



Yearly report of the Digital Culture and Communication section (2017)

This has been a particularly productive year for the Section. The annual report includes updates about the following:

1. Midterm Section event: Brighton 2017
2. Midterm Section event: Athens 2017
3. YECREA Representative
4. Business meeting
5. Social Media presence
6. Next steps (Lugano 2018)

1. Midterm Section event: Brighton 2017 (6th & 7th November, 2017)

- The Digital Culture and Communication Section in ECREA hosted a workshop on the topic “Digital Culture meets data: Critical approaches”. Hosted by the University of Brighton, the discussion throughout two days was very fruitful. There were **14 panels** with a total of **49 presentations** during 6 and 7 of November 2017, reflecting on new directions in media and communications in relation to how algorithms and big data are today shaping our sociocultural and technical relations and our everyday experiences. The contributions covered a wide range of issues such as politics, bodies and cities, literacy and regulation to older citizens, as well as methods and critical research.
- The keynotes were given by Rob Kitchin (Maynooth), on “Data-driven urbanism meets critical data studies”, and Helen Thornham (Leeds), on “Being data: Gender, class and the datalogical turn”. Thornham presented empirical research with NEET populations (16–24-year-olds not in education, employment or training) in the U.K. to discuss digital bureaucracy and datalogical systems, and the way these ideologically and politically shape people’s lives, particularly from a gender perspective.
- The YECREA representative for DCC, Ysabel Gerrard, organized a useful workshop for young scholars, on interviews for academic jobs, how to get a book contract, publishing research, and careers in the digital media, with participations from Caroline Bassett, Aristeia Fotopoulou, and Arne Hintz.
- Participation and response to the CFP (see below) was good and doubled since the previous workshop in Salzburg (2015) and Bonn (2013). There were **63 registered participants** (excluding the local organising team), of which 32 attended both days. **16 identified as students/ECRs. 26 delegates** were based in the UK (approx. 1/3). There is scope to reflect on the low number of ECRs
- The Conference was hosted at the new Research Centre for Digital Media Cultures, University of Brighton. The launch of the new Centre for Digital Media Cultures took place at the end of Day 1, followed by Reception. The Centre for Digital Media Culture critically examines how changes in digital media and data technologies are interlinked with sociocultural change.



- The social organized was a well-attended conference dinner at the end of Day 1, with **25 pre-booked delegates** and 5-10 who joined on the day. This means that approx.. half of the delegates attended the dinner.
- Following the ECC Prague initiative Academic Parents in Prague, we found that asking delegates about their childcare needs was important. Therefore informal childcare advice and information about child-friendly activities in Brighton was offered both by email and on the conference blog (<https://blogs.brighton.ac.uk/brightondcc/>). A child-friendly corner was offered ad hoc at the conference but was not used as no children eventually attended.

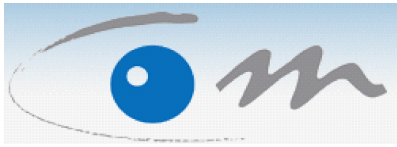
Call for Papers

Algorithms and big data are today shaping our sociocultural and technical relations and our everyday experiences. Digital culture and communication are inevitably changing as media infrastructures, media practices and social environments become increasingly 'datafied'. We may think of surveillance, algorithmic profiling and self-tracking for example. Wearable technologies such as fitness trackers allow people to understand the body as a data-producing object. Our use of commonplace media technologies is mediated by data in ways that we do not ask for, nor even necessarily know about or consent to. Data interpellate us. Yet data are obscure and enigmatic.

But what does this turn to data mean for our research, scholarship and pedagogic practice? Has the data paradigm arrived as an unquestionable unifying concept for studies of digital culture and digital media, communication, technology? It may be that a shift of focus on algorithms and data is fundamentally disruptive to the ways in which we see our research and disciplines. It may even appear to limit the theoretical and methodological tools through which we increasingly try to understand mediation, the formation of identity, social life, politics and the creative industries. To others, the 'datalogical turn' may be plainly repeating the processes of earlier instances of technological innovation. And for some, it may provide an opportunity to frame new theoretical concepts and methodological tools for a whole new set of social, cultural and political phenomena.

The ECREA DCC Conference "*Digital Culture meets data: Critical approaches*" asks the question: what theoretical and empirical perspectives on data and the digital can be used to augment and diversify our research and educational approaches? And how might we challenge data paradigms or aim to show alternative or complementary ways to address digital culture and communication? We invite research empirical and theoretical papers and panels that address themes such as:

- Media studies and datafication
- Researching media and culture using data methods
- Data visualisation, art and design
- Data and the role of the imaginary, fantasy and myth
- Data cultures and neoliberalism
- Data activism and citizen engagement
- Data and critical literacy
- Data and gender
- Datafication and the creative industries
- Machine learning and AI



- Mobile and locative media
- Quantified self and data cultures
- Smart cities, data and sustainability
- Social bots and the management of sociality

The Conference will also host a YECREA Workshop entitled: ‘The ambitious early-career scholar in an age of precarity: questions, challenges, opportunities’ (Chaired by Ysabel Gerrard, University of Leeds). This workshop will facilitate open discussion between academics at various stages in their careers about some of the issues confronting ambitious early-career scholars in an increasingly competitive international job market.

