

# MEDIA AND SOCIETY (MEDIASOC)

ACADEMY PROGRAMME 2019–2022

Programme memorandum

*Media and Society* is an Academy Programme that has two interconnected and intersecting research themes:

THEME 1: The relationship between media and society

THEME 2: Technology in media transition

Projects may be related to one theme only, but applications are encouraged that combine elements from both themes.

## 1. BACKGROUND

Society has become thoroughly mediatised. Every aspect and area from the economy and politics to civil society and everyday social relations is increasingly saturated, in ever new ways, by media. The growing role of social media is changing the criteria for expertise and for constructive public debate. Experienced experts are now debating their positions with novice amateurs on online discussion sites. The restless and accelerating pace of the attention economy is effectively hampering long-term policy-making. In this increasingly fragmented media landscape, narrow interest groups are able to reinforce their own realities. Talk about a post-factual society and alternative truths is not only a consequence of the changing media environment, but itself contributing to this change. All these phenomena reflect the vulnerabilities of the evolving democratic information society– and present novel and profound challenges to social and cultural research.

The ongoing digital disruption is significant on many different scales. It has been described as one of humanity's great civilizational revolutions and compared to the Neolithic agricultural revolution and the industrial revolution that started in the 18<sup>th</sup> century. Some take the view that this digital disruption is just one in a succession of industrial revolutions driven in turn by the steam engine, the combustion engine, electricity, etc. Others refer instead to long waves of capitalist development that recur every few decades: they prefer to talk about economic and technological revolutions that creatively destroy old modes of production and generate new kinds of activity.

Earlier revolutions and disruptions have all been driven by technology, but not necessarily by information and communications technology. The ongoing digital disruption, by contrast, is precisely a revolution of communications and information processing, and the so-called new media evolving from this revolution are a crucial factor in the profound change taking place in society.

The word 'media' is the plural of the Latin 'medium', which means in between or in the middle. It is most commonly used to refer in some way to the media or practices of communicating messages, such as the mass media. The human body can be regarded as a fundamental tool for producing and receiving messages. These bodily communication skills can be transformed and enhanced by technical means. The expression 'new media' is obviously dependent on context, as there will always be newer media in the making.

The basic nature of media can be conceptualised in three metaphors. Container or channel metaphors emphasise the storable or transferable contents of communication. The language metaphor, then, emphasises practices, grammars and discourses of representation. Finally, the media as environment metaphor underscores how different media characteristics in different eras produce different kinds of societies. In this view, each communications technology favours certain senses, supports certain kinds of networks and modes of interaction, encourages certain social practices, facilitates changes in power relations and certain kinds of cultures, and creates valuations and ideologies. This has provided the basis for distinctions between different cultural periods according to the dominant medium of the age.

For example, the advent of typographic printing in mid-15<sup>th</sup>-century Europe can be seen as one of the factors that broke the Catholic Church's monopoly on knowledge, which was based on monks manually

copying texts and which paved the way for the Reformation, the Renaissance and new natural scientific knowledge. In much the same way, the internet and its second stage in particular, social media, have toppled monopolies of knowledge and provided a democratic and an almost free platform for virtually all voices to reach global attention.

The third stage of digital disruption will see the emphasis shift to the internet of things (IoT), where more and more human-made artefacts will be using sensors and detectors to sense and communicate data that can be autonomously processed using artificial intelligence (AI) and algorithms. The agency of machines will thus gain greater prominence. AI will control ships and drive cars, examine patients and establish diagnoses, process huge volumes of data in minimal time, make decisions on stock sales and purchases, as a war machine decide on life and death – and write news stories on world events.

This Academy Programme has its point of departure in digital media disruption and the various associated changes in society. Its themes derive largely from the so-called new media. Social media, for instance, represent a democratic but by no means an unproblematic change. They seem to demonstrate characteristics of a peer medium, which is liable to flatten hierarchies. This may present a challenge and a crisis for scientific expertise, as novices have the same opportunities as learned professionals to try to persuade their audience. Bypassing journalistic gatekeepers creates amateur journalism. Amateurs are not bound by professional journalistic ethics or codes of conduct, such as the pursuit of truth, impartiality, objectivity, balance and responsible data acquisition. Should the media field move towards developing regulatory and self-regulatory mechanisms, or is nonregulation the best way forward?

