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Editors: Bart Cammaerts, Nick Anstead and Ruth Garland

Pioneer Communities: Collective Actors in Deep Mediatisation

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Pioneer Communities: Collective Actors in Deep Mediatisation

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Abstract

The aim of this paper is to draw attention to the phenomenon of media-related pioneer communities. The maker, quantified-self and open data movements have made clear how much an analysis of such pioneer communities can contribute to our understanding of changes in media and communication, together with related social and cultural changes. Pioneer communities do not only possess a marked sense of mission; they also develop ideas of media-related change that can provide orientation for broader social discourses.

Studying pioneer communities as intermediaries between the development and the appropriation of new media technologies permits us to grasp current mediatisation processes from the actor's point of view without the need to first ascribe to them any unifying media logic. Pioneer communities are significant collective actors in the process of 'deep mediatisation' – the far-reaching entanglement of media technologies with the everyday practices of our social world.

is something that can mostly be found in the popular press, often linked to some kind of conspiracy theory concerning the influence of Silicon Valley.

Manuel Castells (2001: 36-63) has provided a more analytical, and so more differentiated, characterisation of the movements 'behind' the technological development of the internet. In his view, this development cannot be understood without taking into account the way in

of the wider public is less involved with the extremes of this 'pioneering vision' than with the gradual transformation of much more basic practices. All of this can be seen as part of an ongoing mediatisation, a stage of mediatisation in which our social world becomes closely entangled with media. Studying pioneer communities turns up evidence that shows it would be too limited to understand deep mediatization as a phenomenon driven by a unifying media logic. Instead this example indicates that we should 'open' the 'black box' of media-related logic(s) and introduce a more empirically-grounded actor perspective into our analysis.

My aim here is to provide a conceptual and theoretical account of this core feature, intending also to lay some foundations for future empirical research. I will use my own media-ethnographic research as well as other work on maker, quantified-self and open data movements to construe

2006), having a long tradition in Europe and the US as a 'community of practice' (Wenger, 1999). In both instances, the makers' movement differs because it is a more focused group, dedicated to change through technological developments. As a pioneer community, makers emerged around 2005, the year that Neil Gershenfeld's book on 'FabLabs' – 'laboratories' to 'fabricate' on your own – and 3D printing appeared; was launched by O'Reilly, and the first faires were held in Silicon Valley.

Table 1: Exemplary media-related pioneer communities

Social domain of community	Conceptions of media-related collectivity	
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2012a: 15; 73-77; 92-95), a community which shares the vision that the 'internet of things' would unleash a 'new industrial revolution', bringing DIY, craftsmanship and self-made technological innovations together. The makers understand themselves as pioneers of the and of an increasing of the media: introducing technological (media) innovations for a better life through the intensified connectivity of the 'internet of things'. This is in turn founded upon a new conception of collectivities based on technologies of sharing. This 'technological utopianism' (Sivek, 2011: 189) – which we can also find in magazine (Frau-Meigs, 2000) and in publications like Jeremy Rifkins (Rifkin, 2014) – characterises the conception of collectivity promoted by , which is now part of (CEO: Dale Dougherty), the company that also organises . The magazine and the faires reinforce the sense of a community of 'makers' who share an optimistic vision of a future in which craft and technological developments merge. Since 2012/13 various 'mini maker faires' have supported the spread of this 'movement' in Europe (Schmidt, 2013: 1). Yet, the main anchors remain the locally founded 'maker' and 'hacker spaces, the latter having their own tradition in Europe.¹

As our preliminary analysis shows, there is a certain parallel in the media coverage of this pioneer community in Germany and the UK.² However, makers have so far been mainly studied with respect to localities of alternative knowledge production and practices, and partly from a (media) pedagogical and co-working perspective (cf. for example Bilandzic,

journalists ('hacks') and technologists ('hackers') seeking to rethink the future of news and information (<http://hackshackers.com>). It grew rapidly in the US and then went international, founding chapters to begin with in Latin America, then in Europe and

in the possibility of a productive change of culture and society through digital media, and are dedicated to promoting such change. With reference to this, three points appear central.

Firstly, these collectivities have to be understood as media-related . They are forms of sociation whose members not only share a sense of 'common we', but who have together created structures intended to be relatively long-lasting. As communities, they are 'post-traditional'

in the process of mediatisation. This can be seen at work in the meta discourse conducted within these pioneer communities over issues in the transformation of media and communication, exemplified in the websites and publications of the maker, quantified-self and open data movements (see Table 1). It can be assumed that this kind of reflexive discourse is constitutive for media-related pioneer communities. As collective actors, they promote particular media-related practices and imagined collectivities, seeking to realise these as in the example of the 'New Industrial Revolution' (Anderson, 2012a: 17); and in this way they reflect both the contemporary and historical aspects of the transformation of media and communication. These communities are thus 'pioneers' of a self-reflection upon mediatis

2012a: 47) the response is to drive mediatisation . This can be done by developing the 'internet of things' (Greengard, 2015), the possibility that, by using 3D printers, computerised designs ('bits') can be transformed into physical objects ('atoms'). He develops the idea of a 'community' that makes possible 'collaborative improvement of existing ideas or designs' (Anderson, 2012a: 74), paving the way for the 'next industrial revolution' in which product development will be carried out by collectives using media whose designs are then realised in robotised factories.

This example shows how reflection upon mediatisation by media-related pioneer communities leads to a range of possibilities in the shaping of unintended consequences; problems are dealt with through further improvements in media technology: of mediatisation leads to an of mediatisation. These processes do not follow a unilinear 'logic', but are instead a complex of practices, complex technical realisation and

exemplified by the quantified-self movement; their conceptions of self-measurement are rapidly gaining ground with a broad public. An approach to the study of mediatisation, and which considers itself to be 'critical' should seize on phenomena such as these at an early stage.

2. Detailed analysis of the processes through which communities form, and a sense of community is built, in media-related pioneer communities is important because these are potential

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Fiore-Gartland, B and Neff, G (2015) Communication, mediation, and the expectations of data.
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