MEDIATED IDENTITY FORMATION

CURRENT TRENDS IN RESEARCH AND SOCIETY

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Abstract

This paper aims to overview the current processes and challenges that relate to how media developments influence – and are influenced by – the ways in which personal and collective identities are formed in contemporary societies. First, it discusses ways to approach and define the concept of identity from a media perspective. A discussion of how identity formation issues links to the concept of new media literacies forms a transition to three sections that in turn analyse the social trends, the policy trends and the scientific trends that may be discerned in this area. The final section first summarises key research questions and then offers some more concrete ingredients for identifying possible instruments of a new research agenda.

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Contemporary Perspectives on Mediated Identities

Identity formation can be broadly described as the development of ways to define and give meaning to individuals or collectives in relation to others and to themselves. Identities are formed both from within and from the outside, in a complex interplay of mutual recognition and understanding of self and others. Identity formation in relation to both 'old' and 'new' media has been the subject of various humanities and social sciences discourses, including analyses of subject formation in different media genres (from romance novels to talk shows) as well as audience research on how different people use media as resources in their everyday lives.

People shape their tools of communication that then shape them. This is particularly true of identity formation in the digital era, where the development of consciousness (e.g. individual, social, national, racial or gender) is profoundly mediated by uses of communication technologies and identifications and therefore directly linked to experiences of media use. Individual self-understanding increasingly has to negotiate how different identity dimensions are proposed and ordered in media texts of various kinds (Nava 2007; Bennett et al. 2011). This may be extended to discussions concerning the formation of hybrid identities which for instance relate to cyberbodies and gamer subcultures; formations of individual identity and identification with 'others'; performative social networks that construct imagined identities; and new forms of linguistic and cultural hybrid identities that are both produced and reflected by new forms of archiving and interaction.

Identity is a term that incorporates two seemingly opposite meanings, as it implies both affiliation with another and individual uniqueness in terms of a difference from the other. It suggests belonging, as in being part of a community, as well as making oneself distinct; it signifies both sameness and difference. Identity is not just a strict *sameness* across time or space, even though it often implies some kind of similarity, in that for instance somebody is recognisable over time or the members of a collective entity share some characteristics. It has another aspect that may be called *selfhood*: a dynamic project with a cultural dimension, linked to the effort to give meaning to oneself and to others through signifying practices of interpretation (Ricoeur 1990/1992). Such signifying processes make use of various kinds of symbols that are mediated through shifting modes of communication, thereby linking identity formations closely to media processes. Consequently, the topic of identity formation incorporates a number of contradictions to be explored through an interdisciplinary approach.

Identities are formed on different levels, from the individual to overlapping sets of social collectives. On shifting scales, similar processes of identification develop on all such levels, though the precise dynamics vary. For instance, there is today a contested project of adding, constituting or consolidating a strengthened European identification that is not meant to substitute older, regional or national identifications, but rather to supplement them (Arslan et al. 2009; Uricchio 2008, Fornäs 2012). This project has since its emergence been recurrently in crisis, and European media studies should be able to offer important insights into the dynamics and dilemmas of European identification, not least in relation to new media, ethnic diversity and generational shifts. The internet in particular has been seen as having the potential for transnational dialogue through its open and participa-

tive structure. However, what such efforts through media-related projects have shown in the recent past is that although people are enthusiastic about the ideal of intercultural dialogue they are not as clear when it comes to the objective of such efforts, which in practice makes it hard to establish efficient online platforms to promote intercultural dialogue. This suggests that what is currently needed is not so much the medium, the technology, or the enthusiasm for working towards the development of transnational identities but rather a clearer theorisation and understanding for the need, the necessity, or the benefits of the development of such identities, be it on a European or a more international level.

Whether individual or collective, identities are not fixed, stable or unified entities, but increasingly fragmented and fractured, constantly in a process of change and transformation. No identity is a fixed essence; all identities are to at least some extent fluid, contextual, contested and discursively shaped (Anderson 1983/1991; Hall 1997; Hall & du Gay 1996; Pickering 2001). In spite of this fluid diversity, there are still some structural frameworks that organise identity discourses in relation to certain dominant dimensions or *identity orders*, such as age and generation, gender and sexuality, class and status, ethnicity and nationality, etc. Specific individual or collective identities are formed at the intersection between all these. This *intersectionality* is no mere addition of age, gender, class, ethnicity, etc. since none of these identity orders is constituted in splendid isolation from the others. Instead, they deeply affect each other from the very beginning, as they are mutually co-constituted. Media studies increasingly tend to take such intersections into account. Identities are relationally constructed across different (often intersecting and antagonistic) discourses and practices that link different forms of individual habitus and cultural capital to positions in social fields (Bourdieu 1979/1984).

