 80%, At: 57%).

The results of the current study point to the fact that response presence, which is based on reciprocal action, replaces physical co-presence in converging media environments.

Lifestreaming – referring to practices of sharing and exchanging images, stickers, texts, audio notes, and videos – dominates the communicative modes of young people in Austria and Taiwan. This also points to the general tendency in advanced media cultures of the omnipresence of pictures recoding cultural space with what is referred to as “iconic turn” (Mitchell, 1992). Following an “imperative of visibility” (Hartmann, 2003: 49), presence has to be visualized. Pictures are important for “sharing presence”, which is constitutive for “affective communities” or “neo-tribes” (Maffesoli 1996), which build on shared emotional experience rather than geographical proximity.

Da-yo, a 21-year-old student from Kaohsiung, explains what he likes to share via Line:

“I express my feelings using photos and videos. (...) If I visit an interesting place, which impresses me, I take a picture. And then I share it because it shows something I like.”

For the Austrian respondents, the speed of reciprocity indicates the level of intimacy of a relationship. The faster the communication partner replies to a message, the closer the relationship is perceived. In close relationships (i.e. romantic partnership), it is expected that the communication partner answers as fast as possible, as a 25-year-old female interviewee from Vienna outlines: “If you are writing, you actually reply immediately, as soon as you see it.” This tightened norm of reciprocity increases the pressure of having to respond and leads to a feeling of being under surveillance. Therefore Anna, a female interviewee from Vienna, criticizes the indication if a person is online: “I do not think that it is

good. On the one hand, it is good for me, if I can see it, but not good if someone else can see my status.”

The “seen” function, indicating that a (potential) communication partner has read a message, can also lead to feelings of frustration, as an interviewee from Vienna describes: “I find it stupid to see that the other person has read my message, because it can be frustrating.”

As the smartphone is carried close to the body and continually interacts with the owner by vibrating, blinking, or sending other signals, it is difficult to escape the pressure of reciprocity.

The results of the online survey show that the Taiwanese respondents expect their communication partners to answer faster than the Austrian respondents.

Most of the Taiwanese respondents said that they would expect an answer to a short message they had sent “within 15 minutes” (22%) or even “immediately” (18%), while most Austrian respondents expected an answer “within 24 hours” (34%).

What further adds to complexity is that individuals simultaneously have to be present and act within multiple contexts of interaction: In physical space, users have to interact with co-present others while at the same time having conversations in “phone spaces” or “chat spaces” with absent others and (inter) acting within “networked publics” (boyd 2007).

## **Tensions**

Technological affordances engender an “always on mentality”, as all interviewees describe being fully accustomed to “seamless connectivity” – “to immediately know what is going on and where in every minute. I am not used to not having this (connectivity), I am conditioned to have it!” (male student from Vienna, 23 years old).

As the interviewees pointed out, there is a heavily present tension between the strong need for uninterrupted connection with others and feeling the pressure of having to be available. On the one hand, lifestreaming practices support social proximity based on new modes of emotional expression. On the other hand, the young users experience a loss of privacy (“I am never alone”), peer pressure (“fear of missing out”), growing impatience, and new routines (“checking behaviour” or “fluid dating practices”).

Being cut off the line results in feelings of being excluded from information flows, which is put on the same level with being excluded from sociality. One interviewee explains why it is so important for her to be “connected”:

It depends on where I am. If I visit my grandparents abroad who do not have any Internet at home and you do not have your mobile phone with you... and then you are spending four days there, you do not know anything about what is going on in the world, well, admittedly you know what is going on in the world, but not what is happening within your circle of friends. Communication is missing.

## Conclusions

In the context of “multimodal communication”, the pressure of being “digitally present” has increased due to the introduction of control features such as the “seen” or “last online” function on messengers and chat applications, indicating whether or not a communication partner is or has been present. On the one hand, these functions enhance the feeling of situational control, which is limited due to the absence of other cues. As users can see if their communication partner(s) is/are online on chat and messenger applications, social presence as well as trust are enhanced. Furthermore, immediate feedback and response afforded by converging media technologies enhances the “richness” of communication, as outlined by media richness theory (Daft–Lengel–Trevino, 1987).

On the other hand, these functions engender feelings of privacy restriction. As presence exclusively depends on response presence and technology affords seamless availability and accessibility as well as control mechanisms, actors are constantly concerned with keeping personal scope and privacy.

While from the perspective of the Taiwanese respondents it is more important to answer quickly in the context of a weaker tied relationship, the Austrian respondents viewed it as a characteristic for intimate relationships to have uninterrupted contact with a high speed of reciprocity. These differences might be interpreted as pointing towards culturally framed norms of reciprocity. While in the Chinese context, the pressure of reciprocity is higher in formal relationships, in the European context, it might be higher in intimate relationships. On the other hand, expectations of fast reaction among the Taiwanese respondents might also be regarded as a reflection of a more advanced stage of hyper-acceleration in Taiwanese society.

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# RESEARCH NOTES





# Visual Research to Study the Digital Literacy and Multimodal Practices of Romanian Pre-School Children

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**Abstract.** The purpose of this research note was to highlight opportunities offered by visual research to collect direct empirical data from pre-school children about their digital literacy and multimodal practices. We have also presented some interesting findings obtained from a visual research conducted among 4- to 6-year-old Romanian children. The issued research is part of broader research titled *Digital Literacy and Multimodal Practices of Young Children from Romania*. The mentioned research was part of the EU COST Action IS1410 involving similar endeavours from over 30 countries (Bakó, 2016: 146). In our visual research, we have analysed 36 drawings belonging to 18 pre-school children. The topics of the drawings were: “My favourite digital devices” and “My preferred digital applications”. The content and formal analyses of drawings showed that pre-school children were aware of the digital devices in their environment, but they were not experienced in using various digital applications. Their emotional relationship with digital technology was not strong either. In conclusion, we have found results similar to previous research on the digital practices of young children.

**Keywords:** pre-school children, digital literacy, multimodal practices, visual research, drawing analysis

## 1. Introduction

Young children live in an extra-rich media environment, where parents – many of them also digital native – have smart phones, tablets, laptops, and other digital devices. Children aged from birth to eight have access to and use a wide variety of technologies from their birth. Many children access online sites or applications to play games, watch videos, visit virtual worlds, or just to draw and paint (COST Action IS 1410, 2014: 5). The everyday use of digital technologies is the norm even for young children under eight (Sefton-Green

et al., 2016: 3). Some authors complain of a vision of a lost childhood, where outdoor, natural, and spontaneous kinds of play appear to be lost in the digital metropolis, and young children meet the world of adults too early (Sefton-Green et al., 2016: 10).

There are serious concerns in the public and academic domain about how young children adopt new technology and the digital environment in their everyday lives. It is obvious that young children's daily routines, their learning, the followed norms and assumptions about how they should grow up are changing (Sefton-Green et al., 2016: 6). The most frequent question addresses the balance between opportunities and disadvantages of using new technology. Children's engagement with age-appropriate applications and games on tablets can develop their knowledge and skills in multimodal communication (Kucirkova, 2013 in COST Action IS1410, 2014: 6; Jaros, 2016). On the other hand, little is known about the level of awareness, digital literacy, and multimodal practices of young children as well as about the risks of using new technology at this early age.

