

# **MeCCSA Postgraduate Network 2018 Conference Special Issue: Communities and the Media Around the Globe**

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Guest Editor

On 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> July 2018, MeCCSA's Postgraduate Network held their annual conference at Canterbury Christ Church University. The event was organised by Nicholas Furze, Aurora Patera and Emma Kaylee Graves, all of whom have contributed to the creation of this special issue. The papers presented in this special issue are each based upon presentations given by attendees of this conference. With the inclusive theme of media, community and culture, the conference saw a wide variety of scholarship from contributors based in the UK and beyond. As a result, the four papers that make up this issue vary greatly, but are all related in that they each consider communities' relationships to the media around the globe.

The concept of community has been defined in many different ways over the years, from being thought of as created by physical or virtual boundaries (e.g. Barth 1969) to being imagined or symbolic (e.g. Anderson 1983; Cohen 1985; Wegner 2002). However, Gerard Delanty argues that the one thing which 'unites these very diverse conceptions of community, it is the idea that community concerns belonging and sharing' (2018, 5). Indeed, this is a theme that can be found in each of the contributions in this issue in some form or another.

Studies of communities have not just been confined to the social sciences, but have expanded to other disciplines; including the arts and humanities. Considering media studies in particular, researchers have analysed the effect of media on communities (such as the study of Porter et al. [2012] on the effect of mobile phones on young people in Africa), how communities interact with media (such as Lovejoy and Saxton's [2012] examination of *Twitter* use by US non-profit organisations) or how communities interact *through* media forms (such as Gray's [2013] ethnography of women playing online games). Significantly, all four papers in this issue contribute to one or more of these areas, whether that be in the online or offline context in Greece, China, the UK or elsewhere.

Opening this special issue, Fatma Matin Khan explores women's relationship to technology in India. Khan adopts an intersectional approach to the study of ICTs, analysing 'the way structures of class, caste, gender, religion and sexuality [...] intersect and form a mutually influencing relationship with technology' (7). Inspired by a phenomenological and postcolonial feminist perspective, Khan's paper is the result of 13 interviews with women in New Delhi on the topic of ICTs. Khan's analysis considers both the positive and negative effects technology appears to have on these women (and women more generally). Her findings showed that, amongst other things, the participants viewed ICTs as both a hindrance (for example, because employers could contact them at all hours) and enabling (such as allowing them access to information).

Still concerned with women and communities, but in a very different context, Lula Mecinska's article focuses on a community performing breastfeeding activism (or 'lactivism') on social media. Mecinska's paper is based on six years of ethnographic research in which she participated in and observed the community's interaction on- and offline. The study looks at breastfeeding support groups on *Facebook*, based in the UK and Poland, as well as international groups. In particular, Mecinska considers how the concepts of embodiment and presence within virtual environments (in this case, the *Facebook* groups) are relevant for the participants, such as in feeling part of the online community while not being physically present with the other members. Moreover, Mecinska documents several examples of support and activities carried out by these groups. As well as being a platform to share knowledge and provide support for breastfeeding parents, Mecinska highlights the way these groups can facilitate activism in both online (*Facebook* and other destinations) and offline settings. She presents various examples of this, including moves against companies such as *Nestlé* and *Dove*, as well as Claridge's Hotel in London.

Lara Herring's paper is similar to Mecinska's in that it considers online social media communities. However, its overall focus is very different. Herring's contribution offers interesting insight into the effect of Chinese social media sites on China's film market. She focuses on two Chinese social media sites: *Weibo* and *Douban*. Herring argues that such sites 'play significant roles in the shaping of the domestic film industry in China' (51). Her analysis is split into three sections. The first considers the use of these sites to promote transparency within the film industry. Herring uses the example of the Fan Bingbang scandal that occurred in 2018 in which the contracts of an actress were leaked on social media, exposing an excessive overpayment for a role. The second part examines the use of social media as a space for open film criticism, away from the 'propagandist' mainstream Chinese media. Lastly, Herring discusses the watchdog role users of social media can take in order to, for example, uncover

box office irregularities. Importantly, Herring's article considers each of these points in relation to the media censorship that exists in China.

Alexandros Daniilidis provides the last research paper in this special issue. He considers spaces of social representation in the Kypseli Municipal Market in Athens, Greece. Daniilidis details the evolution (and, as his title suggests, urbanisation) of the market from the start of the twentieth century to the present. After detailing the history of urbanisation in Kypseli and the market itself, Daniilidis discusses some findings from his empirical research, which included interviews carried out in the market. In this analysis, the author pays particular attention to the impact of the marketplace on refugees, migrants and lower-class citizens, such as allowing them to integrate into the community. He further suggests that the market provides these people with the opportunity to challenge the social representations of themselves produced by the media. Lastly, Daniilidis concludes his enquiry with a consideration of whether and how Kypseli market can be considered a social movement.

In addition to these papers, this issue includes an interview with Professor Nico Carpentier carried out by Aurora Patera. In this interview, Carpentier discusses his idea of the discursive material knot that he focused on during his keynote speech at the MeCCSA Postgraduate Network conference. Additionally, Nicholas Furze presents a review of a special issue of the *Internet Research* journal, 'The Dark Side of Social Media'. Overall, this issue provides varied and valuable insight into media, communities and culture across the world through research papers, an interview and a review of a journal special issue.

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