

## Social media

### Implications for everyday life, politics and human agency

With the current saturation of digital devices in contemporary society, the boundaries between humans and machines have become increasingly blurred. This digitalization of everyday life both obscures and reminds us of the fact that identity, agency and power cannot be attributed to the individual or the machine alone: rather, they are the outcome of interactions and negotiations within a network of actors. Social media, such as Facebook, blogs, Twitter and YouTube, show clearly that the 'meaning' or 'effect' of digital technologies is formed through the practices in which they are used and the social relations and institutions that develop around them. This article presents views expressed during a panel discussion on the implications of social media for everyday life, politics and human agency at the Aboagora Symposium, held on 14th August 2013. The panel was organized as a dialogue between the participants and the discussion was structured around three questions, presented below. The participants in the panel were; Professor André Jansson (Karlstad University), Professor Susanna Paasonen (University of Turku) and adjunct Professor Johanna Sumiala (University of Helsinki). The panel was chaired by Professor Mia Lövhelm (Uppsala University).

#### Introduction

As the Aboagora Symposium showed, digital media are becoming increasingly ubiquitous – integrated into social life to the point where they have become invisible; a natural part of how we 'do' everyday life. This also means that the former separation between communication and interaction 'online' or on the internet and 'offline' or in 'real life' has become almost obsolete. Today we live our lives in and through digital media, and the workings of these media increasingly shape the way we act and make meaning out of things, even when we are not consciously using

a device. In media studies the theory of mediatization seeks to explain this phenomenon. The German scholar Andreas Hepp defines mediatization as the process whereby technical media increasingly saturate everyday life and thus have become 'part of the very fabric' of society and culture (Hepp *et al.* 2012).

The term 'social media' is in itself complicated and its meaning has been debated in the field of media and communication research (see, e.g., Lovink 2012, Boyd and Ellison 2007). Nevertheless, the term has become something of a buzzword in cultural and political debate and in everyday language. Here it is often used when referring to social network sites such as Facebook, sites for sharing video or images such as YouTube, and software for sharing opinions and comments such as blogs and Twitter. The creation and sharing of information and ideas between people is a central feature of the concept of social media. In the context of this panel the concept can, despite its contentious character, be useful, since it brings out two particular characteristics of digital media (cf. Liewrow and Livingstone 2006). The first of these is related to the ways in which digital media are inherently interconnected. A smartphone, for example, cannot be understood as simply a device. Its meaning has to be understood as emerging from the infrastructure of technological artifacts, the practices for which it is used and the social arrangements and organizational forms that develop around it. Secondly, the term social media reminds us that digital media are fundamentally interactive. This means that they make social interaction more immediate and responsive than earlier media forms, something that has various consequences for how we relate to each other and think about society today.

## Topical issues in research on social media

The first question that was posed to the panel focused on what the participants in their own research had found to be the most interesting issue with regard to how digital media shape social lives and cultural values.

André Jansson started with a quote taken from a recently completed research project about the role of new media in the Swedish countryside (Jansson and Andersson 2012). The quote is from an interview with a middle-aged man whose family has a summer cottage in an idyllic spot on a small lake in the countryside. Previously they had no mobile coverage, but quite recently they have become able to go online, even via their mobiles. Here he describes what it feels like to open his work mailbox during the vacation period:

In that very moment work actually begins mentally. It's stored in the back of my mind and breaks the state of summer vacation that I'm struggling so hard to achieve, but which is difficult to really fulfill. ... I think I will have to give up my view of this place as an oasis and a free zone, because it's been so fascinating to escape into such a free zone through geographic movement. In the future I will have to create this free zone on my own instead, through discipline. There will also be very obvious advantages of connecting this place like the rest of Media-Sweden. Because when we still didn't have any mobile coverage two years ago, it was a very strange feeling – to be in a disconnected pocket when the rest of society was entirely saturated by media. It was funny five years ago, but it wasn't funny three years ago.

André Jansson pointed out how this quote says something important about the social consequences of new, digital media – especially the ambiguous feelings and experiences most people must handle on a day-to-day basis. The increasing opportunities for social interaction and mobility are often inseparable from experiences of social commitment and pressure. This, in turn, creates a need for self-discipline and new routines. The example here refers to a summer vacation, but similar experiences may actually emerge on any day in the week. Furthermore, the quote also brings out that there is often a certain 'tipping point' as to when a certain media technology or service becomes *indispensable*. This happens when daily life is no longer manageable, or even thinkable,

without such media. The respondent mentions that a summer vacation without mobile coverage was okay five years ago, but not three years ago. In other words, something has happened during that period; perhaps not only functionally (in the sense that more and more mobile services are on offer), but also culturally; the mobile device has become so integrated into everyday life and social interaction that even a temporary disconnection would be at odds with cultural conventions and expectations.