New knowledge is required on the issues like young children's access to and use of digital devices such as smart phones and tablets or other gadgets in home or community spaces. Empirical research is also needed in relation to the role of digital literacy and multimodal practices in promoting learning, or rather development in this age-group (COST Action IS 1410, 2014: 7).

However, it is not easy to conduct research with children. Young children's general level of development, the cognitive, emotional, and social skills characteristic of their age influence the ways they can be included in research as informants. Teenagers are accepted informants in social sciences research, but pre-school children have only been considered reliable research subjects since the 1990s (Ólafsson et al., 2013: 20; Einarisdóttir, 2007; Hill, 2005: 62). Data collection involving pre-school-aged children research has relied on the observations of parents, educators, and the researchers themselves (Morrow, 1996). However, in the last two decades, an increasing number of studies involved pre-school-aged children as informants and active participants of the research.

In this research note, we focus on visual research as a way to collect direct information from pre-schoolers on their digital literacy and multimodal practices. We present genuine empirical data indicating the applicability of visual research for the study of digital literacy and multimodal practices of pre-schoolers. We consider young children reliable informants and research participants, and henceforth we introduce some findings of our visual research conducted with 4- to 6-year-old pre-school children from Romania. We will also mention the limits of this research method which could point to the need for further development of the method in practice.

## **2. Researching Pre-Schoolers' Digital Literacy and Multimodal Practices**

Adults acknowledge with admiration the almost naturally appearing digital skills of young children, but the issue is much more complex. Obviously, children born in the 21<sup>st</sup> century grow up in media-rich homes, but existent researches (Chaudron, 2015; Velicu–Mitarcă, 2016; Sefton-Green et al., 2016) do not confirm young children's high-level digital literacy and their dominant presence and participation in the digital world.

In most homes today, there are touchscreen devices – tablets, smartphones, touchscreen laptops – which facilitate the digital device use of young children. Researches prove that mobile devices, specifically tablets and smartphones, are some of the favourite devices of young children (Velicu–Mitarcă, 2016; Chaudron, 2015). Analysing the digital habits of Romanian families, Velicu and Mitarcă (2016: 4) have found that smartphones are the privilege of the parents, while the children receive their personal tablets as gifts at a very early age. Children most often use the tablets on their own. Chaudron (2015) reported the same results on a European level.

Pre-school children most often play videogames and watch video clips about games or cartoons. Sometimes they watch cartoon channels online. Pre-school children are also active in content production, they like making and watching photographs and videos about themselves or their family and friends (Velicu–Mitarcă, 2016: 4). Young children rarely use online communication channels (i.e. Skype, WhatsUp).

Young children know a lot about how to operate touchscreen devices; the online applications on mobile touchscreen devices appeals to their visual and tactile skills. Children are not as skilful in operating laptops and desktops as adults would expect. Young children imitate adults and their peers, but they are actually not very competent to participate in the digital world. Parents consider touchscreen devices instruments of entertainment, and tend to ignore their educational-instructional possibilities. For this reason, parents limit the use of digital devices, and therefore children spend relatively little time online. Young children do not even understand the difference between online and offline. Parents often restrict the online activity of pre-schooler children as a measure of discipline (Velicu–Mitarcă, 2016; Chaudron, 2015).

Due to their age developmental characteristics and because young children often use digital devices on their own (Chaudron, 2015; Velicu–Mitarcă, 2016), they are more exposed to online dangers – such as seeing inappropriate photos and videos, harassment by strangers, etc. – as they do not recognize the risks and do not possess the necessary knowledge and digital competence to handle them.

### **3. Visual Research To Study Pre-Schoolers’ Digital Literacy and Multimodal Practices**

#### **3.1. Challenges of Doing Research with Pre-Schoolers**

Researching young children raises ethical and methodological issues we have to address. Considering their level of development (physical, cognitive, emotional, and social) and the way of learning, traditional research methods are not very efficient to study the expression of what young children know and can do (Guddemi–Case, 2004: 3). In addition, every child has a family background, cultural and social experiences, and so every child needs a unique observation.

Ethical principles that apply to adults are the same for children, but there are also additional considerations. Researchers have greater responsibility toward children because children are vulnerable in their interaction with adults, and there is a power inequality between the adult researcher and the child participant (EUKO, 2010; REG, 2016).

#### **3.2. Visual Research as an Innovative Data Collecting Method to Study Pre-Schoolers’ Digital Literacy and Multimodal Practices**

The age characteristics of pre-school children limit the research possibilities (Greene–Hill, 2005: 4). It is difficult to gather data from pre-school-aged children with any kind of cognitive methods for they do not know yet what they know, and therefore they often do not understand the questions they are asked or cannot give meaningful answers (Greene–Hill, 2005: 4). They might also not want to answer some questions. Researchers have also found that small children answer meaningless questions as well – usually “no” – because they want to comply with the researchers’ expectations and can be easily influenced (Greene–Hill, 2005: 9). The attention of pre-school children fluctuates, they do not have the patience for longer conversations (Ólafsson et al., 2013: 45; Greene–Hill, 2005: 17). Building trust is also important, otherwise the child will not be honest (Greene–Hill, 2005: 17). The limits of imagination and reality are still blurred at this age, and therefore it is difficult to decide the boundary between them. Researchers have also realized that children often lie, which researchers fail to notice (Greene–Hill, 2005: 10).

In working with children, it is preferable to use indirect methods instead of direct ones (Einarsdóttir, 2007: 199; Kuhn, 2003). Young children have a great need for moving, and in their activities they imitate adults in their immediate environment and their peers. For this reason, the appropriate methods for data collection are drawing, role-playing, having children complete concrete tasks,

playing with objects, and trials and practising (Guddemi–Case, 2004: 2; Greene–Hill, 2005: 14; Einarsdóttir, 2007: 199).

One of the most widespread data collection methods in doing research with children is drawing (Vályi, 2013: 39; Ólafsson et al., 2013: 82; Thomson, 2008: 3). Drawing is a traditional technique in psychology and psychotherapy, increasingly applied during the past 15–20 years also in other types of research on young children (Literat, 2013: 86; Ólafsson et al., 2013: 21; Thomson, 2008: 3). Moreover, it can also be applied across various cultures since visual expression has mostly the same characteristics in each culture. However, the drawings also bear cultural specificities, which are worth keeping in mind (Literat, 2013: 89).

## **4. Methodology**

### **4.1. About “Digital Literacy and Multimodal Practices of Young Children from Romania”**

During the period of December 2015–May 2016, we conducted an exploratory research<sup>1</sup> among 4–6-year-old Romanian children about their multimodal practices and digital literacy. The aim of the research was to develop theoretical knowledge and to increase empirical data regarding the topic.