Social media also favour populism, which most commonly is defined as a relationship of tension with elites. It is often suggested that decision-makers, medical doctors, scientists and even journalists are inherently corrupt, that their only concern is to disseminate information that furthers their own interests or those of some power-wielding groups. How can trust in experts and science be increased? How should experts communicate in this new situation? How do we create high-quality, disciplined and deliberate dialogue? How do we prevent hate speech and civic polarisation, the formation of filter bubbles and tribal enclaves if algorithms select and screen contents for users that match their existing views? What kind of reactions occur to keep in check the often passionate and unruly debate? What kinds of positive solutions can be produced by means of AI algorithms?

Digital disruption is also a disruption of the economy. In the digital world, copying content is easy and cheap, if not free. This brings us to the 'free problem': why pay for contents when they can be accessed free of charge, without compromising on quality. Media houses' and artists' revenue logic has come under challenge with the constant dwindling of advertising revenue and performance compensations. Is the print culture concept of copyright losing out to free circulation? Is the distinction between advertising and news copy disappearing? What about the traditional distinction between private and public? Are propaganda and information operations on the increase? How are people observed and monitored commercially and politically? An anonymous peer commentary may have been written by a communications agency or a foreign state. On the other hand, digital media are not just an Orwellian 'Big Brother' mechanism, but a system that allows individual citizens to voice their concerns and to anonymously leak violations. Anonymity may furthermore allow for the coverage of sensitive issues and access to peer support on the other hand, peer support and anonymity also make it possible for extremist movements and individuals to exchange information.

The introduction of new technology, including media technology, has historically created both excitement and dismay. Indeed, even Plato criticised the then new media of writing. Film inspired great excitement about this new form of expression, but at the same time parents expressed concerns over the 'wrong kind of education' to which children and young people were exposed. These concerns are even more apparent in the digital world: have parents and teachers lost all control over children's

education? Is evidence-based medicine and official health education being overshadowed by 'alternative' health information? The digital environment provides access to sound and truthful knowledge, but also to apparent disinformation. How can media and information literacy skills be improved so that users can critically assess their sources?

The media have become an increasingly important, but at the same time an increasingly complex and unpredictable part of every facet of society and culture. The threats and opportunities of change cannot be reduced to the changes happening in the media, but it is difficult to understand what is going on without a clear picture of the role and significance of the media. Achieving that understanding will require multidisciplinary research.

Research into the themes under focus in this Academy Programme has applied the methodologies of social sciences, media research, communications research, information research, AI research, political science, economics, history, jurisprudence, linguistics, journalism and mass communication, human-technology interaction, philosophy and arts and cultural research. Other areas of interest have included questions related to health, climate change and media technologies; in these cases, the tools and perspectives of health sciences, natural sciences and technological research have also been put to use. In Finland, all universities across the country and several other research institutes and polytechnics produce high-quality and high-impact research in these areas. The programme will support and benefit the efforts of many existing research communities and new teams and help them produce more high-quality research that will significantly contribute to the international discussion on these topics.

## 2. OBJECTIVES

The Academy Programme *Media and Society* will contribute to regenerating science and strengthen earlier research in relevant fields. It will provide new impetus and direction for Finnish research into society by bringing together different fields of study and different approaches and by linking them with a current research theme of great social importance. The programme's multidisciplinary approach will aim to identify, analyse and explain relevant social concepts, phenomena and trends, and to open up horizons for new solutions and choices in present-day society.

By making good use of multidisciplinary research approaches, the programme will produce knowledge, analyses and innovations to respond to the rapidly emerging developments of today's society, political culture and media landscape. The programme will place major focus on promoting dialogue between different disciplines and on furthering exchange among these disciplines by combining different methodologies, by identifying common research subjects, and by networking at both national and international level. The programme will encourage projects that involve interdisciplinary or multidisciplinary collaboration between two or more fields of study that apply different approaches and methodologies.

The programme is designed to strengthen multidisciplinary collaboration. For this reason, funding will be provided to projects that cut across disciplinary boundaries and that involve multidisciplinary teams aiming to discover new perspectives.