These experiences of *indispensability*, André Jansson argues, provide a relevant measure of the social strength of the so-called mediatization process. They illustrate what mediatization is all about; namely the increasing levels of material and cultural dependency on various media technologies. Today, when our everyday media are becoming more portable and multifunctional, the sense of indispensability is further intensified. The smartphone, as a case in point, is closely attached to the moving body and can be used for almost anything, almost anywhere. People interviewed in the project describe the feeling of losing their mobile in terms of an 'amputation,' or like 'being naked,' reminding us of Marshall McLuhan's prophecies of the media as 'extensions of man.' And the smartphone is probably just a taster in terms of the technologies to come. It will become even more difficult to disconnect in the future.\*

At the same time, André Jansson reminded us that at a more foundational level, social and cultural values are still quite stable. Just as they were 20 or 50 years ago, the forms and expressions of value are linked in similar ways to social position, or class. The introduction of new media hasn't altered these structures in any dramatic way. Rather, the ways in which new media are handled vary greatly across the different social groups. In his research Jansson has seen that certain groups are more inclined than others to maintain modern distinctions and boundaries – such as between work and leisure, between the private and the public, between the real and the simulated. As mentioned in the beginning, the omnipresence of the media today, the fact that people lead their lives more or less 'in the media' (rather than 'with the media'), implies, however, that such boundaries are increasingly being destabilized and must be actively recreated.

\* For a thorough discussion of McLuhan's analysis of the telephone and its impact on humanity, see John Armitage's article in this issue.

It is not a coincidence that the quote referred to comes from a person with an academic type of job, as well as cultural and intellectual interests. The informant explains that on the one hand he feels an increased pressure to be up-to-date with his job, regardless of time and space. On the other hand, he wants to prioritize other things in life too, especially close relationships. Such relationships demand time, mutual presence and intimacy – they are potentially threatened by today's 'media life'. He continues:

It seems as though if I want to be involved and have control, then I will have to raise my own media-intensity; it must become much higher [also during the summer period]. And this is a direct conflict with how I feel – because I notice that this is deeply related to existential values of cultivating your relationship and having time to fade into each other. So this stands in direct conflict with being off, with my wife and to unwind and calm down... To communicate with her *or* to be connected and communicate about a whole lot of things that stress me up, so this is a pretty difficult conflict.

This is not an entirely new type of conflict, of course. And it is not merely linked to the emergence of new media. Still, André Jansson's point is that digital (trans)media technologies tend to accentuate such conflicts and ambiguities, and invoke new forms of reflexivity and discipline on behalf of individuals and groups. It is not only liberating to live in the media. It also demands a lot of boundary work, and for many of us it is often quite frustrating.

Susanna Paasonen reminded the audience that transformations related to networked communication, computing and digital imaging (to mention only a few of the strands involved) have been gradual at the same time as they are radical and fundamental. Whereas some effort was necessary for a user to connect to the internet in the mid-1990s (with dial-up connections charged by the second or bytes downloaded and uploaded), connectivity is currently the default assumption, whilst a computer lacking connectivity is deemed to be semi-useless. One of the pervasive discourses of the 1990s was that of access and connectivity, especially in the framework of information society agendas. Today, the issue is not so much access as the lack of option *not* to access – the opportunities to disconnect and not network have narrowed down. How to manage without access to online banking? How to study without a user ac-

count? How to work? How to connect with friends and family? It is difficult to fully be a citizen if one is off the grid.

One of Susanna Paasonen's current research projects explores students' affective relations with media and communication technology, especially during moments of failure. The findings from the project point emphatically to the degree to which networked connectivity cuts across work and play, family life, social ties, entertainment and academic pursuits. To paraphrase Bruno Latour (2007), these are the networks that define, make, the individual; many of them cannot be chosen; and they are very much wired. When and if these connections fail, the effects are visceral and fundamental, and described as sensations of confusion, agony, frustration and fear. One of Susanna Paasonen's respondents said: 'Each time this (lack of net connectivity) has obviously angered me and at the same time felt unreal. A thing taken for granted was no longer available, as if my apartment suddenly lacked a toilet.' These rather prosthetic connections to technology give rise to particular kinds of sensibilities that are difficult to categorise under theories of 'media effects' or conceptualizations of users as masterful operators of the devices and applications in question. In other words, devices and applications are not merely 'extensions of man', but nonhuman elements in a heterogeneous network of actors that comprises the everyday and define the individual and the possibilities of her actions (or agency).

