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Special Issue

Networked belonging and Networks of Belonging

Edited by Manuel José Damásio & Paula Cordeiro

This special issue results from the work of Working Group 2,
Task Force 3 of the Cost Action IS0906
"Transforming Audiences, Transforming Societies"

COST is an intergovernmental framework for European Cooperation
in Science and Technology, allowing the coordination of
nationally-funded research at the European level.

For the large majority of people, daily life is spent online, with the Internet being the main tool for communication.

Within the COST Action "Transforming Audiences, Transforming Societies" Observatorio (OBS*) is launching a special number covering Working Group 2, Task Force 3 research topics, under the general theme "Networked belonging and networks of belonging", that also corresponds to the activities of the COST Action "Transforming Audiences, Transforming Societies", that coordinates research efforts into the key transformations of European audiences within a changing media and communication environment, identifying their complex interrelationships with the social, cultural and political areas of European societies. Four interconnected but distinct topics concerning audiences are developed, all of pressing importance to both European communication research and European societies: New media genres, media literacy and trust in the media; Audience

interactivity and participation; The role of media and ICT use for evolving social relationships; and Audience transformations and social integration.

This special number of *Observatorio (Obs*)* crosses different backgrounds and perspectives around networked belonging and networks of belonging. Some talk of group integration and emotional need to belong to a group, others of the social need to be part of something beyond us as individuals. In this sense, authors are exploring the context of online social networking experience and community experience.

Manuel José Damásio, Sara Henriques and Conceição Costa explore concept of belonging and discusses it in the context of online social networking experience and community experience considering social capital and user's activities as nuclear concepts to understand collective actions and social relationships mediated by social media. In the same field of study, but with a different approach, Andra Siibak and Virge Tamme present us the main trends in the field of intergenerational communication in new media environments, while exploring how new technological possibilities have been introduced and rooted inside the family. Gustavo Cardoso discusses the possible building of a networked life world, using the power of sharing with others values and practices, arguing that changes in mediation are also creating the conditions to foster the creation of a networked life world. Again, Stine Lomborg presents findings from a qualitative study about sociality and the self in network-based social media, as examined through a case study of ordinary Danes' uses of Twitter. Networks of belonging are still, for most people, rooted in offline interactions and identifications. However, online activities nurture new forms of networked belonging that may challenge existing patterns of belonging, as expressed by Knut Lundby, that proposes a general typology on access to symbolic resources from networked sites, as a stepping-stone for further research on networked belonging and networks of belonging that could be applied to other cultural and social fields than the one on religion. Complementing these approaches, Dina Vozab explains the relationship of civil society and participation with traditional and new media, based on experiences and attitudes shared through interviews with members of civil society organizations (CSOs) in Croatia. In this sense, Teresa Piñeiro-Otero and Carmen Costa Sánchez explore the emergence of social networks and new forms of social activism on the Web, suing the paradigmatic example is the rising of 15M Movement through the facebook platform, by analysing the Real Democracy Now birth and development in this social network.

Samuel Mateus brings contributions from visual culture studies into the research about social networks audiences and the relations they establish with the medium and with its users, approaching a scopophilic dimension that transforms users into spectators. Spectatorship would be, then, a fundamental notion, not only to understand the social role of pictures and videos on social networks as also to understand how social networks contribute to the promotion of social organization and cohesion. Hence, Samuel Mateus discusses how scopophilia and spectatorship

lead to the formation of communities of vision and the redefinition of intimacy in contemporary societies. Approaching serialization, Carla Ganito makes the case for television series as much of the attention from the industry and the academy is drawn by music and cinema neglecting the effects on television viewing, offering a case study of Portuguese College students' serialized participatory culture regarding television series. In a similar approach, Francesca Pasquali investigates audience performances in downloading, sharing and archiving TV content in contemporary scenario, proposing to theoretically investigate the TV and social media users from the perspective of social definitions and uses of TV, promoting a (re)consideration both of how TV content grassroots distribution is relevant in personal everyday routines and sociability, and of how these practices shape personal, group and collective identities and belongings.

The variety of contributions gathered for this special issue of Observatorio (OBS*) show that online activities foster the development of new forms of relationship, which translates into a sense of belonging different from what we knew so far. The process of sharing and collaboration among individuals in whom the expression of your individuality is through negotiated specific networks of affiliation demonstrates the relevance online social networking sites have for this. The fact that the individuals meet online, to voluntarily be part of groups and communities that do not materialize, resulting in a different form of social integration that this special number seeks to unravel.

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