We addressed the following research questions: the role of digital technology in young children’s everyday life; the use of digital technology among young children’s media practices; young children’s access to and use of digital devices; young children’s emotional attitude towards digital technology; young children’s preferred digital devices (smartphone, tablet, console, or computer) and adopted multimodal activities (games, applications); young children’s level of digital literacy; adults’ attitudes toward the relationship between young children and digital technology.

We implemented the research in kindergartens of two Transylvanian settlements. One kindergarten was situated in Cluj-Napoca (Cluj County) and the other one in Miercurea Nirajului (Mureş County). The kindergartens were financed by the local government. Cluj-Napoca is the seat of Cluj County and is a very populous city having around 400,000 inhabitants. Miercurea Nirajului is a small town in Mureş County, having around 5,500 inhabitants.

In the research, 18 children participated, between 4 to 6 years of age, and one of their parents as well as the educators of the two kindergartens who were close to the selected children.

In selecting the children participants, we aimed to achieve diversity regarding the place of residence, the socio-economic situation (SES), and gender. From the

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1 The research was financed by the Institute of Research Programmes of Sapientia Foundation during the period of 1 March 2015–31 August 2016. Members of the research team: Gyöngyvér Tőkés, Rozália Bakó, Sz. Mária Csíki, Boglárka Lovász, and Hunor Szócs.

kindergarten of Cluj-Napoca, we selected 10 children: 5 girls and 5 boys. From the kindergarten of Miercurea Nirajului, we selected 8 children: 5 boys and 3 girls. All children's families had middle SES based on the parents' educational level and occupational status. All families had their own homes.

We collected qualitative data in the same way in both kindergartens using the following methods:

- Visual research – we asked the kindergarteners to make two drawings: a) their favourite digital device and b) their favourite digital application; during and after the drawing activity, we asked them to interpret their drawings;
- Interviews – a) we interviewed children regarding their digital practices in the presence of their kindergarten teachers, b) we made interviews with one of their parents about the children's digital practices at home and the level of their digital literacy, and c) we made interviews with the kindergarten teachers about the children's digital skills and digital devices used in the educational activities;
- Participant observations – we observed each child using a tablet for 30 minutes.

In this research note, we present just part of the full research presented before. We outline the design of the visual research and some empirical findings obtained from the analysis of drawings made by the Romanian pre-school children from our target group.

## **4.2. About the Visual Research**

We used projective drawings (Vass, 2013: 20) as part of our visual research to explore the pre-school children's perspectives about the digital world and to evaluate the importance of digital devices and practices in their daily routines, or rather the level of their digital literacy. The reality of children's life manifests through the drawings (Kuhn, 2003). We did not intend to perform the psychological profile of the children from the sample.

In the research process, children drew freely without any indication telling how to draw, so they could draw anything they wanted to and how they wanted to in order to better express their ideas and feelings regarding the digital world (Vass, 2013: 20). In both kindergartens, children were given the same instructions and used the same kind of paper and pencils. They were drawing during the kindergarten programme. At the first occasion, the topic of their drawing was "My favourite digital devices", while at the second occasion it was "My favourite digital application". Children drew one picture for each of the related topics. During and after both drawing activities, children explained what they were drawing.



### **4.3. Analysing Criteria of Drawings**

To analyse children's drawings, we used content and formal analysing criteria. To develop the set of analysing criteria for decoding children's drawings, we selected some criteria from the "Seven Step Configuration Analysis" model formulated by Zoltán Vass (2013: 21), which is a psychological method to interpret projective drawings. According to Vass (2013: 20), projective drawing means that the picture is prepared freely without direct influence by the researcher.

In order to understand the content of drawings, we applied intuitive, global, and item analysis. Intuitive analysis means that the researcher uses intuition to find the core meaning of the drawing and to describe it in one essential sentence. The global analyses let us define the level of integration and harmony of the drawings. The item analyses allow us to determine symbols and unusual items present on the picture.

The formal criteria according to which we analysed the children's drawings were: the use of space on the page and the positioning of the picture; the quality of lines; the size and proportions of the picture; the level of detailing; the use of colours and contours. The formal analysis of drawings would have enabled us to reproduce the psychological profile of the pre-school children from the sample. However, we did not intend to establish such kind of psychological diagnosis.

## **5. Key Findings**

In what follows, we will present the findings from analysing 36 drawings of 18 pre-school children from Romania according to the set of criteria presented above.

First, we will present the content, and then the formal characteristics of the drawings. The content of drawings reveal the children's thoughts, ideas, knowledge, and perceptions in association with digital devices and digital activities. The formal characteristics of the drawings reflect the children's emotional attitudes and experiences with the digital world.

### **5.1. Content Analysis of Pre-School Children's Drawings**

The intuitive, the global, and the item analyses (Vass, 2013) of drawings revealed which digital devices and activities were known to the children, or rather how they perceived the digital phenomenon.

At this age, children's drawings convey a viewer-centred information about the depicted object. At this developmental stage (4 to 6 years), pre-school children draw what they know, think, and feel about the expressed object, merely the real components and details of the represented object. Pre-school children have the

intention to represent reality in their drawings; even so, it is difficult to decide the boundary between fantasy and reality because they use symbolic drawing. At this age, children draw what is important for them about/of the represented object. Children's drawings are in the pre-schematic developmental stage, when children depict the objects from their environment, but drawings do not have an inner organization or schema. The emotional connection is important at this age; children use plenty of colours. It is also usual to use just some favourite colours.

### *5.1.1. "My Favourite Digital Devices"*

The first series of drawing were about the favourite digital devices of the pre-schoolers. Analysing the objects represented we could observe differences on the pictures of children from Cluj-Napoca and Miercurea Nirajului.

Six of the ten children from Miercurea Nirajului included digital devices on their drawings: one smartphone, three tablets, and two desktop computers. The other four drawings contained elements of games played on digital devices or elements which were apparently not connected to the digital world.

Six of the eight children's drawings from Cluj-Napoca contained digital devices. Three children drew smartphones, two children drew tablets, and one child drew both devices. Two children drew cartoon characters from cartoons they had watched on digital devices.

The type of the most frequently represented digital device on the drawings gives hints that the children from Cluj-Napoca are at an advantage regarding their use of touchscreen mobile digital devices. Six of them drew touchscreen mobile devices, while just four children from Miercurea Nirajului drew the same type of devices. As drawings are expressions of children's real life, we interpret the higher frequency of the touchscreen mobile devices as the manifestation of richer personal experiences with such devices in the case of the children from Cluj-Napoca.

### *5.1.2. "My Favourite Digital Application"*

The subject of the second series of drawing was the most used digital application by the children on the digital devices. The component items of pictures from the second series of drawings indicated that digital activities were less known and less familiar to the children. Just a few kids drew application icons or characters from cartoons and online games; most of the young children repeatedly depicted the used digital devices. The representation of application icons or other identity elements from games and cartoons was a rare case.

Five of the ten children from Miercurea Nirajului drew digital devices again (three tablets, one smartphone, and one desktop computer) and three children

drew characters known from games played on digital devices. Two drawings lacked any symbol of the digital world.