In terms of media culture more generally, one much-discussed transformation has to do with the shifting boundaries of media producers and consumers (as discussed under neologisms such as *produsage* or *prosumerism*). And while there is much hype related to this – interaction possibilities do not equal interaction; browsing, lurking, 'just looking' remains a primary mode of web use, for example – transformations of the technical horizons with respect to the potential of media use have been tangible. As an example Susanna Paasonen mentioned the digital camera/video camera/all-purpose connectivity tool that most people in the north western region of the globe walk around with in their pockets: the question is not only one of people having the opportunity to 'shoot' all kinds of things that might otherwise go undocumented, but also one about sharing these images, making them public, or at least semi-public. This is a radical change *vis-à-vis* the early 1990s, although one that may not feel radical, given that it has been gradual.

Johanna Sumiala reflected on the implications

of recent developments in mediated communication which have impacted on understandings of, for example, 'media', 'news' or 'society'. The main focus in study of the media just two decades ago was still firmly on the mass media: television, radio, film, newspapers, and magazines. Today, the word 'media' is far less straightforward in meaning. It is not uncommon to watch or even make news on YouTube, Facebook or Twitter. The boundaries between different aspects of the media are shifting, and so are the categories and hierarchies associated with them. Taking the example of YouTube, she pointed out that television news clips can be viewed on YouTube and YouTube clips can become television news. Thus, the term 'media' is increasingly being taken to refer to a hybrid mixture of old – traditional mass communication and new – online communication. All these developments have consequences for our social lives and related values.

Mediated communication, understood here as a practice of creating common, shared worlds, is no longer limited to a few national mass-media organizations such as the BBC, or international media corporations such as CNN, each beaming its messages to a 'large indistinguishable mass'. More and more often, the people who make up that mass are themselves involved in communicating in and via mainstream media, by means of social media. Recipient becomes producer and producer becomes recipient at the stroke of a key – at least in principle. If social media are characterized as online digital communication where web users are increasingly performing the role of message producer, mediator and recipient, what makes them social is the perception that anyone who has access to the web and who knows how to post, send and receive messages online can, in principle at least, play multiple roles. The social element of the media is also defined in terms of how the roles of producer and recipient are defined in them. In newspapers and other traditional media, content production has always been the job of editors, reporters, photographers and other professionals hired to create and package media content for consumption by the recipient: the reader. The relationship between producer and recipient is traditionally considered to be hierarchic; a top-down process which leaves the recipient in a rather passive role. However, Johanna Sumiala argued, it is misleading to think that this is not a social relationship. It is just that the relationship between producer and recipient is formed differently. Besides, the process of content production in traditional media is profoundly social in nature, involving

a large number of people working together to conceive new ideas and to produce and disseminate content, to make decisions and to create new practices.

Moreover, questions concerning media audiences have become increasingly complicated. No longer do we have one major national public sphere (cf. Habermas 1989); rather, with the emergence of social media the mediatized public sphere has become splintered into numerous smaller public spheres – for instance, we may belong to communities organized around local YouTube channels, regional Facebook groups, or Twitter communities based on a shared lifestyle. Consequently, Johanna Sumiala pointed out, the social media has seen the growth of a completely new type of public media sphere. At the same time, notions of the audience as an anonymous, passive mass have given way to understandings that emphasize audiences' active involvement in the dissemination of information. Howard Rheingold (2003) refers to these kinds of audiences as 'smart mobs': groups of people who are constantly on the move and who live their lives in different arenas of media publicity, using them for their own ends. Dan Gillmor (2006), for his part, talks about the phenomenon of the grassroots journalist, a new breed of civic journalist who provides online news for media houses.

Many scholars of social media say that 'participation' as a low hierarchy mode of sociality has emerged as the new buzzword to describe interaction in these mediated environments (see e. g. Jenkins 2006, Burgess and Green 2009). Not only the dividing line between producer and recipient, but also that between the public and private spheres seems to be in constant flux in the modern arenas of media publicity. Active web audiences, in particular, are all the time producing material where the private becomes public. Facebook status updates serve as a case in point. Messages can also start to circulate from one arena of publicity to another with unforeseen consequences. Today's arenas of media publicity can be described as being embedded in particular social contexts and partially overlapping. However, the event of 9/11 is an example of the emergence of huge, even global arenas of publicity on various scales (locally, nationally and internationally) in a manner unprecedented in media history.

### **The implications of social media for current political and cultural debates**

The second question concerned the implications of social media in the political and cultural arena. Here,

social media have been regarded both as a new site of opportunity for grassroots social mobilization and as the source of a fragmentation and dilution of public discourse. What perspectives can your research bring to this debate?