New Media Practices and Competences

In contemporary post- or late-modern society, through processes of mediatisation, globalisation and commercialisation in the information and knowledge society, individuals form identity in relation to media access and media effects. Therefore, media competence (as access to 'new' and 'old' media as well as the ability to critically assess and process media content) becomes directly relevant to the issue of identity formation. If media competence poses the question "what is needed in order to be a literate person?", then media competence in the twenty-first century is a condition of knowledge for the formation of identity and subjectivity. Knowledge involves technical qualification but also ethical wisdom and aesthetic appreciation. Navigating in today's media world demands knowing how to search and find relevant sources of information as quickly as possible, by googling etc., but also being able to tell reliable from unreliable sources.

Media competence is a life skill that is necessary for full participation in society, and it is itself an integral part of identity formation, since it immediately relates to how people understand and define themselves as well as each other. It has long been argued that democratic deliberation in contemporary societies, which are increasingly diverse, complex and intertwined, demands subjective identities that are less bound to traditional conventions and more open to mutual interaction and reflexivity. In theory, this demands and may be supported by changing modes of socialisation in families, schools and other parts of everyday life – and not least in

media use. More research is needed to find out how such interactive mechanisms between media practices, identity formations and democratic politics actually function.

This also raises questions of who is considered to be literate today and how liberating media competence is in relation to identity formation. It is often argued that increased and facilitated access to media use and media content enables the individual to form identity in a more informed, responsible and critically aware manner. On the other hand, some 'democratic' forms of access to media use and content tend to fix subjects in set identity formations that may appear fluid and boundless but in practice serve as new forms of oppression, for instance with the invasion of privacy, victimisation, abuse and networked group pressure. There is therefore a need to strike a balance between emancipatory and authoritarian traits in new media practices and skills. Issues of media competence and identity formation always implicate issues of power, where there tends to be problematic imbalances between different social groups (in terms of class, gender, ethnicity, age, etc.) as well as between individual citizens and political or commercial institutions (state and market actors; Canclini 1995/2001).

This furthermore gives rise to questions of the subject of media competence. Do audiences need to be educated or should corporations be targeted – or both? This is in turn related to whether media content is primarily determined by socio-economic factors, media corporations, audiences or wider cultural trends in society. Such questions point towards a need to differentiate among different types of media competence, related to different media contents or genres, as well as to different media users (the elderly, for example, seem not to be as often researched as younger users). Such a differential approach may also take account of the ever-faster fragmentation of audiences, enabled by the new communication technologies and growing individualisation in media use (Livingstone 2005). At the same time, the links between such different types must not be forgotten, as both ordinary users and media industries increasingly tend to develop intermedial connections that allow various contents to move between different platforms.

Trends in Society

Media impinge upon almost all aspects of contemporary life, including key financial, social and cultural processes. To study media is therefore an important pathway for understanding fundamental processes in society and the human condition more generally. In the last two decades, media have undergone profound changes linked to digitisation, globalisation and commodification. Digitisation shapes a shared technological platform for telecommunication, media and ICTs (information and communications technologies), offering new multimodal forms of expression and exchange. Globalisation is facilitated by satellites and cables that offer instant communication and networked interaction with distant others through networked mobile devices. Commercial enterprises push these processes forward and shape media products and processes of use by familiar fault lines in terms of class, gender, ethnicity, age and region. Even though terminologies vary, there is a wide consensus among researchers that contemporary societies are increasingly media-saturated, so that these new technological, economic and socio-cultural media developments together constitute a mediatisation of society, whereby complex

ensembles of media processes impact on all dimensions of social life (Elliott & Urry 2010; Hepp 2011/2013; Hjarvard 2013; Morley 2006).

