

The Researching and Teaching Communication Series

**Politics, Civil Society and Participation:  
Media and Communications in a Transforming Environment**

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POLITICS, CIVIL SOCIETY AND PARTICIPATION.  
MEDIA AND COMMUNICATIONS IN A TRANSFORMING ENVIRONMENT

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The project aims to move away from earlier conceptualizations of practices of digital media commons, and free and open source software production as ideological or anti-capitalist. I argue instead for a more pragmatic conceptualization, also anchored in the history of computer graphics development.

## Digital storytelling for community engagement

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New digital media have deeply changed people's media habits, transforming them from passive consumers to active producers of contents. Social Media and Web 2.0 applications have modified the paradigm of producer-audience: from one-to-many to many-to-many, as people are creating different kinds of content and are sharing it on the Internet and social media, blurring the boundaries between producers and audience. In this context, the term 'Digital Storytelling' refers to the creative practice of "ordinary people" (i.e. amateurs) who tell their own stories using digital tools and languages, and share them through digital media.

This research analyzes Digital Storytelling from the perspective of the Design domain and focuses on the process of engagement of people in a community through storytelling, in which the final output – digital stories as media content – cannot be considered as an effective communication product: it gains its value for those who participate in the creation process, but it lacks coherence and autonomy as a strategic communication product. The core hypothesis is that a design approach to digital storytelling, could contribute to adding value and meaning to community digital stories, focusing on both the co-creative process of content production, and the narrative quality of the final product, helping ordinary stories emerge from the amateur dimension and disseminating worthy contents in the new media.

Reflecting on this critical issue, this research focuses on two fundamental questions: 1) What is the relationship between the co-creative dimension of digital story-making processes and the quality of the derived products? 2) How could design contribute to facilitating co-creative story production processes?

Mainly involving the local community of a suburban area of the city of Milan in Italy, this project belongs to the area of research through design, in which the design of tools, processes and methods for digital storytelling are tested, adapted and modified step by step during the research process. Considering both the theoretical and applied levels, the methodology is based on different research strategies: a first phase is based on a literature review and

the analysis of the two pioneer case studies in the field of Digital Storytelling, together with a map of best practices for digital storytelling projects, which aims at exploring how participatory creative processes have been elaborated into autonomous digital projects. The following phase draws on the strategy of participatory action-research for the definition of a designer-facilitated process for digital storytelling, which includes a set of tools and co-design practices. The participatory action research project builds upon the idea of experimenting tools and practices for co-designing digital stories with both designers and non-designers, working communication design students and members of the local community of citizens.

The main expected result for this research is an analysis of both the content of stories and a designer-facilitated process of story-making, which might prove useful for articulating some guidelines for new and innovative digital media products. These products would then provide value to community creativity and consider people as both authors and characters of fictional stories based on reality.

## Media audiences and democracy in Croatia: Social stratification as a predictor of media use and its role for political participation

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Political communication in new democracies has mostly prompted research within normative assumptions of democratization theory (Voldtmer, 2006) and is criticized for simply copying research agendas from more developed democracies (Barnhurst, 2011). In this PhD project, I plan to use mainstream political communication concepts, media malaise and virtuous circle, in a post-socialist setting - new EU member state Croatia. However, I plan to critically reflect on the theoretical model. The media malaise and virtuous circle should be revised for the contemporary media environment by employing non-mediacentric views or user centred approaches (like media repertoires, in Hasebrink and Domeyer, 2012). I would like to analyze the effects of media use on political participation by studying the position an audience member takes in the complex social structure. With every technological innovation that reshapes the media market, social stratification remains, and class, gender or age influence media reception (Livingstone/Couldry/Markham, 2007, p. 25). Social stratification of media use will be analyzed using Bourdieu's concepts of capital and habitus, which are seen as useful to addressing cross-media use in con-