Susanna Paasonen emphasized that this is clearly not an either/or type of debate: social media can facilitate either line of development, both (separately and together) or neither. It's important to note, she argued, that here is no such thing as a 'social media' as a singular point of reference – the term is rather a flexible umbrella for all kinds of applications, business models, forms of entertainment and interaction. We might also want to investigate the very viability of the term itself, given that the term 'social media' (referring to, for example, social networking services, blogs and tube platforms) seems to imply that there are forms of media that are somehow less social, or even 'unsocial'. Considered in a historical context, a view of the pre-social media internet of the 1990s as being less social or unsocial is obviously untenable. As pointed out by Johanna Sumiala earlier, what the social media phenomenon has done is to shift the source of content generation to users, largely in order to accumulate advertising revenues. Rather than paying monthly fees for services, users pay, both knowingly and unknowingly, with the data they generate.

There is a risk of treating social media as either a symptom or a symbol of broader sociocultural trends, such as those to be detected in social activism, transformations in political systems, or in the very notion of citizenship. These things are indeed intimately connected – the question is *how*. As the technological horizons of potentiality – that which is technologically possible or viable – shift, they afford connections and networks that wouldn't have been equally viable in a different kind of framework. Thus, networked communications, particularly mobile ones, facilitate an easy and affordable dissemination of information of the kind unlikely to circulate in traditional media, hence enabling a flexible social organization. Yet tags such as 'the Twitter revolution' have, for good reason, been critiqued for their reductionism – micro-blogging is unlikely to generate social change as such. It may function as one actor in a network that gives rise to forms of social engagement, activism, or even revolt, but it is not their autonomous engine.

Dystopian diagnoses of electronic media (in general) and social media (in particular) as adding to the insularity and fragmentation of the social are similarly partial and selective. They often assume an ideal

and largely fictional model of a public debate that contemporary transformations can then be measured against. Media have definitely become more fragmented: the numbers of TV channels have exploded, large newspapers have been losing their authoritative status as gatekeepers of information, and so forth. Whether this is a bad thing is open to debate.

Johanna Sumiala also emphasized the ambiguity of social media with regard to political and cultural debate. Drawing on her research on YouTube, she pointed out that it has potential to encourage social engagement – understood here as emancipation – but it may also nurture fragmentation and alienation. The case of the Finnish school shootings illustrates this point well (see e.g. Sumiala and Tikka 2010, Sumiala 2013). The incidents at both Jokela and Kauhajoki stimulated collective action around public mourning – in the sense of an identification with the suffering and loss – but what we could also find is social action concerning an idealization of violence and the killers. In both these tragic events one of the key scenes for the social action and community formation were the web and social media, as seen in the creation of numerous grieving and remembrance communities. Upset by the killings, people from both nearby and far away participated in signing virtual books of condolence, lighting virtual candles and laying virtual wreaths. The glue that held these grieving communities together was a sense of grief and shock that web users wanted to share in. By visiting places of pilgrimage either physically or via the media, people touched by the massacre could experience a sense of community and social cohesion. But the community's involvement and movement was ritualized (and made socially visible) not only around grief, but also around hatred. The school shootings at Jokela and Kauhajoki generated communication on social media that was based on identification with the crime and its perpetrators. In these virtual hate communities, which were most notably active on the web, the principle that tied and continues to tie them together is an idealization of the gunmen and a deep hatred for the surrounding world. Members of the hate communities could identify themselves with the killers, find soulmates and in this way support for their own feelings. In hate communities, too, symbols, images and texts describing the Jokela and Kauhajoki gunmen had and continue to have a central role in building and maintaining cohesion within the community. It was this online material that constituted the symbolic imagery of destruction which characterised the media coverage of the catastrophe, which was then

ritually repeated by the other media forms. And this is not only a question of the past. Even today there are YouTube videos in circulation that idolize the school shootings and the two gunmen. They are removed from the site, only to reappear in modified versions. In these videos anonymous web users combine music and visual material from different school shootings (Columbine, Virginia Tech, Jokela and Kauhajoki) to create new stories of the killings. We may say it is a kind of theatre of terror and a dramaturgy of death in which mediated symbols of the school shootings play a cohesive role for this type of community.

André Jansson expanded on the issue of social and cultural reproduction. Referring to several current examples of how activism which has been carried out through social media platforms has managed to influence political processes both at the local and the national, even global, level, he suggested that social media possess the potential to *bring people together*, convening around a particular cause; they are also well adapted for *making certain issues visible* in the public sphere, thus influencing political discussions on a broader scale.

