

Editorial Preface

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The advent of 2017 ushers forth immense challenges for scholars working on the digital realm. Today as we start the new year, the terminology of the ‘post-truth’ era is unsettling. Questions arise on how we can accommodate the notion of anything beyond truth to be part of our constructed world. The rise and rise of fake news, the false news feeds on social networking sites which depend on algorithms rather than editors, and elections which can be swayed through untrue or partial information which can influence voters raise numerous ethical and moral conundrums for societies at large. The great enthusiasm for keeping the internet as a democratic and empowering space has come at a juncture of extreme vulnerabilities where the very resource of information we sought to retain as a public good has come to besiege us. The internet has today become both a mirror and receptacle to project the human condition, the magnitude of its vulnerabilities and depravities yet these are not without the contrasting stories of agency and enrichment which the e-platforms can enable. IJEP as a platform for new and established scholars, dealing with issues which affect our digital cultures, societies and everyday lives will no doubt deal with difficult and probing issues in the months to come. From fake news to lending voices to the disenfranchised, IJEP will endeavour to give space to a plethora of international scholarship, keeping it as a receptive space for alternative paradigms from diverse contexts.

This issue has a mixed bag of offerings from mediatized witnessing to interactions on Instagram. Sasha Scott probes what it means to witness in an age saturated with media technology. Scott argues that there is a need to make a distinction between mediatized witnessing and to truncate its conflation with the ‘watching and passive consumption of events’. Implicating mediatized witnessing within a wider potential to realign power and control in society, Scott makes his argument through the case study of public death events where he positions these as ‘serving to increase our moral awareness of seeing, rendering an ethical imperative of capture on those that witness’.

From witnessing through technology, Janne Berg examines formal and informal e-petition platforms as well as the characteristics of the e-petitions in Finland through their features including initiators, text length, topics, preparation quality, rationality, affectivity and connections to other types of media. By discerning the differences between formal and informal platforms, Berg focuses on citizens’ political behaviour with relevance to online petitioning. Berg’s article concludes that e-petitions on the formal platform are better prepared, show more signs of rational argumentation, and often concern controversial topics.

Size matters in social media more so for political parties. The use of social media by political parties is the ambit of interrogation for Rosa Borge Bravo and Marc Esteve Del Valle where they use the case study of Catalonia to assess how parties and their followers behave on Facebook. The authors look through a vast corpus of social media posts to understand how the organisational structure (particularly size) of the political parties can influence posting behaviour on Facebook, and in tandem mould the reactions of their Facebook followers. Their findings nod towards smaller parties having a better engagement with users/voters than bigger and more institutionalized parties. From Facebook comments, Uta Russmann and Jakob Svensson direct attention to the use of Instagram by political

parties in the Swedish national elections in 2014. They investigate the visual platform as a political tool for engagement and communication. They point out the limitations of the platform where interaction and deliberation were not enhanced by this visual economy.

Articles in this issue are an indication of the vast array of topics we will explore in the upcoming issues. I want to take this opportunity to thank all the contributors, reviewers, associate editors and special issue editors as well as the international advisory board for their generosity both in terms of time and commitment and in enabling *IJEP* to make a sustained contribution to the field. I look forward to continue working with all of you and in welcoming more scholars to this journal in the coming months and years.

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