In particular, these societal changes have clear implications for identity formations. A widened range of societal debates and conflicts are today centred upon identity issues: intergenerational shifts, gender inequalities, national issues, ethnic relations, European integration, human rights, multiculturalism and xenophobia all have a primary focus on issues of collective and individual identity, which are in turn strongly related to uses of media genres and technologies. The latter are obviously related to the former, but it remains an open question whether new media have opened new links between people or just offered new modes of being "alone together" (Turkle 2011). Joint European media research has therefore started to take such issues seriously, and approach identity formations as they are constructed by the use of various kinds of media, which is for instance important when it comes to the interplay between new waves of media technologies and complex sequences of overlapping generations among media users, audiences and publics. Media policies and identity policies at both the national and European levels also need to be considered in this respect as they represent a social and democratic response to the challenges put forward by the mentioned societal changes. Moreover, public policies reflect the public efforts within societies directed to an organised regulation of media development trends.

The term 'mediation' denotes that something functions as a linking device between different entities. Media are socially organised technologies made for being used in the practices of communication that are prime examples of such mediating processes. 'Mediatisation' refers to a historical process whereby such media increasingly come to saturate society, culture, identities and everyday life. There is currently an intensified activity among European scholars to discuss and clarify this alleged process of mediatisation, in a number of international conferences, working groups and publications. There is a need for theoretical development to better understand whether and in which respects various aspects of society and everyday life are becoming more mediatised, and in what sense: how has this changed over time, which forms may be discerned in different world regions, what dimensions and spheres of life and society are affected, and with which results. Still, there is a widespread discourse that takes such development for granted, indicating a need for a deeper understanding of how media texts, technologies and practices interact and affect identity formation on both an individual and a collective level.

Serious efforts are today made to uphold a reasonable balance so that the social effects of new media technologies are fully acknowledged but not overestimated (Hepp et al. 2008; Morley 2006). It seems for instance clear that networked digital modes of communication and so-called social media of various kinds have had strong (though contested) repercussions on social and political life. The Arab Spring offered ample evidence to the way text messaging, mobile phone cameras and blogs have affected civic resistance as well as state and market surveillance. But at the same time, processes of *remediation* (whereby new media lean on and reshuffle aspects of older ones, and vice versa) imply that the older media forms and practices largely remain in place too (as do indeed certain traditional forms of political power and ideology; Bolter & Grusin 1999). One cannot take for granted that new phenomena make the older ones obsolete. For instance, in most countries

television is still the dominant medium in terms of time of usage in the majority population, followed by radio, while the internet continues to reproduce important structures, forms and contents from the established media (press, books, TV, radio, film, music media, etc.). Also, television largely remains among the most socially widespread media forms, while the internet still has a very biased use in terms of class and other identity categories. Conventional mass media are now embedding social media for increased audience participation and identification, giving rise to remediation and intermedial hybridity rather than a simple substitution of one medium for another. Today new research is looking at how such combinatory flexibility and hybrid media use is causally or otherwise linked to new modes of being and identification. Such considerations must be kept in mind when formulating policies for meeting the present media situation and envisaging their future developments.

In a media saturated world, audiences are bombarded with messages and information. However, it remains to be seen how much media content audiences actually absorb and how much they filter out, and whether there is any wider spread of a social media fatigue syndrome where individuals are overloaded and therefore tend to abandon network activities. Perhaps too much agency has been placed on technology and there is therefore a need to reconsider how institutions and individuals cope in a media saturated world. In addition, if everyone processes information through a filter bubble, then it is perhaps necessary to investigate how to empower people in their need to break the bubble. This is particularly important when it comes to issues of media competence as people need to be aware that they are in a "box" (or in a number of different "boxes"), and to this effect, a broader perspective of media competence is needed. It seems that the latter is also a key point for policy formation.

Besides its fundamental intersecting of diverse individuals, collectives, identity orders and symbolic modes, identity formation in an increasingly mediatised society involves the increasingly complex interaction of several key levels. Identities are always symbolically expressed, and when these modes of signification involve a growing scale of media technologies, the potential gap increases between (a) the 'front-stage' performance of identity, for instance in shifting internet environments, (b) the often complex and hybrid 'back-stage'understandings of selves and others in everyday life, and (c) the industries and institutions' ways of managing and organising how identities can be formed and communicated.[1]

Trends in Media Policy

Most policies focus on computer-based ICT competence, as a tool for virtual collaboration, information processing and learning in the workplace or in education (e-learning). Media competence is a broader term, embracing the shaping, sharing, (critical) evaluation and use of print as well as audiovisual and digital media. Divides remain between definitions of ICT competence versus media competence. All policy documents agree that more systematic and trans-border research is needed in order to facilitate effective policy-making, but public and private stakeholders differ in identifying the appropriate aims and outcomes of such research. While ICT competence spreads rapidly and is standardised to be relatively easily transferred, media competence demands efforts that enable understanding of a wide range of

social processes (cultural, historical, language, etc.). The interactions between the two interconnected spheres of competence (ICT and the media) need therefore to be studied in the perspective of the media and ICT policy trends.