In his research the salient question is how various groups are making use of new media, and what for?

The very meaning of social media is shaped through the social environment in which these media are put into use. There is no absolute answer as to whether there is a general development towards enhanced political participation or towards fragmentation and delusion. There is also a kind of historical validity to this argument, he pointed out. By the time of his doctoral thesis, which was published around the turn of the millennium there were as yet no social media, and even the internet was considered a rather new phenomenon. In Sweden there were discussions about the social and political consequences of an expanded and commercialized broadcasting system. What would happen to cultural preferences and political engagement when there were more TV and radio channels to choose from? The general answer, as seen from much research, was that the multiplication of media channels and forms of content led to a further differentiation, even a polarization, of the audience. Those who were politically engaged and wanted to follow various political issues and events could consume even more news and current affairs programmes than before; those who were more disengaged got a surplus of entertainment programmes to choose from (just to make a very simplified dis-

Otto-Ville Väätäinen



André Jansson, Susanna Paasonen, Johanna Sumiala and Mia Lövheim formed the panel on social media at Aboagora.

inction). TV and radio preferences thus became an accentuated form of cultural distinction between different lifestyles and social groups.

In his research today André Jansson has seen that the appropriation of social media follows largely the same kind of social logic. Today, when the media also enable an increased level of participation and expression, when audiences are turned into participants and content producers, more time and energy can be spent on those interests which one finds most important, whether we are speaking of politics, sports, art or something else. As mentioned above these mediated activities may also occur as we go about our everyday lives in general – in the lacunae of life, while waiting or in transit – and not merely in front of the TV screen or newspaper, as used to be the case. When we see people around us, on the bus or in the street, using their smartphones, touchpads and laptops, it may seem as if they were doing one and the same thing, but they are actually occupying very different worlds.

The findings from another of André Jansson's more recently completed projects illustrate this (Jansson 2012). The project primarily looked at surveillance practices and forms of social control through new media, but the interviews also provided detailed accounts of contemporary patterns of media use in general. One striking result is the polarization between those maintaining a local orientation and those oriented towards the world at large. There are people who constantly follow their friends' updates on Facebook, and for whom Facebook is a kind of virtual epicentre which reproduces their local lives and social bonds. At the other extreme we find cosmopolitan lifestyles, and expressions such as this this:

I often check BBC, CNN, then I often use Google translate for Russian news, Spanish *El Pais*, especially for politics, changes in governments, the crisis in Greek newspapers, I've been following how their newspapers angle things. I've started using the old service Kiosken where you can update newspapers from around the world. I'm interested in different alternatives. ... You need to see things from different sides so I don't believe in any single source, I think it's all angled, but I usually go to that country's newspapers if something happens there, then check the tabloids, the serious media, links to blogs and commentators, I speak to people I know who come from that country, I get a picture from all of them to get a complex picture.

Even though this might be a rather extreme example it illustrates how new social media are interwoven with older media sources, and thus also ordered into hierarchical systems of value and status. For example the user and his/her usage patterns and modes of political participation contribute to the classification of particular blogs. The quote points especially to the distinction between *locals and cosmopolitans* that the American sociologist Robert Merton spoke about in the 1940s – at that point in time referring to newspapers and journals! The historical continuity is rather fascinating, as illustrated by this quote from Merton's book *Social Theory and Social Structure*:

[cosmopolitans] devote themselves more fully to the kind of vicarious experience set forth in journals, whereas the locals are more immediately concerned with direct interpersonal relations. The one tends to read about the great world outside, the other, to act in the little world inside. Their reading practices reflect their ways of life. (Merton 1968: 460–1)

### Digital technology and human agency

The third question discussed by the panel focused on the relationship between human agency and the controlling powers of technical systems. Looking at the particular form or use of social media that you engage with, how would you describe its possibilities and dangers for individual agency?

Johanna Sumiala approached the issue through an understanding of agency as empowerment. According to this line of thinking individual agency is seen as a positive value for modern society. Concepts such as freedom of expression, surveillance and sousveillance are often discussed in this context. The most optimistic thinkers, such as Jenkins (2006) see the internet and digital culture as a platform for increased individual agency and even democracy, while the more pessimistic thinkers remind us about the concentration of economic power, the digital divide and the commercial logics associated with the attention economy (see e.g. Couldry 2012). Instead of encouraging individual agency this new culture means a dissolution of agency, transforming us into nothing more than the 'marionettes of our own lives'.

