**Political Agency
in the Digital Age**

**Media,
Participation
and Democracy**

ECREA

**Communication
and Democracy
conference 2015**

9-10 October
Copenhagen Business School
Denmark

Political Agency in the Digital Age Media, Participation and Democracy

Research on media and politics has traditionally tended towards separating the sphere of politics from political processes in other societal spheres, focusing on parliamentarian politics and formal, institutionalised interest group politics (e.g. unions).

At the same time, there has been a tendency to focus on elites, whether political, corporate, media or cultural.

With the emergence of digital media, the research agenda within the field of media and politics research is shifting towards exploring interrelations between institutionalised politics and political processes in other societal spheres, and moving beyond elites to also include "ordinary" people.

The personalisation of digital media and the rise of user-generated content have led to an increased interest in personal self-expression of citizens at an individual level as a political act.

While this represents an important development, it also warrants fundamental questions about what counts as politics and who count as political actors. At the same time euphoric accounts of the potential of digital media for political agency are questioned critically both in terms of actual potential and the wider structures in which they are embedded.

The conference addresses questions of shifting agency in connection with changing media technologies, while considering a dialectical relationship between social and media-related change.

Communication and Democracy

The Communication and Democracy section of ECREA promotes thought provoking research on the dynamic relationship between media, communication and democracy.

It encourages interaction among scholars who are conducting research on this relationship in consolidated, as well as emerging, democracies, the Communication and Democracy section explores sound theoretical analyses, backed up by empirical research, be it quantitative, qualitative or a combination of both, and welcomes interdisciplinary approaches to the different issues and topics. As such, a non-media centric approach is preferred, allowing dialogue among different disciplines to develop.

The Communication and Democracy section also welcomes contributions from young scholars and aims at being representative of the different scholarly and linguistic traditions of European research in communication.

Management Team:

Julie Uldam (chair)
Maria Kyriakidou (vice-chair)
Anne Kaun (vice-chair)

Friday 9 October

0900 - 0930	*Coffee, Registration and Hello*
0930 - 1030	**Keynote session: COULDRY**
1030 - 1045	*Break*
1045 - 1215	**Parallel Paper Session 1**
1215 - 1315	*Lunch Break*
1230 - 1300	*[Section Business Meeting]*
1315 - 1445	**Parallel Paper Session 2**
1445 - 1500	Break
1500 - 1630	**Parallel Paper Session 3**
1630 - 1700	*Coffee Break*
1700 - 1800	**Keynote session: KAVADA**
1800 - 1930	**Reception**

Keynote

London School of Economics and Political Science
Nick Couldry

The changing topology of public engagement

The word 'topology' is much abused, but there is something difficult and puzzling how public engagement is today configured in space, and one way of capturing this is through the idea that the topology of public engagement is changing. Building on the argument of Couldry's 2014 article 'The Myth of Us' (in Information Communication and Society), this talk will consider further how we can think spatially about the social processes that underlie the traces of politics in social media. Returning to Nancy Fraser's celebrated 2007 article on 'Transnationalizing the Public Sphere', Couldry will argue that Fraser underestimates the complexity of how the public sphere is being transnationalized, and in particular the complexities of how engagement now operates within still-existing national public spheres. This complexity is indeed a matter of topology, that is, the minimal degree of spatial complexity that national deliberations now involve. Focussing on this raises new questions about what is needed for a better and more democratic culture on all scales.

University of Westminster
Anastasia Kavada

Rethinking the Collective in the Digital Age

Digital media are commonly thought to facilitate the individualisation and personalisation of politics as they allow more scope for self-expression and self-organization, limiting the need for grand ideologies and formal organizations. This has raised important questions about the definition of the 'collective' in collective action, about our understanding of political actors and their agency to effect change. Drawing from the fields of organizational communication, media studies and social movement research, this talk outlines some of the ways in which we can conceptualize the collective in the digital age. It focuses on the collective as a phenomenon that is always in-process, as an open and inherently contradictory project, and suggests that to understand the role of digital media in its formation, we need to examine them as part of a broader communication ecology. The process of creating the collective involves the continuous negotiation and redefinition of its boundaries and shared codes, a process that unfolds in a variety of sites with different affordances for interaction. This more open conceptualisation of the collective also entails a different under-standing of political agency that acknowledges its multiple and situated character.

Parallel Paper Session

Room 112	Room 113	Room 114
1045 – 1215		
Political communication and e-democracy	Media and struggles over independence and recognition	Data, technology and visual communication
1315 – 1445		
The Eurocrisis and anti-austerity politics	Activism and political subjectivities	Online communities and empowerment
1500 - 1630		
NGO communication and alternative organising	Book Launch: Critical Perspectives on Social Media and Protest: Between Control and Emancipation	Networked politics

Saturday 10 October

Time	
0915 - 1015	**Keynote session: YANG**
1015 - 1030	*Break*
1030 - 1200	**Parallel Paper Session 4**
1200 - 1300	*Lunch Break*
1300 - 1430	**Parallel Paper Session 5**
1430 - 1445	*Break*
1445 - 1615	**Parallel Paper Session 6**
1615 - 1630	Coffee Break
1630 - 1800	**Parallel Paper Session 7**
1800 - 1815	*Goodbye*

Keynote

Annenberg School for Communication
Guobin Yang

**Activism:
An Ambiguous Word for an Ambivalent Age**

This paper explores the changing meanings of activism using Raymond Williams' keyword approach. The two editions of Williams' Keywords capture the spirit of his times with analyses of such keywords as radical, revolution, violence, and liberation. Conspicuously absent from Williams' classic is the word activism. However, in the decades since, but especially since the 1990s, activism has become a magic word in contemporary cultural and political discourse in proportion to a growing disenchantment with revolution and liberation. What does the ascendance of activism reveal about contemporary culture, society, and politics? Did the development of new communication technologies reinvigorate activism? How did the Arab Spring and the global "Occupy" protests redefine the meaning of activism? A keyword study of activism may provide a unique angle for understanding the meanings of political agency in the digital age.

Special Events

Room s12

Time	
1030 - 1200	Closed Workshop: **Digital Activism in China, Scandinavia and the USA** Chair: Anne Kaun
1300 - 1430	Book launch: **Civic Engagement and Social Media: Political Participation beyond Protest** Chairs: Julie Uldam and Anne Vestergaard
1445 - 1615	YECREA Workshop: **Politics in Academia:** **On the (im)possibility of activist scholarship and scholarly activism** Chair: Tina Askanius

Parallel Paper Session

Room 112	Room 113	Room 114
1030 – 1200		
Elections and social media	Childhood publics in a digital age? Possibilities and limitations	Nationalist and right wing discourses
1300 – 1430		
Young people and civic engagement	Cultural politics and civic engagement	Journalism and civic engagement
1445 - 1615		
Political talk and social media	Political agency and civic cultures	Politics and online media in the European Union: Rethinking power and legitimacy in the era of mediatized crises
1630 - 1800		
Communication Technologies and the Politics of Visibility	Protests and social media	Participatory mediations of the political