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Editors' Introduction: Audience involvement and new production paradigms

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This Special Section arises from the work of the Working Group on "Audience interactivity and participation" of the COST Action IS0906 "Transforming Audiences, Transforming Societies". COST is an intergovernmental framework for European Cooperation in Science and Technology, allowing the coordination of nationally-funded research at the European level.

The Action "Transforming Audiences, Transforming Societies" (2010-2014) is coordinating research efforts into the key transformations of European audiences within a changing media and communication environment, identifying their complex interrelationships with the social, cultural and political areas of European societies. A range of interconnected but distinct topics concerning audiences is being developed by four Working Groups: (1) New media genres, media literacy and trust in the media; (2) Audience interactivity and participation; (3) The role of media and ICT use for evolving social relationships; and (4) Audience transformations and social integration.

The following selection of articles is an initiative within working group 2 of the COST Action “Transforming Audiences, Transforming Societies”. This group is focused on how participation and audience interactivity are changing not just media practices and consumption of information, but the media landscape too. The different levels of involvement of audience are creating in many cases new production paradigms, where a new media ecosystem is appearing today, built around competition, collaboration, market niches, audiences’ participation and interactivity. In order to remain strong within this ecosystem, media productions have to create strategies to make audiences engage emotionally and intellectually with media contents.

With this scenario, the media have to take into account that receivers tend to be more active and creative. The border between production and reception is therefore blurred, leading to confusion between the specific roles of the producers (journalists, media, series, TV shows, video, radio, fiction products) and receivers. Of course, the emergence of technologies such as the internet and its interactivity are not unknown phenomena within the development of new media and new reception paradigms. Concepts like convergence, networks and audiences are the main players in the construction of this new communication paradigm. The media ecosystem works with key notions such as cooperation, interactivity or multiplatform contents. In this emerging context, key elements such as crossmedia (the same message adapted to different platforms), transmedia (a coordinated entertainment experience through different media) and multiplatform strategies are employed by cultural industries in order to ensure that media contents are spread and circulated in public spheres. The following articles explain these elements and strategies for different kinds of media, products and points of view.

The Special Section explores this new media ecosystem focusing on four major themes (that of course are deeply interwoven): 1) the convergence between traditional media and social media; 2) audiences’ crossmedia interactions and their negotiation of transmedia production strategies; 3) audiences’ involvement within new production strategies; and 4) audiences’ and media professionals’ reflexivity within the new transmedia and crossmedia ecosystem.

The Section is divided into two parts. The first features three essays by well-established scholars – Matt Hills, José Alberto García-Avilés and Giovanni Boccia Artieri, whom we warmly thank for their contributions – from each of whom we have asked a contribution to help us frame the new media ecosystem from a theoretical point of view.

The second part is composed of case histories presented by a number of scholars at very different stages in their careers, based in different institutions across Europe and coming from different backgrounds. Despite these different starting points, this part’s coherence is assured by the fact that most of the essays are case studies, empirically informed, giving an in-depth – country-specific – description of how the new media ecosystem is developing on both the production and the audience side, and providing, at

the same time, a nice variety in terms of media technologies, genres, and contents (we have essays dealing with radio, newspaper, television, and social media).

The first section is opened by Matt Hills who, through the analysis of *Torchwood's* hyperdiegetic world, discusses and frames – both from fan/audience and production perspectives (and their integrations or conflicts) – the slippery and tricky concept of transmediality. José Alberto García-Avilés' essay is more focused on crossmediality, offering a typology of the different roles and strategies of interaction that media industries prefigure for their audiences (as citizens, consumers, collaborators, fans, players, commentators, benefactors and activists), thus underpinning how audiences' participation in the new media ecosystem can be designed by media institutions. Finally Giovanni Boccia Artieri's article, exploring a broad range of transmedia storytelling examples (from television and newsmaking to comics), and discussing the role played by pro-am communities and fans, underlines how storytelling in itself has become the real consumption platform where audiences' participation and reflexivity are enacted.

The second part of this Special Section is opened by two essays that analyse (from different perspectives) the challenges and opportunities that social media, and crossmedia audiences' interactions bring into traditional media scenarios. Igor Vobič and Ana Milojević, starting from the results of a set of in-depth interviews with Slovenian and Serbian journalists, analyse how newsmaking professionals are coping (or sometimes refusing to cope) with the new challenges posed by networked media scenarios and audiences' involvement. Paola Cordeiro's essay offers a broad, theoretically-informed analysis of how radio, as a cultural industry, is facing this crucial transition, focusing on the relation between radio broadcasting and social media.

The integration of social media performances (especially in Twitter) within television patterns of media consumption is at the core also of Lucy Bennett's analysis. Starting from a set of online surveys, the article unravels how audiences' interaction through social media, in sync with broadcasting viewing, affects television consumption, social relations and audience reflexivity, becoming at the same time a new opportunity for media broadcasters to encourage audience engagement (for example with *Twittersodes*). However even if there is increasing attention among media professionals toward the new media ecosystem, media content does not always explicitly take into account new social media consumption practices. This is the situation analysed by Dóra Horváth, Tamás Csordás and Nóra Nyirő's article, which examines how content expressly manufactured for traditional television (series, reality shows, sports) is consumed through different media platforms, trying to identify the typical patterns of interaction and synergies of consumption.

María del Mar Grandío and Joseba Bonaut's article develops a cross-country comparison (between Spain and the UK) of two different television series: *Skins* (UK) and *El Barco* (Spain), and their transmedia distribution and crossmedia consumption. The complex relations between crossmedia audiences and transmedia production is the centre also of Liam Berriman's article which is devoted to the relation between the teenagers' commercial

virtual world Habbo, and fansites created by groups of Habbo users. The article explores both opportunities and difficulties raised by the coexistence of production strategies and active audiences' online performances.

The direct involvement of audiences in media productive processes is the focus of Yuwei Lin's and Mikko Villi's essays. Yuwei Lin's article is devoted to the analysis of how a skilful and socially and technologically hyper-connected "élite audience" has been involved in a BBC Backstage project. Meanwhile Mikko Villi's essay, starting from the results of a qualitative study conducted with the personnel of a Finnish newspaper, underlines the role played by the readers in sharing and distributing, within their communities, content produced by media companies, discussing how audience "social curation" needs to be taken into account and also enhanced by media companies.

The spreading of media content on multiple media platforms, from simple adaptation to augmented storytelling, involves particular technical practices from both producers and receivers. This is what this Section is all about: a new media ecosystem leading to a new paradigm for production as well as for reception. As editors, we hope these selected articles are useful in helping to build a framework for further studies about production, distribution and the involvement of audiences within a context of crossmedia contents, transmedia strategies and the constant interchanging of roles between producers and publics.