### 3. THEMATIC AREAS

#### THEME 1: The relationship between media and society

How has the relationship between the political system and the media developed through to the present day? The influence wielded by the Fourth Estate on government and political decision-making today is very different from the early stages of nation-states and modern media. At times of social, political, economic and linguistic upheavals, the media are to an increasing extent involved in democratic decision-making. The impact of the media is also reflected in changing language uses and in the emergence of new concepts, such as social media, algorithm or media ecology. The terminology reflects not only the relationship between media and technology, but also the extent and ways of media use, media comprehension and media access among different groups in both national and global networks. The idea of free media access and use also raises the question of the democratisation of communications and the breakdown of more traditional media gatekeeper roles. How democratic is the discussion and debate in the media? Do the media reflect polarisation in society, or are the media, and increasingly the diverse range of voices appearing in the media, creating and driving this polarisation?

Are social media phenomena and the increasing media discussion increasing grassroots involvement in public decision-making (inclusion debates, civil society and civic engagement), or are they in fact leading to greater exclusion of citizens from governance? In other words, are public media debates just hollow pseudo-democracy, or do they implement the ideals of direct and deliberative democracy? How do public media debates affect the popularity of political parties and the building of trust? Social media platforms in particular provide a forum for challenging the positions and performance of politicians and their parties: does this enhance democracy, or does it transform expertise and power? The relationship between the media and society presents a wide range of possible research questions, including the following:

- Media and democracy
  - How do differing discourses and different local, national, and global levels bring together media discourses, on the one hand, and differentiate them, on the other?
  - Questions of discursive power: *Who* is involved in constructing discourses? How is networking and participation in these discourses manifested?
  - How democratic are the media (and social media in particular)? Is cultural, economic or political discussion and debate a genuine process of dialogue, or are the media today more about monologue?
  - Questions of filter bubbles and tribal enclaves, where people cluster together to reinforce their own views and opinions. Are the social media just an extended arena for writing opinion pieces that will deepen divides between different groups?
  - What kinds of citizenships and communities and subcommunities will evolve and be formed in response to the changes unfolding in society? What global phenomena will be absorbed into local discussion environments?
  
- Media, power and the economy
  - How are different media regulated, and what kind of communications policy governs and informs possible regulatory mechanisms?
  - Who controls different types of media at different levels; indeed, is media control possible in a more traditional sense? Changes in control and governance in relation to the media and society.

- Technological questions, know-how and its accumulation; growing inequalities in an increasingly technological and mediatised society.
  - Themes of access and exclusion from the standpoint of high technology and global inequality.
  - Definitions and distribution of data and information: Who creates data, and how and for what purposes are they processed and interpreted?
  - Who has access to information and databanks, how are data leaks addressed in the media?
  - How do data and data use for marketing and marketing development purposes control or influence media users and their world-views?
  - Data economy and related political and economic interconnections.
  - Data and content production and various marketing mechanisms are connected to the needs and discussions that are shaped and created in the media. Has this been researched in sufficient depth? A closely related political question has to do with the definition and understanding of data, with who collects data and how data are transformed into knowledge in society.
- Truth and persuasion; professionalism
- The question of veracity and responsibility in terms of how information and expertise in the media are received. In general the definition and understanding of truth in the post-truth era.
  - Has ethical and moral agency in 'democratic' media environments been lost?
  - Agendas and influencing agendas: Which issues are raised and which are silenced in the media, and by whom? Who gets their voice heard?
  - How are the relationships between different political and economic hierarchies, leading media figures, media agencies and information operations (or to use the older word, propaganda) reflected in the media?
  - Business and marketing in their current forms lead to questions as to what constitutes a media system, media economy or media ecology.
  - Participatory and critical media education as a foundation of democratic society and culture.
  - The use of new media and the media world in civic, health and other education for children and adults.

## **THEME 2: Technology in media transition**

Digitalisation is advancing across all sectors and all aspects of society. Technology plays a central role in the mediatisation of society. It has penetrated virtually every sphere of life in the form of data networks, user-carried or environment-embedded terminals and sensors, and applications (ubiquitous media and IoT). Technology solutions may have both positive and negative impacts on society. This theme combines research concerned with technology and research concerned with phenomena of media production and consumption. Key subject areas include changes in the digital media environment, new approaches to human-technology interaction, the impact of AI and algorithms on the role of the media in society, and the use and effects of social media.