A case study on YouTube conducted in 2010 (Sumiala and Tikka 2013) offers an interesting example. The study provides a media-ethnographic analysis of the so-called 'flotilla' event and its performance on YouTube. This news event was

launched when Israeli forces raided a group of ships attempting to deliver humanitarian aid to Gaza on 31 May 2010. In this clash nine Turkish activists were killed on board the *M/V Mavi Marmara*. Videos of the raid quickly spread to YouTube as both the activists and the Israeli Army circulated visual material related to the events.

In the study it was argued that YouTube served as a platform where various operators had the opportunity to assert their versions of reality and where the emphasis shifted from journalism-centred to user-centred, from monologic to plural, from media institutions to grassroots-level citizen journalists and/or activist groups, and from a journalism of facts to one of attachment and events. Most importantly, the hierarchies of news between the different producers and discourses of news were set in motion. While traditional news machineries, such as Russia Today and Al Jazeera English produced accounts of the story through a 'distinctive class of media professionals', such as news anchors, interviews with the different parties involved, and live images, YouTube also gave ordinary people the opportunity to tell their stories, to raise their individual voices, and to share their accounts of the event on the same platform. In these YouTube news stories, the interpretation of reality

did not, in most cases, follow the patterns of conventional news journalism and the 'national' outlook (cf. Berglez 2008).

One example is a video reply to a Russia Today news story, viewed by thousands of people. Through this video an individual YouTube user could place her or his own account of the event alongside a mainstream news story and thus reach out globally. This shows how YouTube can become a multi-level arena in which participants on different sides can – at least in theory – freely engage in the battle over how 'reality' is constructed in news. To follow Lilie Chouliaraki's insight, YouTube as a global news medium 'does not only alter the truth claims of news but also has profound implications for the ways in which we imagine distant others and relate to the world beyond "our own"' (Chouliaraki 2010: 1). Thus we can, in effect, speak of changes in the social and cultural values related to how we as individual agents make meaning in the world.

Another way of looking at this question, brought up by Johanna Sumiala – and previously Susanna Paasonen – is in terms of the agency of material objects are often referred in this context (see Latour 2007, Mitchell 2005). Johanna Sumiala has been discussing visual representations such as images; how

Otto-Ville Väätäinen



The Aboagora audience, among them researcher and author Jenni Wiik, was engaged by the theme of social media.



and where they travel in these digital worlds, and what kinds of associations and encounters are created and maintained around them. This approach draws our attention to what *kind* of images that spread in the media created collective movements, *how* practices are formed around images in the media, and *who* are at the centre of these actions. One controversial case with far-reaching implications was the publication in Denmark in 2005 of the Prophet Mohammed cartoons (see Eide *et al.* 2008). These cartoons created numerous imagined objects which stirred up a set of collective movements. Some communities rose up in defence of freedom of speech, others were brought together by a sense of abhorrence and condemnation. The people who were opposed to the publication of these images considered them to be religiously and culturally offensive. The Mohammed cartoons are a good example of imagined objects and the communities they create in the sense that the community dynamics associated with the images did not end with the event itself, that is to say at the moment of publication. Once out in the public sphere, the Mohammed cartoons have lived on in various mediated forms. The images continue to circulate on the web, inviting responses from an ever-increasing number of individuals. In the words of Bruno Latour (2007), the social community evolving around images is created out of mediated encounters between different actors, that is to say images and their viewers.

In his response to the question André Jansson returned to the argument that social media provide the opportunities for local as well as cosmopolitan orientations and engagements. There is a social logic to this, he argued, suggesting that greater cultural and economic resources in general tend to foster more cosmopolitan outlooks and lifestyles. This does not mean, however, that such privileged positions are truly liberated and independent in relation to technological infrastructures. In today's media society one might even say that every new level of increasing mobility and mediated interaction across spatial and temporal boundaries is paralleled by a heightened level of surveillance and control. When we travel, for example, the opportunities for quickly finding information about new sites, getting in touch with people, finding our way between different places, and recording and circulating our impressions through social media, are quite impressive. But all these practices also involve industrial monitoring; our movements can be traced, and every activity we conduct online produces information about who we are and what we like, which can be used for further com-

mercial purposes, such as marketing. So while we are able to move increasingly frictionlessly and securely through geographical and social spaces we are also caught up in what communication scholar Mark Andrejevic (2007) calls 'the digital enclosure'.