Seven of eight children from Cluj-Napoca also drew digital devices (three tablets, two smartphones, two tablets, and smartphones). One child from Cluj-Napoca drew a cartoon character.

To conclude, children are highly aware of the presence of digital devices in their environment, but they have less experience of the applications that can be utilized on digital devices. Based on the drawings' analysis, we could note the modest exploit of these devices. There is no major difference between the children from Miercurea Nirajului and Cluj-Napoca in this respect.

Little can be said about how integrative and harmonious the drawings were because only a few elements appear on them. If elements other than the devices also appeared, then these were the children themselves, members of their family, or characters of the games they play on the devices. Drawings contained no unusual elements. The drawings of the children from Miercurea Nirajului contained few elements, while some of those from Cluj-Napoca contained several elements. With more items on the picture, there were confusion and lack of integration on the drawings.

## 5.2. Formal Analysis of Children's Drawings

The formal analysis of the drawings revealed the pre-school children's emotional relation to the digital world. We looked at the quality of lines, the use of space and the positioning of the picture on the page, the size and proportions of the picture, the level of detailing, and the use of colours and contours.

### 5.2.1. *The Quality of Lines*

Nine out of the ten children from Miercurea Nirajului had a constant and normal pressure on lines while they were drawing their favourite digital device. Four children out of ten used soft lines in the second drawing, the one about the favourite digital application.

Among the drawings about the favourite digital device of the children from Cluj-Napoca, we found one drawing with soft lines. We found two drawings representing the preferred digital applications with faint and uncertain lines.

The soft lines indicated uncertainty and lack of self-confidence regarding the subject of the drawing. Young Romanian children had more confidence in drawing the digital devices because they lived in media-rich homes with digital devices around them. But many of them lacked confidence when it came the turn of used applications. They used just a few applications, so using the devices meant for them handling tablets or smartphones in a simple way.

### *5.2.2. The Use of Space, the Size and Proportion of the Pictures*

The use of space showed a great deal about the children's relation to the subject of the drawing. In the first series of drawings, the Cluj-Napoca children all placed the drawing in the centre of the sheet, which claimed the control of the subject. In the second series of drawings, seven children placed the picture in the centre of the sheet and one child on the left side of the sheet. Left dominance of the drawing means lack of control and uncertainty.

Five of the ten children from Miercurea Nirajului drew their favourite digital device in the centre of the sheet, four drew at the bottom of the page, and in one case the drawing was placed partly outside the sheet. Drawings at the bottom of the page mean uncertainty, while drawing placed partly outside the sheet means inhibition. In the case of their favourite application, four children from Miercurea Nirajului placed their pictures in the centre and six at the bottom of the sheet.

As for the size and proportion of the pictures, all Cluj-Napoca children filled the entire sheet with their drawings, while four children from Miercurea Nirajului drew small-sized pictures. Small-sized drawings indicated uncertainty and an inferior importance of the represented object.

From this perspective, we should note the differences between pre-school children from Cluj-Napoca and those from Miercurea Nirajului. The use of space on paper and the size of both the represented digital devices and the digital applications undeniably indicated a lower level of importance and interest in the usage of digital devices as well as practice in multimodal activities among the pre-school children from Miercurea Nirajului.

### *5.2.3. The Level of Detailing*

Five of the ten children from Miercurea Nirajului drew a detailed image of the digital devices and five of them a sketchy one. In the case of depicting the preferred digital applications, there were only two detailed drawings and eight quite sketchy ones.

Seven out of eight children from Cluj-Napoca made a detailed picture of their favourite digital device. For the favourite application, there were six detailed and two sketchy drawings. In the case of the second series of drawings, the Cluj-Napoca children often represented the icons of the applications as displayed on the device screen. This indicates that they are aware of the opportunities offered by digital devices although they have not used them consciously.

In all eighteen drawings, the shapes were adequate and the representation recognizable. As anticipated, the images were often sketchy, stereotypical, simplified, and schematic, containing few details, which can be typical for 4- to

6-year-old children. However, the variety of shapes, creativity, and individuality in the drawings is already present in the case of favourite drawing topics.

The detailing of the pictures highlighted a higher interest in the digital world of the children from Cluj-Napoca as their drawings were more detailed, containing more relevant elements.

#### *5.2.4. The Use of Colours and Contours*

Colourful, filled-in drawings signal the familiarity with the subject and a positive attitude towards it, as well as self-confidence. Contour drawings signal uncertainty, unfamiliarity, and averseness.

When drawing their favourite digital device, four children from Miercurea Nirajului made rich-coloured drawings. Six of ten children drew contours with less colours. In the case of their favourite application, two of them drew colourful drawings and eight drew contours with less colours.

Seven of the eight children from Cluj-Napoca made colourful drawings and one drew contours with little colouring. As for the second series of drawings, there were six highly coloured and two contour drawings.

As for the first drawing in the Miercurea Nirajului group, five children used cold colours (blue, green, purple, black), three children used a mixture of cold and warm colours (blue, green, yellow, orange, red), no colours were used on one drawing, and contrasting colours on another one (black and red). Similar results have been found for the second drawing: five children used cold colours, three children used mixed colours, and two children used warm colours.

In the case of the children from Cluj-Napoca, for the first drawing, five children used a combination of cold and warm colours, one child used only warm colours, one child used a single colour, and one child used only a lead pencil. As for the application, three used a mix of cold and warm colours, three used only warm colours, one child used contrasting colours (red and black), and one used only a lead pencil.

The use of colours refers to emotional states and indicates children's emotions towards the represented topic. The use of cold colours indicated a rather rational or negative attitude. The drawings using both cold and warm colours indicated cheerfulness and balance. The use of warm colours indicated energy and interest. Contrasting colours indicated emotional ambivalence.

The children from Cluj-Napoca compared to those from Miercurea Nirajului used more colours and less contours to represent the digital devices and applications. And yet, considering that children like colours, especially vivid ones, the use of colours seems poor in the case of the pre-school-age children in both settlements. In the drawings of the Romanian pre-school children, contours were much more prevalent than colours, which refers to the poor emotional relationship with the

represented topic. The comparison of the two groups of children revealed a more favourable emotional attitude of the Cluj-Napoca children, in whose case the emotional attitude to the topic was more positive and balanced.

## 6. Discussion and Conclusions

Under eight years, children need preparation and guidance to learn and develop themselves in our recently fast-digitalizing society, where a high level of digital literacy and good digital practices would lead to integration and competitiveness.

Yet there is a lack of knowledge regarding the digital literacy and multimodal practices of children under eight, which could help parents and educators to define principles for a beneficial guidance in the digital world. Researchers have been formulating the need for empirical data in order to better understand the young children's ways of learning and developing in the 21<sup>st</sup>-century information society.

However, it is not easy to conduct a research with children under eight years of age. Young children's general level of development influences the ways they can be included in research as informants (Ólafsson et al., 2013: 20; Einarsdóttir, 2007; Hill, 2005: 62).