- Changes in the digital media environment
- Changes in media sector work, for example in journalistic genres, distribution channels and processes
  - Lifestyle changes with the spread of digital media, for example the shift from textual to visual media, the implications of different modalities for communications, interaction and education

- Development of a media environment that benefits society, for example technologies that could contribute to improved public debate
- Changes in the media economy and media politics (impact of technological innovations on media industry financing, need for legislative changes and political governance)
- Diverse human-technology interaction
  - Use of new technologies in media creation and dissemination (e.g. 3D and 360 videos and virtual and augmented reality); integration of digital and physical interaction; multichannel systems
  - Games and gamification, e.g. the development of game-based applications as discussion platforms, playable media
  - Use of IoT in the media
  - New divisions of labour between humans and AI-supported digital media (collaboration and division of labour between human and machine agents)
  - Ethics of communications and media technology design and socially sustainable design (technoethics)
  - Media use and non-use (how and why do different groups participate or not participate by technological means in public discussion and debate)
  - Data and information retrieval and the management of (personal) information in the era of ubiquitous media; privacy protection
- Use of AI and related algorithms in media creation and dissemination
  - Datafication (e.g. steering of social processes by means of data analysis, profiling of customer services)
  - Algorithmic moderation of media content production
  - Robot journalism and shifts in public debate when algorithms turn into agents and begin to determine contents
- Social media use in different sectors of society
  - Processes and challenges of social media use
  - New social media applications and their use in everyday and work contexts

The programme's interests furthermore extend to the theory and methodology of research into technology-driven mediatisation of society, including theories and research methods concerned with the joint agency of humans and technology.

#### 4. IMPACTS OF PROGRAMME

The interweaving of media and society is an extremely important and topical issue with far-reaching implications for Finnish democracy and the Finnish way of life. This is a genuinely multidisciplinary web of interlinked problems where research can be expected to generate high-impact results that cut across broad areas of culture and society. This Academy Programme combines a wide range of social, humanistic and cultural research interests, and offers significant development potential in communications and interaction. Furthermore, it opens up new opportunities for integrating different subject areas that come under the programme's umbrella.

The programme's outcomes will have wide application across various sectors of society. It will contribute to more informed public decision-making and explore the conditions under which the relevant research information is channelled into decision-making. The media have an absolutely crucial role in this. The vulnerability of information society and the role of the media as an instrument of political influence have recently begun to attract growing research attention. Information warfare and the dissemination of disinformation via the social media and other channels are phenomena of great

current interest on which the research programme will provide new information for leaders in society as well as for the media.

## 5. IMPLEMENTATION

The programme will aim to strengthen interdisciplinary exchange and cooperation within the relevant fields of research. Its themes tie in with the research interests of the Academy of Finland's different research councils. Preparation of the programme has been a joint effort of the Academy of Finland Board, the Academy's Programme Unit and three of the Academy's four research councils: the Research Council for Culture and Society, the Research Council for Natural Sciences and Engineering, and the Research Council for Health.

### 5.1 FUNDING

The Academy Programme *Media and Society* is a four-year programme (2019–2022) funded and coordinated by the Academy of Finland. Through the programme, funding is provided to multidisciplinary research conducted by research projects and consortia with a view to supporting national cooperation and networking. A research consortium is a collaboration of independent projects working under a joint research plan by combining different methods and research fields with a view to achieving greater added value than is achieved by normal project collaboration. The goal is to fund around ten research projects with the programme's first call. The programme's funding budget for 2018 is 8 million euros. An additional 2 million euros is reserved for international calls that will supplement the first call.

### 5.2 NATIONAL COOPERATION

The Academy Programme *Media and Society* will include active collaboration with other ongoing thematic programmes run by the Academy of Finland. The programme will also take into account programmes and projects run by other Finnish organisations under this same theme.

### 5.3 INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION

The programme selectively aims to establish cooperation with foreign research funding agencies that are committed to supporting leading-edge scientific research in the field and that are recognised and beneficial partners for Finnish research. Another aim is to collaborate with corresponding and relevant international programmes and projects as well as with leading foreign research organisations in the field.

### 5.4 SCHEDULE

Funding will be made available for 2019–2022 to individual research teams and consortiums (two or several teams) scheduled to run for no more than four years. As a rule, the funding period is four years. The funding period starts on 1 January 2019 and ends on 31 December 2022. Individual projects may apply for a maximum of 500,000 euros. Consortia may apply for a maximum of 1 million euros.