Along these lines, and without being too pessimistic, André Jansson argued that we must formulate a nuanced critique of what these monitoring systems, which are mostly commercial, do to individual agency. To put it very simply, the restraints can be traced to two main dimensions. First, there is the vertical dimension, referring to the increasingly automated and algorithmic nature of industrial surveillance. The automation of surveillance means that we, as consumers, subscribe to a certain level of monitoring, implying that we give up some of our privacy in return for better, more personalized services. This can, for instance, be seen when ordering products from online stores and receiving shopping suggestions based on the consumption patterns we have exhibited, or when we communicate through email or social media and advertising banners pop up based on what you write and what you like. This can be seen as a restraint to agency not only in the sense that we are being monitored, controlled and persuaded to buy more things. There is also an inbuilt, automated tendency to reproduce taste patterns and lifestyles. Entering the digital enclosure means that our agency is constantly reflected in, even shaped by, its own simulations.

The second dimension is the increasingly important horizontal dimension of what André Jansson calls *interveillance* (Jansson, forthcoming 2013). *Interveillance* refers to various forms of peer-to-peer monitoring, which are today nurtured by social media, but also overlap with older forms of social control. Social media become an arena for seeing what others are doing and for exposing our own choices to others. On the one hand, this development corresponds to our self-image. We like to think that we are liberated and independent individuals. And, for sure, we are no longer living in a society where religion, tradition and social class pre-determine how we go about our lives. On the other hand, social media (as well as other forms of media) contribute to filling the void of social insecurity that the loss of such structures has brought about. Both smaller and more substantial life choices become the objects of strong social discipline. We are continuously mirroring and measuring ourselves in relation to mediated formulas of what it means to be happy and successful in one's life.

This is not to say that social media invoke entirely new social forces. Social control and self-monitoring

are not new phenomena. However, social media clearly *enhance* these forces, implying that it becomes increasingly difficult to neglect the choices of other individuals and groups. Trends and discourses of the good life spread much more quickly today, which has to do with the growing prominence of interveillance in everyday life. Measuring ourselves in relation to people we know is likely to have a much stronger social impact than measuring ourselves in relation to the celebrities of mass media (as it used to be). We anticipate the existence of trends and new social norms almost before they have happened. The combined effect of social media representations might thus be a kind of hyper-adaptation of social behaviour. An example of this might be the rapidly expanding popularity of various kinds of individual sports, such as running, biking, or different forms of fitness-training – as well as the discourses and consumer trends attached to these sports. These have much to do with the introduction of social media and associated applications for self-monitoring and the sharing of training schedules, results, diets, and so forth. The popularity of many competitions has increased dramatically during the last five years, coinciding with the normalization of mediated interveillance.

Even though it would be naive to predict any clear-cut ‘media effects’ in such a situation one might speculate that we are today witnessing a new instance of *media cultivation*, which is part of a broader cultural transformation. In the 1970s and 1980s American media scholars discovered that the extensive media coverage of violence in society caused people to over-estimate the level of violence, and the risks of being affected by such violence, in their own neighbourhoods. These studies showed that the media reproduced a culture of exaggerated fear and risk (Signorielli and Morgan 1989). Similarly, one might believe that social media lead people to over-estimate the happiness and success of other people, thus leading to a culture of exaggerated life-styling, individual performance and competition. Such a hyper-adaptive culture is not one of an emancipated individual agency, but a culture of social discipline, even narcissism.

Susanna Paasonen in her reflection pointed out that traceability has always been inbuilt in the digital media applications we use (for example through IP protocols and cookies). What is new today is that this feature of digital media has become increasingly pronounced and discussed. The issue is then partly one of the illusion of user freedom (as invisibility) being broken. When considered in the context of networks,

as described by Johanna Sumiala, agency by default results from the networks that we are part of. Beyond and besides an individual’s control over her own actions, individual agency is shaped and conditioned by a range of forces beyond our control, such as the economy, the environment, law, or social policy (to name only a few). Users connected to, reliant upon, and defined by multiple networks – be these social, technological, educational, informational, or ones geared towards entertainment – conflict with the modern ideals of individual autonomy and control.

As an example Susanna Paasonen referred to the notion of online addiction. The Finnish language lacks a distinction between dependency and addiction (the term for both is *riippuvuus*, see Suominen 2006). Yet the term addiction is also widely used to describe a range of attachments and investments in popular media in languages with more readily available distinctions between addiction and dependency, to the degree that the term can be applied to virtually any activity (both online and offline) which is geared towards pleasure, gratification, and enjoyment and which draws the user back and back again. Popular accounts of ‘Facebook addiction’, for example, may refer to users checking their newsfeed numerous times a day – which a large proportion of users do. Similarly, many of the symptoms of internet addiction provided as tools of self-diagnosis on recovery web sites and in the related literature are applicable to people routinely connected to networked devices. On [netaddiction.com](http://netaddiction.com) we can for example read the following:

Do you feel preoccupied with the internet (think about previous online activity or anticipate next online session)? Do you feel restless, moody, depressed, or irritable when attempting to cut down or stop Internet use?; Do you stay online longer than originally intended?; or Do you use the internet as a way of escaping from problems or of relieving a dysphonic [*sic*] mood (e.g., feelings of helplessness, guilt, anxiety, depression)?