Besides political and social citizenship, research as well as politics have increasingly recognised the importance of *cultural citizenship*, which requires access to tools for active participation in those communication practices that underpin civic society and its mutually overlapping public spheres (Canclini 1995/2001; Stevenson 2001; Cardoso 2007; Fornäs et al. 2007). This demands access to the means to fully use the widest possible range of media in dialogues with others. *Communicative rights* aim to secure the democratic availability of three main kinds of such means: material, social and personal resources. Material resources for interaction include access to many kinds of media texts and technologies; social resources imply access to interactive networks and public spheres in which such media forms circulate; and personal resources point towards the area of media competence in a more narrow sense, including access, knowledge and critical education.

Citizens all over the world use a wide range of communication media to satisfy their personal, social and economic needs as well as to try and intervene in the political arena. Governments on local, state and supra-state levels also develop increasingly sophisticated methods for administering society and meeting popular opinions and movements either with democratic or non-democratic measures. Media and communication issues are increasingly important in virtually all policy fields of today, including both market policies in the economic sphere and governmental policies in the political sphere. To a large extent these negotiations and struggles relate to issues of identity formation. One example is how European integration has a key cornerstone in the efforts to make Europe's citizens identify as Europeans and not just as different from the rest of Europe (Bondebjerg & Golding 2004; Uricchio 2008; Salovaara-Moring 2009). Another example is how equality issues relating to gender, sexuality, ethnicity and other identity dimensions are more and more placed at the core of policy development for new media technologies and content (Arslan et al. 2009; Olsson & Dahlgren 2010).

Co-extensive to that is the issue of policies on privacy and copyright, as the two intersect when it comes to the use of social media. The sexualisation of society, as well as an apparent lack of media competence and sexual education, often make users (especially youths) more vulnerable to various kinds of dangers, threats and abuse. Therefore, the conditions under which agency and self-governance is exercised need to be re-examined. The issue of copyright is also related to the distribution of cultural capital and how that is distributed, as currently the information gaps of policy makers seem to have prevented the creation of policy related to this issue. The changes in the media and in the way these have changed identities need to be interlinked with new policies which reflect recent developments.

A policy for cultural citizenship and communicative rights needs to reflect upon the main ongoing developments in media, culture and politics. Processes of mediatisation and new challenges to the existing political and economic structures combine into an urgent demand for reformulating the interfaces between identity formation and new media.

Trends in Research

Media studies have developed at most European universities, but in rather disparate ways – from sub-sections within a mother discipline to independent, interdisciplinary departments both in commercial as well as academic traditions. Media studies embrace an equally wide array of foci, evolving out of the social sciences and humanities, and drawing on a wide range of traditional and emergent disciplines. There is also a range of strong international research societies in the field (ECREA, ICA, IAMCR, etc.).

There are many different branches of media studies of identity formation. Whereas in the late twentieth century, this academic field was divided by deep and often antagonistic gaps, one may today discern considerably more convergences and dialogues between positions and perspectives that supplement rather than fight each other. Instead of distinct and mutually hostile camps, there is more often a dynamically interweaving set of currents that sometimes reinforce, sometimes contradict each other.[2]

This is for instance true of textual and contextual approaches. There has for many decades been a number of *cultural* turns, including the development of cultural sociology and of cultural studies, together with a general awareness in the wider social sciences of the importance of cultural factors and dimensions in various social and human spheres. Within media studies, this has implied a greater attention not only to genres of arts, entertainment and popular culture, but also in a wider sense to signifying practices and aesthetic aspects in all kinds of media and communication processes. As identity has to do with social actors' meaning-making, this in turn has reinforced the interest in identity issues. At the same time, interpretations have become more aware of the importance of *contexts*, so that the cultural acknowledgement of meaningful texts has fused with a complementary attention to social contexts. As a result, identity formations have become understood as resulting from signifying practices that link individuals and collectives to various forms of meaning, always mediated through communicative resources that operate within a complex set of social contexts. In one sense, the cultural and the contextual current seem to contradict each other, as they either expand or delimit the scope of symbolic forms, but in another sense, they supplement each other and have blended in fruitful ways, for instance in the diverse field of cultural studies (Silverstone 1999; Couldry 2000; Lehtonen 2000).