The timetable for the call and the review process is set out in more detail in Chapter 6 of this memorandum. The programme's kick-off seminar will be arranged in early spring 2019. Information on funding agencies, research topics, schedules and application processes of any supplementary calls will be announced separately.



The final evaluation of the programme has been scheduled for 2023. Read more about the evaluation under section 5.7.

### 5.5 STEERING GROUP

The programme is run by a steering group composed of members of the Academy's research councils and other expert members. Additional experts may also be invited to the group. The duties of the steering group are:

- to prepare the programme and submit to the programme subcommittee a proposal on projects to be funded
- to make a proposal to Academy research councils and other funding bodies on any new calls and/or additional funding
- to manage and monitor the programme
- to steer programme coordination
- to be responsible for the final evaluation of the programme
- to promote the application of research results produced within the programme.

### 5.6 PROGRAMME COORDINATION

The programme strives to promote the development of the selected projects into a coherent and cohesive structure through active cooperation and exchange of information. The steering group and the programme managers and project officer appointed by the Academy are in charge of programme coordination. They work closely with the projects to facilitate the attainment of the objectives set for the programme. The aim is to ensure that the projects reinforce each other and that the programme generates new multidisciplinary research knowledge. Consequently, the principal investigators (PI) of the projects will be required to commit themselves to the programme objectives and to cooperate actively throughout the programme and during the programme evaluation upon its completion.

The PIs of the projects selected for funding under the programme will be required to

- assume responsibility for and report on the scientific progress of the project and on the use of the funds in accordance with the instructions of the programme manager and relevant funding bodies
- ensure that the whole research team attends all events organised by the programme coordinators, and facilitate exchange and cooperation between research teams in the programme
- take part in producing reviews, syntheses and information material around the programme, and actively disseminate information about the programme's progress and results on public and scientific forums.

During the course of the programme, the research projects will participate in events arranged together with end-users of research results and in any other activities designed to disseminate information to stakeholders.

### 5.7 FINAL EVALUATION

The Academy Programme will be evaluated on its completion to assess implementation and outcomes. The scope and aims of the evaluation will be defined during the course of the programme, but it may consider e.g. the

- attainment of the programme's aims

- implementation
- achievement of intended impacts
- national and international cooperation
- publicity and visibility of research conducted within the programme.

The evaluation may be carried out as part of a more extensive evaluation of Academy programmes or other national programmes and in cooperation with other national and international actors.

The research teams receiving funding are required to report on the progress of their projects in accordance with the decision of the steering group and to submit a research report to the Academy upon project completion. The reports must include information on, for example, scientific publications produced and theses and doctoral dissertations completed within the programme.

## 6. APPLICATION GUIDELINES AND REVIEW CRITERIA

This Academy Programme has a two-stage call. See the application guidelines in the Academy's April 2018 call for applications. The non-negotiable deadline for applications is 25 April 2018 at 16.15 local Finnish time.

Based on the letters of intent submitted at the first call stage, the Steering Group will select which projects will proceed to the second stage. Full applications will be reviewed by international panels of experts. Based on the scientific review of the applications and considering the programme aims, the Steering Group will prepare a proposal to the programme subcommittee on the projects to be funded. The subcommittee will make the funding decisions in December 2018 at the latest. Any supplementary calls will be scheduled separately.

Applications will be reviewed following the general criteria applied to all Academy Programmes (see [How applications are reviewed](#) on our website). Besides the general review criteria, focus will also be placed on the objectives specific to the programme, as described in Chapter 2 of this memorandum. This aspect will be considered under section "Relevance of the project to the research programme" on the review form.

## 7. MORE INFORMATION

This programme memorandum is available as a PDF download at [www.aka.fi/mediasoc](http://www.aka.fi/mediasoc) > EN.

Programme Manager  
Risto Vilkkö  
Academy of Finland  
tel. +358 295 335 136

Programme Manager  
Mikko Ylikangas  
Academy of Finland  
tel. +358 295 335 143

Project Officer  
Erika Lempiäinen  
Academy of Finland  
tel. +358 295 335 101



ACADEMY OF FINLAND

Emails: [firstname.lastname@aka.fi](mailto:firstname.lastname@aka.fi)

Fax: +358 295 335 299

Postal address:

Academy of Finland

PO Box 131 (Hakaniemenranta 6)

FI-00531 Helsinki

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