In this research note, we have underlined the opportunity offered by visual research to collect direct information from children under eight years of age. We have also presented some findings about the digital practices of 4- to 6-year-old Romanian children from their own perspective.

The results of the visual research of the 4- to 6-year-old Romanian pre-school children fit well with the previous findings in the literature and also confirm our research results using direct data gathering methods with adults connected with the children under study.

As expected, the analyses of the drawings of young Romanian children show that the *use of digital devices is an important but not dominant element of their lives* (Chaudron, 2015: 7). The content of the drawings indicate that Romanian pre-school children grow up in media-rich homes, where they are in a daily contact with a wide range of digital devices (Chaudron, 2015: 7). Children are familiar with the digital devices, but their emotional relationship with these are weak. They practise just a few multimodal activities; this scarcity is also indicated by the plain content of the drawings. Children sketched almost the same pictures at both drawing tasks although first they had to paint their favourite digital devices and secondly their preferred digital activities.

It is important to note that the features of drawings of young children from the big urban settlement of Cluj-Napoca and the small town of Miercurea Nirajului appear to suggest different digital practices. These results confirm the previous

findings in literature that users in urban and rural areas have particular digital-usage habits. In our research context, this means that the young children's parents have different digital practices and various emotional attitudes toward digital technology. Accordingly, parents' digital habits have influence on children's digital practices (Tórkés, 2016). The children from Cluj-Napoca seemed more positive and self-confident about using digital devices and applications. This interpretation appears to be well sustained by the formal analysis of the pre-school children's drawings. The drawings of the children from Cluj-Napoca were characterized by normal pressure lines, pictures positioned in the middle of the page, with proportional subjective sizes. They also used less contours and more colours in their drawings. Many children from Miercurea Nirajului drew small-sized pictures, positioned at the bottom of the page, used contours intensively and less warm colours.

We are aware that visual research has its limitations too. One disadvantage is that the interpretation of drawings is very subjective, so the attitude, knowledge, and experience of the researcher influences the results to a great extent. There is also problem with the reliability of the drawings because the boundary between reality and fantasy is still blurred in the 4- to 6-year-old children's minds and drawings.

In conclusion, we have presented genuine empirical data, which revealed the applicability of drawings in studying the digital literacy and multimodal practices of pre-schoolers. Our study provided considerable insight into the effectiveness of visual research. We have also mentioned some limitations of visual research, which could point to the need for further testing and development.

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## Fashion as a Communicative Phenomenon

### Agenda Setting for a Research Project on Youth's Clothing Consumption

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**Abstract.** In spite of its omnipresence, fashion only rarely constitutes an explicit research subject among Romanian scholars. In the present review, I intend to set the ground for a research project aiming at studying youth's fashion-related consumption mostly from the viewpoint of their "fashion talks", i.e. those discursive repertoires through which youngsters define what is fashion and fashionable in terms of clothes. The assumption is that in spite of its social, economic, and psychological aspects fashion and clothing consumption can be well defined within a communicative framework. In this sense, some theoretical viewpoints and research questions are formulated in order to outline a research agenda for a research project on youth's fashion consumption.

**Keywords:** fashion consumption, youth, communication

## Fashion as a Form of (Over)Consumption

Since Lipovetsky's (1994) observation that in spite of its omnipresence fashion still has a lower academic status, there have occurred significant changes in the academic institutionalization of fashion. Today, we can speak about *fashionology* (Kawamura, 2005), i.e. about the study of fashion as a system of institutions which produce the concept and the practice of fashion. Fashionology is by definition an interdisciplinary field, which implies economic, social, and communicational approaches, determined by the very essence of fashion as a power, cultural, and symbolic phenomenon.

We usually associate fashion with clothing, but not all clothing can be considered fashion. On the other hand, fashion is more than clothing and accessories. Fashion is everywhere, it is a system of meanings which adds extra values to clothing and

objects in general through those invisible elements that exist in people's imagination and beliefs (Barthes, 2005). Fashion is symbolic and refers to those styles that are accepted by a large group of people at a given time, it is a transitory phenomenon "about capturing the moment" (Kaiser–Ketchum, 2005), it is the passion of novelty and change (Lipovetsky, 1994).

Due to its visual nature, fashion is a great example for both conspicuous consumption and overconsumption. In this sense, fast fashion refers to those low-cost clothing collections which are based on current high-cost luxury fashion trends; fast fashion is imitative and it constitutes a response system to high fashion that encourages disposability (Fletcher, 2008). Due to its imitative nature, fast fashion is particularly popular among young consumers, who try to follow the fashion behaviour of their icons; it offers trendy design and immediate gratification for youngsters' identities. In this respect, fashion is inseparable from advertising as far as fashion brand images are associated with attractive lifestyles or celebrity figures through which we are continuously mobilized to wish to consume and look for gratification (Schwartz, 2005).

Bauman's theory of liquid modernity (Bauman, 2005) also contends that in a consumer society identity is permanently cultivated and adjusted in accordance with the mobility of lifestyles and unsettledness. In the context of the ever-changing liquid modernity, people continuously reinvent their identities, and for this purpose (fast) fashion represents a great instrument. The role of advertising should also be mentioned here because marketing techniques and brand images continuously stimulate new consumer desires, and consequently consumers are encouraged to continuously shop and look for new experiences and sensations (Niinimäki, 2009; cf. McGrath, 2012). Then, the places and sites of shopping, e.g. the shopping mall, determine that the engagement with garments occurs mostly through purchase rather than through wearing (McGrath, 2012); moreover, social media and content sharing further enhance disengagement: on the Instagram, for instance, fashion becomes a "shareable experience" (Pike, 2016) – the momentary image of an item of clothing is more important than wearing it *à la long*.

Similarly, in his work titled *From the Work Ethic to the Aesthetic of Consumption*, Bauman (2001) juxtaposes the ethics of work and the ethics of consumption, and contends that within the framework of the society of consumption modernity's major ethical values centred around duty and responsibility started to lose their validity and have been replaced by the aesthetics of consumption. This means that consumers are aesthetical subjects whose decisions are motivated by strategies of identity constructions, rather than moral subjects who act in accordance with their duties and responsibilities. The aesthetics of consumption links the purport of consumption to the fever of new sensations.

## Consumption and Fashion Consumption as Communicative Phenomena

Communication studies and studies of consumption are overlapping on many dimensions: the exploration of the ways in which signs and symbols are incorporated in the process of consumption is a perfect example in this sense. As Baudrillard (1998) put it: the analysis of consumption should focus not on the use-value of the goods, but on the production and manipulation of signs through the process of consumption. Attainment has a visual importance; the happiness of having certain goods does not mean (solely) an inner enjoyment, “it is associated with a display of consumer activity (...); with a presentation of signs or evidence of consuming achieved” (Baudrillard, 1998: 49).

The consumption of signs and meaning is evident throughout the whole system of consumption, but probably the most salient domain of sign consumption occurs in the case of clothing and fashion. Veblen (1899/1953) was among the first authors to talk about the double function of clothing by differentiating between the protective and the symbolic role of clothing, the latter being indicative for the wearer’s economic and social position. Literature speaks in this sense about *status consumption* and about the role of visible objects’ consumption, and among these especially high-end fashion and clothing items consumption to satisfy not only the material needs of the consumers but also their social needs in terms of impressing others (Husic–Cicic, 2009).