The development of new, networked and electronic media technologies has had far-reaching effects on identifying practices, for instance as a result of a heightened compression of time and space and a convergence between different modes of expression, technologies and branches. Much common as well as academic discussion of this *digital* turn has produced the expression of a radical break that completely alters the conditions for everything from political agency to fan culture. The whole distinction between 'old' and 'new' media is based on that idea. At the same time, influential currents of media history have emphasised the *intermedial* connections between 'old' and 'new' media, and the fact that new forms of mediation always remediate older forms and genres. This in turn tends to relativise the recent digital turn and point at certain continuities across time. Again, there are both affinities and tensions between this pair of currents, as digital and intermedial perspectives

on mediated identities offer slightly different takes on change and continuity in media history (Bolter & Grusin 1999; Herkman et al. 2012**)**.

Another pair of themes concerns the basic coordinates of time and space. A *historical* current has revitalised an interest in not only understanding the present situation as if it was autonomous from all that came before, but rather linking the present to the past and the future, focusing on various kinds and levels of temporal processes. This is not least important for identity issues, as identification has very much to do with tracing genealogies and trajectories of subjects across time, reconstructing identity positions that link past to contemporary actions. At the same time, a *spatial* current has also been notable, with studies of communication geography, city branding and media ethnography. This is likewise essential for identity issues, where a move from abstract and universal ideas to situated modes of understanding has been influential. Here, the spaces and locations where identities are made by uses of media are put in focus, making use of ethnographic or geographic modes of mapping. Just as time and space need to be understood together, there is also a need to synthesise historical and spatial perspectives in media studies of identity formation (Kittler 1997; Hörisch 2001; Falkheimer & Jansson 2006; Morley 2006; Fornäs et al. 2007).

A strong *visual* current has been notable, fuelled by the success of new visual media forms. Verbal interpretations are not enough, and there is a need for refined readings of the visual markers and landscapes that define individuals and groups. However, *aural* modes of communication, not least music but also speech, continue to be of vital importance in today's mediascape. Music is sadly neglected in much ordinary media studies, while being focal for much of the content and use of new as well as older media. There is a great need to develop new innovative methods for understanding how mediated sounds work as tools for identity formation, and not neglect this analysis and leave it to dedicated musicologists or other sound specialists(McCarthy 2001; Sturken & Cartwright 2001; Sterne 2003; Nyre 2008; Erlmann 2010).

One may also discern a *material* current, where some from a perspective of media archaeology have argued for a focused attention on the materiality of media effects instead of interpreting meanings. This stands in a dialectical relation to another, *discursive* current, which focuses on how meanings are made across media texts. Discursive approaches map out the webs of communicating meaning that organise the social world, and how such ordering mechanisms position and constitute human subjects. In some ways, the two again contradict each other, in that radical discourse analysis tends to deconstruct material worlds (from sensual and affective bodies to technological machines) as effects of social and communicative discourses, while on the other hand materialist positions have argued against textual analysis of mediation and for a return to immediate lived experience and material effects. For instance, are human bodies and technical artefacts in communication practices to be seen as extratextual material actors or textual discursive constructs? On closer scrutiny, the two streams often run in parallel, in important efforts to understand the close interaction between materiality and discourse, seeing materiality not as an alternative to meaning but instead focusing on the close interaction between the two (Shields 1996; Sundén 2003; Turkle 2011; Hayles 2012).

Key Research Questions

In conclusion, it is important that future research in media studies addresses the issue of identity formation as both a consequence and a cause of engagement with media-related technology and production. Although current research has dealt with a variety of aspects of identity formation from a media studies perspective, relevant research questions and topics of investigation in this area may be seen as comprising three major thematic categories which aim to explore (1) how mediated identity formations are changing today; (2) why these changes take place; and (3) what are their main consequences.