2. Midterm Section event: Symposium “Sexualities and Digital Culture in Europe” (Athens, 26-27 May 2017)

Together with the ECREA Gender and Communication section, the Digital Culture and Communication section co-organized a two-days symposium “Sexualities and Digital Culture in Europe” (26-27 May 2017). Hosted by the National and Kapodistrian University of Athens, seven panels with a total of 25 presentations made sure there were lots of inspiring discussions. Despite the topic of the symposium being rather specific, there was an incredible diversity of themes being discussed; from online pornography, the popularity of Tinder, using Twitter to study conservative movements in France, to discussing young people’s sexualities in the context of social media. However, despite this diversity, all contributions shared an interest in exploring the digitization of sexuality; exploring changing representations, attitudes, experiences, and practices to sexualities because of digital media. The contributions often looked beyond the well-established frameworks to study sexuality and media, expanding their methodological and theoretical perspectives to more fully comprehend sexual life-worlds and the digital.

3. YECREA Representative

After the ECC 2016, Ysabel Gerrard filled the candidacy of the YECREA position. During the first year of tenure, showed enthusiasm and responded very well to the needs of the section, especially in regards to the organization of an activity for young scholars in the Brighton workshop, as well as the communication and visibility of the Section. Particularly, Ysabel has taken up the task of forwarding new about academic jobs in the sector, which she does using the DCC twitter account. Ysabel has also initiated a call for extended abstracts that are published on the DCC blog.

4. Business Meeting (Brighton 2017)

During the Business meeting in Brighton we discussed the distinctiveness of the section as well as future activities.

- Participants in the meeting reflected on the workshop theme and the mission statement of the workshop, in view of the Lugano ECC conference in 2018.
- **ECREA Lugano Conference program chair:** For the ECREA Prague 2016 conference, the section received more than 270 submissions. Being able to count on a minimum of 50 reviewers is therefore crucial. Both Vice-chairs Ana and Sander volunteered and were willing to share the responsibility as program chairs for the ECREA 2018 Lugano conference.



However, the system only allows for one person to act as Programme Chair and it was decided that Sander will be the Programme Chair for 2018.

- **Proposal for collaborating with the history of communication section:** The section received a request from the history of communication section to organize a joint event on the history of digital media. The section recognizes the importance of reflecting on the history of digital media. The section will not be able to organize a pre-conference event on this topic, but suggests the history of communication section to submit a panel for the ECREA Lugano 2018 conference. The section can endorse this joint panel by circulating the call to its members.
- **Evaluation of the Athens workshops co-organised with the gender and communication section ‘Sexuality and digital culture in Europe’:** Together with the ECREA Gender and Communication section, the Digital Culture and Communication section co-organized a two-days symposium “Sexualities and Digital Culture in Europe”. Hosted by the National and Kapodistrian University of Athens, seven panels with a total of 25 presentations made sure there were lots of inspiring discussions. Organizing such a very focused/thematic event, as well as the collaboration with the gender and communication section has overall been very a very positive experience.

5. Social Media

The Section blog has done very well in generating content this year. Taking over from the previous Communications Officer Anne Mollen (University of Bremen, Germany), Ysabel has continued to produce great content. The Facebook page was set up and is moderated by the Chair, Aristeia Fotopoulou in November 2016, and has currently 271 members.

6. Next steps: ECC Lugano 2018

- a) The Section description has been amended, in consultation with members who attended the Business meeting in Brighton 2017 (see above):

“The Digital Culture and Communication section aims at sharing and developing research connected with the European context in the field of digital media, cultural transformations, and social change, including emerging processes of communication and mediation related to recent advances in computing and data-based technologies (e.g. AI, IoT). The section welcomes cross-disciplinary contributions developing critical understandings and/or creative engagements with emerging media, including those focusing on matters of production/consumption, regulation, identity and representation. We invite empirically grounded work, as well as theoretical and critical debates on urgent ethical and political questions, novel methodological approaches, as well as approaches that attempt to rethink existing media and communication theories”.

- b) There will be elections in Lugano in October 2018, as Aristeia has accomplished her period in the management team, so she will be stepping down as chair. The Management Team will invite expressions of interest from Section members in March 2018.
- c) Aristeia has collaborated with Helen Thornham to propose a Special Issue from the Brighton conference.