Clothing use is not just a cultural and normative phenomenon, it is also communicative, and for this aspect probably the most eloquent example is first impression, but it would be too simple to reduce the informative role of clothing to this specific situation. In fact, clothing is systematically used in society in order to create appropriate appearances at a particular time (i.e. fashionable appearances) and specific meanings about their users (Crane, 2000).

A specific manifestation of object language is the so-called *clothing behaviour* or *clothing speech* (cf. “I speak through my clothes” – Eco, 1973 – qtd by Hebdige, 1979/2002: 100), a non-linguistic communication through which people manifest, enhance, or manipulate their identities. Clothing and fashion can be manipulated to serve as indicators of power or, in the expression of the anthropologists, they are both bridges and fences (Douglas–Isherwood, 1979) in the sense that fashion items enable the share of common identities within a group, but they also delineate one group from another (according to Bourdieu’s theory of distinction, 1984).

Barthes (2005) contends, however, that *fashion language* is much more than the visual image of clothing; it refers to those discourses through which fashion is described, and such repertoires always make reference to both vestimentary

features and evaluative narratives. Such discourses can be located both on the level of institutional discourses, e.g. fashion magazine's aesthetic discourse, which represents a kind of "written clothing", and on the level of daily conversations, which on the level of the lay public defines what is fashion and fashionable and what is not.

In connection with clothing and fashion communication, we can speak both about distinction and adjustment. *Adjustment* (Meyer–Anderson, 2000) describes how people, and especially youth, tend to use their clothing to adjust to their peer groups. Brands that signify specific social status can then enhance the entry into groups that value such brands and brand meaning. Once advertising creates a brand image, consumers are willing to acquire these brands and adjust their social status to that of fashion icons or to that of trendsetters in their groups. Obviously, adjustment is not equally important for individuals, and there can be specific consumer segments ranging from high adjusters (i.e. status consumers) to high deniers, the latter being illustrative of the emergence of fashion subcultures (Hebdige, 1979/2002).

It is worth mentioning that status consumption does not occur exclusively among the wealthy, and economically less better-off are also willing to adjust their status through consumption of status items. What is different, however, is that while upper class individuals' conspicuous consumption demonstrates their social and economic potential, lower class consumers' imitative behaviour (i.e. aspirational consumption) can be explained by their need to increase their self-esteem in the context of social comparison (Husic–Cicic, 2009). In this respect, even the so-called ethical fashion consumption (Fletcher, 2008) can be interpreted as ways of providing uniqueness and distinction, i.e. a form of eco-narcissism (Griskevicius et al., 2010) rather than genuine manifestations of truly moral values.

## **Starting-Points for a Research Agenda on Youth's Fashion Consumption**

Rooted in the above outlined theoretical positions, I propose in the following a research project whose aim is to investigate the phenomenon of fashion consumption among youth from a communicational perspective. As already mentioned, clothing choices are both individual (e.g. pleasure, hedonism) and social (interpersonal influences, status assignments, etc.), and, as far as clothes are visual objects, they represent ways of message encoding and decoding not only about our stylistic preferences but – through these preferences – about our social values, status, group adjustments, etc. More than these, besides the visual

messages of clothes, fashion communication occurs also through the language repertoires in which fashion is described and narrated (Barthes, 2005).

The concrete empirical endeavour of the proposed research agenda is to study young consumers’ discourses about the meaning of fashion and about their fashion-related behaviour in terms of consumption habits, fashion-related influencers (e.g. online and offline fashion icons, the role of social media), brand preferences, fast-fashion-related behaviours, conscious fashion decisions (e.g. ethical consumption), etc. (*Table 1*).

**Table 1.** Research questions to be investigated through the empirical research (proposal)

<b>The meaning of fashion</b>	What does fashion mean for the youngsters? What is the meaning of “fashionable” and “being in fashion”? Which are those examples (people, garments, brands, etc.) they associate with fashion? What types of evaluative discourses do youngsters use in connection with fashion?
<b><i>Fashion-related information</i></b>	How informed are youngsters about fashion? (self-identification) What is the role of significant others, institutions, offline and online platforms, and fashion icons in providing fashion-related information?
<b><i>Fashion consumption</i></b>	Shopping for fashion: where, when, and what do youngsters use to buy? Who influences the shopping decisions (significant others, fashion icons, social media platforms, advertising, etc.)? How are shopping decisions negotiated? What is the role of fashion in these decisions? Optimized fashion-related choices: budget vs trends; the role of second-hand shops, etc.
<b>Brands and advertising</b>	Which are the most important fashion brands from youngsters’ viewpoint? What is the role of advertising and social media in generating brand images and consumption desires? What kind of lifestyles do youngsters try to imitate through their clothes? Do youngsters use and how do they use social media in order to communicate their fashion image?
<b><i>Status through fashion</i></b>	How to manage status through garments? The role of brands, styles, images, etc. How does fashion become visual and communicated through clothes? What is the role of social media in communicating status consumption?

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<b>Adjustment vs distinction</b>	What strategies does the youth use in order to adjust their image to/distinct it from that of a group? Which are those fashion items that help them in doing so? Are there specific subcultures? How are these subcultures structured and seen by others?
<b>Ethical conduct in fashion consumption</b>	How do youngsters relate to fashion overconsumption? Do they experiment sustainable lifestyles in fashion consumption (e.g. capsule wardrobe, conscious collections, re-use, second hand, flea markets, etc.)? What is the role of ethical values/narcissism in choosing sustainable options?

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All these research questions are intended to understand the communicative nature of fashion, the ways in which young people are elaborating narratives and argumentations about their fashion-related behaviour and the ways in which they are using their clothes as a form of non-verbal communication about their actual or preferred social status, self-management, and self-optimization.

The research population consists of youth with various socio-economic backgrounds in order to be able to sketch possible types of fashion and status consumptions. For instance, by taking a research population of students, we can pay attention to how students' economic and parental background, their permanent residence (e.g. rural vs urban culture) influences youngsters' fashion-related behaviours and discourses.

As a method of research, focus-group discussions are proposed, which have the advantage of collecting the data in a more natural way, by taking into account the opinions resulting from participants' reciprocal influencing of one another (Krueger–Casey, 2009). Focus groups are especially useful in exploring debated topics, with pro and contra arguments, such as fashion in our case.

Additionally, quantitative surveys can bring further information on the research populations, help to quantify those major themes which are going to be treated in the focus groups, and allow the construction of various types of publics in connection with fashion consumption.

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## Maria's Bag

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**Abstract.** Shared photographs transmit a sense of place (Agnew, 2011) that allows for (dis)affection to be transmitted. Social co presence and intimacy are generated when photographs are shared within a particular group, which could be called the phatic community (Prieto-Blanco, 2010). It is at this stage, at this level of kinship that the how and what of sharing is determined. The empirical work carried out with Maria and ten more Irish-Spanish families living in Ireland corroborates this likeness and hints at a communicative function that is activated by photographic exchanges – namely, the phatic.