1. *How are mediated identity formations changing today?* This first category of questions is concerned with defining and describing ongoing changes of identity formation. This relates issues of individual, social and cultural identities to notions of diversity and power.

a. *Individual, social and cultural identities*: As individual identity formations interact with social and collective identifications and with the symbolic forms of identity that are constructed in various media texts and genres in arts and entertainment, it appears relevant to examine the way such formations work. Moreover, the issue of self-identification of an individual or a social group and its interaction with other identifications as well as their struggle for recognition through different media forms is directly relevant here. This is reinforced by the role of media-focused subcultures such as fans, gamers or 'hacktivists', particularly considering the changing role of public institutions – from archives and libraries to museums and public service media – in supporting identity formation and the dynamic of that change.

b. *Diversity and power*: In addition to these issues, social fragmentation and media fragmentation as they relate to audience power and institutional power place identity formation in a field of tension. The distribution of cultural capital across social space as well as the intersections between different identity dimensions such as age, gender, class and ethnicity play an important role in the formation of identity. There is a need to examine the materiality of mediated identities, which identities are excluded or marginalised in current media practices, which are the performative aspects of identity formation, and which bodies (e.g. gendered, abled/disabled, young/aging) matter while others do not. For instance, the performances of (masculine, feminine or 'queered') gender and sexual identity are affected by developments of 'new' media access and content in feminist groups, male subcultures, internet pornography, dating, chat-rooms, blogs, information websites, etc. (Ahmed 2006; Butler & Spivak 2007). There is further a need to come to grips with the ways in which 'haters' of various kinds (misogynistic, homophobic, xenophobic, sectarian or fundamentalist 'trolls' etc.) threaten to undermine efforts to make new media a vital element in the public sphere.

2. *Why have key modes of identity formation changed?* This second category relates to the media-related causes behind current identity transformations, including matters of technology, form and context of communication, as well as the roles of the 'new' media.

a. *Technology, form and context of communication*: Understanding the interaction between new media technologies, new genres of text and communication, new political and economic structures, and new social and psychological ways of life

is one of the relevant issues here, particularly considering the changes in communication technologies in relation to other social and cultural factors. In assessing the proper role of 'new' media, one must not disregard the historical process of mediatisation that the sociocultural world of identity formation is subject to. It must here be studied how new media forms remediate older modes of communication, replicating but also redefining them. This effort can benefit from the history of previous media transitions that may shed light upon the current situation, involving mutually contradictory and ambivalent processes of exploration, exploitation, institutionalisation, disciplining and normalisation.

b. *Roles of new media*: The way in which conventional features of social interaction (e.g. immediacy or ritual social events) limit or enhance identity formation in social media environments should be explored. The ways in which the engagement in new ICTs redefines identity by creating distinctions between non-users and (different kinds of) users is also of relevance. Furthermore, the trend towards individualisation in new media resources (techniques and genres) also affects identity formation. Both the brighter and the darker aspects of for instance the internet need to be acknowledged, neglecting neither its emancipatory nor its authoritarian potentials – the former linked to resources for democratisation and empowerment, the latter to new forms of surveillance and post-panoptical 'sousveillance' as well as to misogynist and xenophobic 'haters'.

3. *What are the consequences of new modes of identity formation?* This third category of research questions concerns the consequences of new modes of identity formation as they affect the development of transcultural identities and the issue of empowerment.

a. *Transcultural identities*: Whether recent changes in cultural consumption and media use have led to new forms of identity, e.g. changing the balance between European, national and sub-national identifications, is a possible area of investigation. This directly relates to the prospects, problems and potentials of transnational identities such as those linked to Europe, in a situation of increasingly complex and multi-levelled global media flows. It remains to be seen whether new social media contribute to intercultural dialogue and the emergence of new 'contact zones' where diverse cultures meet, as well as to what extent they shift or perpetuate established power structures between different cultures and societies. The role of language and translation for the formation of identity in 'new' media environments, and the rise of hybrid linguistic systems due to the use of 'new' media that further contribute to the proliferation of more hybrid, fluid, transitory and de-territorialised identities has also not been adequately researched. Current media transformations affect the ways in which fictional identities in arts, popular culture and games interact with people's own identifications and social practices.

b. *Empowerment*: Media studies should get a better understanding of issues related to empowerment, aimed at strengthening individual and collective citizens' (and non-citizens') communicative rights and resources in relation to state control and the power of large corporations to pre-structure and delimit the potentials of new media technologies. Here, regulation and responsibility need to be balanced with rights and freedoms of expression, and democratic movements as well as public cultural institutions should find ways to make even better use of the emerging new media resources.