Popular addiction discourse tends not to distinguish between different forms or motivations of internet use so that the abstract object of the internet – rather than the multiply-entangled networks of potentialities, obligations, and affective intensities that platforms and connections interlink with and facilitate – is defined as *the* addictive substance. It therefore makes no difference whether the user is longing for

connectivity in order to finish her work tasks, to find herself on the map when visiting a new city, to find the address for the night's party, or to hunt down the recipe for the fluffiest of scones: if she longs to get online, she is possibly addicted. This can also be seen in a quote from one of the students in Susanna Paasonen's research on affective relations to technologies failing and connections breaking down:

It's difficult to try to remain calm about the stubborn malfunction of the net connection since I feel that the lack of connectivity limits my life and activities. Net use has become such an elementary part of my everyday life that I don't even notice all the things I use it for before the connection stops functioning or doesn't exist. I recognize my increasing ineptness when, for one reason or another, I can't check baking recipes or bus schedules online.

Detached from networks of potentiality, exchange, and investment, the act of internet usage is reframed as an isolated activity driven by the desire for online access as such. Such undifferentiated treatment of both addiction and internet usage circumvents the multiple forms of dependency on online connectivity while reducing them into issues of free choice. The frame of addiction links internet usage with a quest for pleasure, whereas the impulses of network access are actually considerably mixed, and linked to work obligations, titillations, and affective investments alike. The easy conceptual slippage between routine use, dependency, activity geared towards pleasure (or at least some kind of gratification), and addiction can then be seen as connected to the predominance of conceptions of users as 'governors' and technologies as instrumental means to an end. However, as Sarah Kember and Joanna Zylińska (2012: 13) argue:

It is not simply the case that 'we'—that is, autonomously existing humans—live in a complex technological environment that we can manage, control, and use. Rather, we are—physically and ontologically—part of the technological environment, and it makes no more sense to talk of *us* using *it*, than it does of *it* using *us*. ■

**Mia Lövhelm** is professor of sociology of religion at the Uppsala University. Her research focuses on media as an arena for expressing and negotiating religious and cultural identities in late modern Swedish society, with a particular focus on youth and gender. Her current research

concerns representations of religion and modernity in the Swedish daily press, and the interplay between religion and mediatization. Some of her recent publications are 'Mediatization of religion: a critical appraisal' (*Culture and Religion*, 2011), 'Young women's blogs as ethical spaces' (*Information, Communication and Society*, 2011), 'Halal-tv: negotiating the place of religion in Swedish public discourse' (*Nordic Journal of Religion and Society*, 2011) and the edited collection *Media, Religion and Gender: Key Issues and New Challenges* (Routledge 2013). Email: mia.lovhelm(at)teol.uu.se

**André Jansson** is professor of media and communication studies at Karlstad University, Sweden. His research deals primarily with issues related to media, globalization and cultural identity. His most recent project studied perceptions of various forms of mediated surveillance, including the significance of new (social) media at the intersection of cosmopolitanization and social monitoring. Currently he leads a project focusing on the role of various (trans)media technologies for sustaining close relationships among globally mobile class factions. Jansson's research is influenced by cultural sociological as well as human geographical and phenomenological theoretical traditions, notably in the spirit of Pierre Bourdieu. Email: andre.jansson(at)kau.se

**Susanna Paasonen** is professor of media studies at the University of Turku. With an interest in studies of popular culture, internet research, affect theory and pornography, she is most recently the author of *Carnal Resonance: Affect and Online Pornography* (MIT Press 2011) and coeditor of *Working with Affect in Feminist Readings: Disturbing Differences* (Routledge 2010) and *Networked Affect* (MIT Press, forthcoming). Her current research focuses on affect, technology and materiality. Email: suspaa(at)utu.fi

**Johanna Sumiala** is docent at the Department of Social Research/Media and Communication Studies at the University of Helsinki and Kone Senior Research Fellow at Helsinki Collegium for Advanced Studies. Sumiala is a media scholar specializing in media anthropology, social media, ritual studies, death and visual culture. She has published widely including such journals as *Media, Culture & Society*, *Social Anthropology and Communication*, *Culture and Critique*. Her most recent book is *Media and Ritual: Death, Community and Everyday Life* (Routledge 2013). Email: johanna.sumiala(at)helsinki.fi

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