**Keywords:** Irish-Spanish families, photographic exchanges, phatic community

For the past four years, I was immersed in a doctoral journey that allowed me to work with eleven families in Ireland. The ethnographic work lasted eighteen months during which participants granted me access to their everyday photographic practices. In this context, and arguably in many others, photography was sensed to, first, being in transformation and second to be creating a mode of action whereby actors share tacit and intersubjective knowledge visually. As Rose has pointed out, “[p]articipation produces a set of specific sets of meanings, feelings and positions” (2010: 17). Thus, it may be argued that visually mediated interactions with one another have the potential to precipitate socio-cultural change.

The first striking finding occurred while in the field. After a few meetings with several families, I realized that both screen- and paper-based images coexisted in a seamless flow. Accordingly, diverse modes of distribution were used synchronically to share images with significant others living far away. Snail mail, messaging applications, photo calendars, and selfies all belonged to the media repertoires of Irish-Spanish families living in Ireland. In the midst of all these photographs, or better said photographic objects, and pictorial practices, there was one case that immediately struck my attention. Allow me to share it with you.

Maria has been living in Ireland for almost a decade now. She is in her thirties. She works full time. She is in a long-term relationship and shares an apartment with her partner. She photographs regularly both for personal and leisurely reasons, but she

does not work for the creative industry. In fact, none of the participants of the study did. She shares her photographs via e-mail, social media, messaging applications and her apartment is populated with frames and photo-albums. All these processes were commonplace to the other participants too. However, Maria always carries with her a bag that contains: her photo camera, memory cards, recently taken photographs printed and placed in a small 10x15 photo album, postcards and flyers of events related to photography she has attended or aims to attend.



**Image 1.** Maria's Bag, June 2014.

The first time we met, and following the research design, she selected five photographs that she had already shared. She first used her camera to show me the images, but, frustrated by the slow browsing process on the camera display, she turned to Facebook. In line with the narrative approach of the research, I listened to the stories behind the production and distribution of each of those photographs. Maria moved from concrete to more general narratives of her photographic practices, stating that “Facebook can be a little addictive” (Maria, October 2013) and that she shared more photos with her friends than with her family. Like other participants expressed, continuous – albeit ever-interrupted – digital exchange of images framed by a conversational mode challenge traditional notions of digital ephemerality. The immediate and intermittent nature of these exchanges generates ontological security for migrants like Maria and her transnational network of support. The affordances activated within these photographic practices highlight the social and cultural relevance of digital ephemeral encounters (Grainge, 2011). Three elements seem to define transnational digital photography: connectivity, reflexivity, and material emplacement.

When we finished talking about those five photographs, I asked her about the many memory cards she kept in her bag. It was an unusual amount, especially for someone who does not photograph professionally. Her answer was striking too while highlighting the continuity of analogue and digital in contemporary photographic practices. Maria treats memory cards the same way analogue films were treated: once the memory card is full, it is time to start photographing with a new one. Thus, for Maria, full memory cards become portable storage units and she carries many of them around in case she wants to browse her photographs or show them to friends and family. Afterwards, we discussed the 10x15 photo album she carried in her bag. For the most part, it was filled with photographs she had taken recently; however, she also said: “I change the photos quite regularly, but some of them stay” (Maria, October 2013). Like observed with other participants, paper-based photographs – some may call them analogue photographs – seemed to offer Maria anchor points. Other participants also consider photographs as proofs of experiences shared with others, and, as such, they are not just clickable: they are constitutive and the result of ongoing relationships.

With the popularization of mobile digital lifestyles, Facebook and other social networks complement purely analogue third spaces (Oldenburg, 1989: 28) by subsidizing social interactions and advancing informal socialization. Edwards (2009, 2012) highlights the affective dimension of photographs and their power to create places of (dis)affection. The parallels between her work with analogue photography and this research suggest a strong sense of kinship, particularly with regard to the emphasis on the affective dimension. Shared photographs transmit a sense of place (Agnew, 2011) that allows for (dis)affection to be transmitted. Social copresence and intimacy are generated when photographs are shared within



**Image 2.** Paper photographs. Maria's Bag. June 2014.

a particular group, which could be called the phatic community (Prieto-Blanco, 2010). It is at this stage, at this level of kinship that the how and what of sharing is determined. The empirical work carried out with Maria and ten more Irish-Spanish families living in Ireland corroborates this likeness and hints at a communicative function that is activated by photographic exchanges – namely, the phatic.

\*If you are interested in this study, further insights can be found in Prieto-Blanco, P. 2016. (Digital) Photography, Experience and Space in Transnational Families. A Case Study of Spanish-Irish Families living in Ireland. In: Gomez-Cruz, E.–Lehmuskallio, A. (eds), *Digital Photography and Everyday Life. Empirical Studies in Visual Material Practices*. London: Routledge.

“Objects matter in the context of social practices” (Rose, 2010: 18).

\*When talking about social practices, I should always reiterate that in the context of photography one needs to talk about socio-technological practice as the medium is an intrinsic element and it is by a collaboration between human and non-human agency that meaning arises.

## Notes

**Material objects** – by reflecting on the materiality of objects, certain cultural expectations of their function are fractured, thus allowing the research to be focused on ambiguities and subjective responses to production and consumption. The medium itself is questioned (Edwards, 1999: 68–69). Subjective and objective

agendas come together through the medium's characteristics. The expressive communicates, explores, and articulates a response by taking the viewer outside of the frame, thereby revealing what has not been visualized on the image (ibid.: 59).

**The objectual character of photographs** is brought in relation with social practices:

- Visual form, what photographs show;
- Material form;
- Presentational form.

The objectual character of photographs of other media is the result of perception, thus of the blend between the subjective and the objective. From a holistic point of view, the same that is required to approach and explore practices, environmental features are meaningful elements. These environmental features are perceived rather than sensed. I think that the objectual character of photographs can be explored through the concept of **affordances**: “material qualities of an object that allow some things to be done with it and not others” (Gibson, 1977).

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# **BOOK REVIEW**







## Building a Foundation: Hanga András (ed.) – Kommunikációs terek 2016

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A year prior to the publication of the book *Kommunikációs terek 2016* (Communication Spaces 2016), there was a project with a similar name that aimed to create a periodical publication which could further the relevance and appreciation of communication and media as a science and give an overview of what some of the young Hungarian scholars in this discipline are currently working on. Thanks to the dedication and perseverance of the editor and writers, the tradition continued this year with the publication of *Kommunikációs terek 2016*. Hanga András, the President of the National Association of Doctors' (NAD) Department of Communication and Media Studies (DCMS), once again took up the mantle of editing the publication. Her work tied together 16 different scholars including herself, who in some capacity are either in connection with the DCMS, or the Doctoral School of Social Communication at Corvinus University of Budapest, where András also studies. This connection also shows in several of the papers that were submitted, as the reader can find clear traces of the mark left on the authors by Özséb Horányi's school.

