

Editorial introduction to the standard issue

MADHUSHALA SENARATNE, *University of Sussex*
OLIVIA GABLE, *The Open University*

The vast and interdisciplinary nature of media, communications, and cultural studies is fittingly captured in this standard issue of *Networking Knowledge – Journal of the MeCCSA-PGN*. Along with four papers, this issue also introduces the journal's new book reviews section.

In contrast to previous themed and conference-based issues of the journal, the papers in this standard issue are diverse in their exploration of themes and modes of enquiry. Their themes range from health communication to protest, and from queer narratives to search for home. Significantly, the papers engage with different forms, platforms, and means of mass media, communications, and culture, including community-based communication, forms of political communication, strategies of lobbying, and creative cultural resistance. At the same time, the research contexts of these authors are also varied, with case studies drawn from the EU, Israel, Kenya, and India. However, it is in the diverse nature of these papers that a unique standpoint is offered, bringing together global perspectives on culture, people, and organisations, and their complex interactions with and understandings of media and forms of communications.

This issue begins with the paper by Briec Lits which critically examines the phenomenon of astroturf lobbying in the EU. Controversies around the exploration of shale gas is the central case study. Conducting an emphasis framing analysis, the author tests the hypothesis that astroturf groups use different frames than genuine grassroots movements to meet private interests they represent. The findings point to the emergence of two coalitions: one that is opposed to the exploration of shale gas through the use of hydraulic fracturing, and comprising of environmental and health NGOs; and the other supporting the exploration of shale gas, and bringing together trade associations and sectional groups.

In the second paper, Mor Cohen explores the use of tactic in artistic and activist practices in Israel. Examining three case studies initiated by artists and activists, the author explores the relationship between the use of temporary and critical interventions, and their theme of return to or search for home. Considering the case studies within the broader societal power and economic structures and contexts, the author argues that the adoption of tactic within collaborative projects presents a double challenge, both to the neo-liberal economic model that encourages individual growth and accomplishment, and to the Israeli-Zionist hegemony and its notion of national identity and land ownerships.

Thereafter, the study by Faith Kisiangani (lead author), Reginah Gachari, and Leah Jerop Komen draws on qualitative data in examining challenges of communicating cervical cancer screening awareness and uptake in the Bungoma County in Kenya. The study identifies me-

dia, health education channels and radio shows as the key platforms for communication, while the primary challenges detailed by respondents include lack of proper terminology, inadequate information on the communication channels, and fear among women. One of the recommendations of the study is the need for education of media personalities and other key health informants on cervical cancer for increase in uptake of screening services.

The final paper in this issue by Sohini Chatterjee critically explores India's political attitude towards LGBTQ rights and concerns at the United Nations, and aims to understand what this says about its global political image in the 21st Century. The author argues that despite its anti-queerphobic narrative, India has indulged in 'political homophobia' at the international level, while also emphasising the significance of India's attempts at constructing an anti-phobic image by leveraging tactical rhetorical devices to its advantage are significant.

In addition to these papers, this issue also features two book reviews. In reviewing Amanda Lotz's *Portals: A Treatise on Internet-Distributed Television*, Anne Sweet summarises how the text examines frameworks, methodologies, and actors involved in new media, focusing on the changing American business model of television, specifically the move towards non-linear distributions systems that provide unlimited access to content and revenues based on subscribers. The author notes that Lotz's work, although more hypothetical and theoretical than concrete, succeeds in continuing and shifting dialogue around new media industries and practices.

The review of Natalie Fenton's, *Digital, Political, Radical* by Chrysi Dagoula captures how the book challenges current debates on politics and democracy, offering a pragmatic perception of politics, and the need to frame these discussions within broader social, political, cultural, and economic contexts. The review also places emphasis on Fenton's approach of debates on politics and democracy from a critical theory point-of-view, and its wider challenge posed to media research, on the need for more discussion on how politics is experienced in a digital age and its wider implications on individual's ability to be political.

With a diverse collection of papers and book reviews, this standard issue invites rich discussion and debates, bringing to the forefront crucial areas for research in the field of media, communications, and culture.