Ingredients for a New Research Agenda

A new agenda for media studies needs to find workable instruments to support research that takes these questions seriously. Ingredients to be taken into consideration include the following, all of which are of relevance to the organisation of research but in various ways also to the direction and content of research itself. In three dimensions, there is a core need for interaction across traditional borders, to be enhanced by organisational measures but also through new forms of comparative research.

A. *Interdisciplinary approaches*. It should first be noted that co-operation between humanities and social science scholars, as well as with technological expertise, is already comparatively well developed in media studies, as this is a rather dynamic and composite field of knowledge with shifting faculty locations in different countries and universities. In this area, social science approaches tend also to acknowledge the role of media texts, while humanities approaches likewise tend to be also interested in the social significance of the media genres they focus on. This mutual interaction offers great opportunities for validating results at both sides. There is, however, a need for more real comparative studies across (geographical, political and social) space, time and media/genre – comparing mediated identity formations in different European countries, between different historical periods and between shifting media genres and modes of communication. This requires continued and strengthened collaboration across disciplinary boundaries, both within different branches of media studies and not least also with other disciplines and fields within the humanities and the social sciences. This applies to languages, aesthetic and historical disciplines as well as to sociology, anthropology, economics and political science, but there is also a need to further develop interactions with technological fields of research, so as to bridge the tendential gap between interpretive, critical and technical knowledge-interests in the workings of new media.

B. *International scholarly interaction*. Second, the comparative research mentioned above necessarily demands strong elements of transnational co-operation within Europe but also on a global scale. The new media situation is not confined within national or continental borders, as European trends are intrinsically linked to how states, media corporations and civil society actors contribute to identity formation across the world. European institutions and traditions make it fruitful to develop certain new modes of interaction and research within the overall European community, but such initiatives should never be firmly closed off to participation from the rest of the world, including not just the USA and other 'Western' nations but also actors in Africa, Asia and Latin America.

C. *Dialogues between the academy and other stakeholders*. On such a platform, media studies should thirdly be able to identify innovative ways for various European actors to develop improved media policies for engaging with the current challenges for mediatised identity formation. Media studies have a strong potential to link not only to commercial and policy stakeholders across key sectors in Europe, but also to NGOs, artists and other actors in civil society. Media studies can contribute to analysing both dangers and opportunities in the currently emerging mediascape, by identifying its dark sides but also highlighting examples of good practices and

policies with potential to productively respond to the many economic, political and ecological crises faced today. Free and basic academic research organised according to a bottom-up principle is the essential foundation, but there should also be supplementary resources for interaction with other stakeholders. On one hand, empirically researched and theory-based knowledge needs to be transferred from universities to society at large; on the other hand, researchers can also learn from other actors who are deeply involved in new media practices, in the commercial sector or among media-saturated subcultures and movements of various kinds. For these purposes, models may be devised to enhance interaction, not only by matchmaking workshops and dialogic conferences, but also by experimenting with mutually fruitful forms of postdoc internships or other positions linking academic practice to various kinds of media institutions. The knowledge gathered through such activities and dialogues may inspire new types of regulation and organisation of the media and thus support socially acceptable mediatisation processes. For obvious reasons both media policies and media studies often tend to lag behind important sociocultural and technological media developments, but efforts should be made to increase the capacity for pro-active intervention. In order to meet new challenges and rapidly changing trends in the media world, it might therefore be helpful to invent new modes of '*rapid research*', where smaller amounts of research resources might be given to tight groups of scholars who propose intense exploratory studies of contemporary phenomena, preparing for the more long-term work of ordinary research projects. There is at the same time a continued need for *'slow science*', which involves large interdisciplinary and international research teams and develops methods, data and results over long periods of time, making it possible to better understand complex processes that involve comparative studies of transnational, longitudinal, intersectional or intermedial dimensions.

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Notes:

1. The terms front/back stage derive from Goffman (1959), and have been widely debated in recent discussion of mediated interaction on the internet.

2. The following is based on Fornäs (2008).

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