Because the main aim of the publication is to lay a firm groundwork that further studies and scholars can base their research on, there are some limitations that come with this as well. Because of the broad spectrum the book covers, in some cases, it is hard to find the inherent connection that binds some of the papers to the field of communication and media studies. The other drawback, which is clearly present and even acknowledged by the editor in the foreword,<sup>1</sup> is that there is a current lack of active discussion and reflection going on between the authors. Even with these issues, the book is a great milestone that helps us get one step closer to get past these problems, and hopefully the publications that will follow this book will be able to address these problems and build on the groundwork that their predecessors have laid.

The structure of the book consists of three chapters, plus a report on the proceedings of the 2016 Tavaszi Szél Conference by Márton Demeter. The first

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1 András, H. (ed.), 2016. *Kommunikációs terek 2016* (Communication Spaces 2016) Budapest–Sepsiszentgyörgy: DOSZ-T3, ISBN: 978-615-5586-02-6.

chapter consists of the abstracts of the presentations in the Workshop Discussions of the NAD DCMS. The second and most expansive chapter contains 8 essays written in 2016 by the members of the DCMS, and the last and final chapter consists of 13 reviews of Hungarian and International papers and publications.

Before the main chapters of the publication, Márton Demeter in the short report of the 2016 Tavaszi Szél Conference brings up an interesting and important point about the state of Communication and Media Sciences in Hungary. Both at the conference and at the National Scientific Students' Associations, the section for this discipline was the most popular, which is a good sign. The next step should be to deepen the impact of their work and legitimize the place of the discipline within the scientific community. The numbers and the interests of young scholars are definitely there, we just need to focus our energies and help to build a firm groundwork they can stand on. Publications like this are a great way to give a place for these authors to come together and show off their work to each other. What we need to do now is to open up to formal scientific debate and discussion amongst the researchers to help each other grow further.

The first chapter consists of the abstracts of the presentations given at the NDA DCMS workshops. These were given by some of the professors and lecturers who are actually teaching most of the researchers who published essays in the next chapter. It gives the book a good and strong start, as we can read what – and how – experienced researchers write about and currently find an interest in. First, we have Petra Aczél, who focused on the phenomena of big data and the organically bound changes in human attention and the new patterns of information behaviour. It was interesting to see that in the paper Aczél refers to the ideas of McClure about how the pre-digital and digital generation finds and uses information. Amongst many other differences, the born digital generation generally prefers to find information quickly, they trust this information more and rarely double-check their sources. This divide – after some careful observation – was in most cases visible even in the scholars who published their essays in the book. It was interesting to see where the information they were using in their research was coming from, and how did they verify them. Next, we have the paper by Rozália Klára Bakó, who wrote about an exploratory study they conducted, which was aimed at identifying multimodal communication practices of children aged 4–8 and the way digital and mobile technologies are changing the way they are learning. This was really nicely tied together with the previous essay, as there were some common points that the two can build upon. Finally, we had Mátyás Domschitz, who drew parallels between the popular self-help books and their groundwork they build upon such as the work of Max Weber and the main tenets of religion. Once the reader familiarizes themselves with the basis of these books, the parallels outlined become quite clear.

Further on, the second chapter consists of eight essays written by the members of the NAD DCMS. These researchers are varied greatly based on overall experience, scientific mind-set, and the state of their research. Some are full-fledged, completed case studies and research papers, while others are from authors who are just trying to test whether or not their research will hold any water in the long run. It was interesting to see the wide range of topics they covered and also the different forms of research methodologies they based their works upon. The issue of gender clearly captured the interest of some of the scholars, as the first four papers directly or indirectly build on this. First, we have Zita Komár, who analysed the appearance of rhetorical and grammatical elements in various speeches of male and female orators. This study is trying to lay a foundation for a further, more in-depth research into this topic to clearly try to understand, define, and categorize how male and female speakers operate. After this, Ágnes Nagy brought the readers on a journey about the different gender issues concerning macroeconomic indicators and possible ways to solve them. Katalin Gyürke narrowed this down a bit, and focused more on the representation of women in news media, with the clear goal to bring gender studies and media sciences closer together. After the clearly gender-focused studies, we have the essay from Adrián Lips, which still balances somewhat near this category, as he is examining the myth created around Katalin Karády, in which a new type of woman was created based on her performance in the movie *Halálos Tavasz*.<sup>2</sup> It is clear to see even just by glancing at the titles of these essays that even though they have some similarities in the scope of their research they are still vastly varied both on their approach and their goal. This wide spectrum becomes even wider as it becomes harder to find ways to connect the following essays. The first one of these was by Gabriella Richmann, who focused on learning and knowledge, while delving deep into the research of Nonaka to see whether his model of dynamic organizational knowledge creation can be used in the ever-changing organizational sphere. After this, we take a dive into branding and marketing with the essay co-written by Hanga András and István Szakács about how national identity can shape brand communication and loyalty. They base this on a case study concerning *Igazi Csíki Sör*. Out of all the essays, this was clearly the most practical one, tying together scientific methods with real-life application. If we want to legitimize our discipline further, we definitely need to create more connections like this. This was followed by an essay by Judit Gabriella Tóth, which focused on how deeply childhood traumas and memories would stay with a person and how fast some triggers could bring up vivid memories in those who had lived through these events. Last, but certainly not least, Ágnes Bánkúti focused her efforts on the non-verbal communicational aspect of dance.

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2 Deadly Spring

Overall, while the essays varied wildly by their topic, scope, and the state of their research, they were all unique in some aspects. It is vitally important that young scholars have an opportunity to show their work in some way to other like-minded people because this is the only way they might receive useful feedback and advice on how to proceed further. It was interesting to see that most works were quite enjoyable to read as they had an eloquently crafted structure, which created an easy flow of information throughout the essays. Unfortunately, in some cases, they turned out to be a bit too easy to read, as the paper lost the use of necessary scientific language to convey an appropriately deep and worthwhile message.

The last chapter contains 13 reviews of works of both Hungarian and international scholars that in some way connect to the discipline. This connection is in most cases much clearer than it was with the previous essays, although there are some where there is hard to find any connection at all. The authors have also heavily left their mark with their style on the reviews: some are quite cut and dried, only giving a description of the content of the subject of their work, while others are presenting a nicely researched and eloquently written review, which gives the reader a much deeper understanding of these works. The critical components of the reviews are interesting to delve into: while most authors stayed at a crucial distance from the work they were reviewing, there were people on both ends who failed to do so. There are some reviewers who clearly had an agenda choosing their object of review, propagating a message they believe in, offering no critical approach to the content, while others took a more adversarial stance because of the subjective approaches and ideas the authors had.

Overall, *Kommunikációs terek 2016* is an important step forward to highlight the role of communication and media sciences and to give opportunities for young researchers to come and work, think and publish together, and, in the long term, start a crucial back-and-forth discussion, which can help this field grow and move forward in the future. I honestly hope that the next publication can build on the grounds that it started to lay down in the last two years.

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