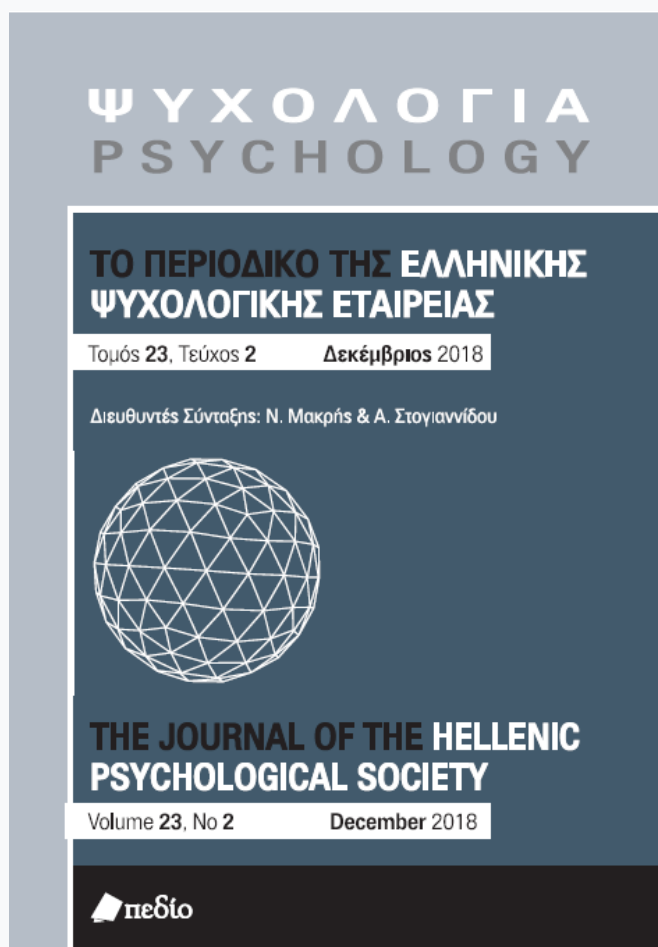


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Media Psychology and Technology: Introduction

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MEDIA PSYCHOLOGY AND TECHNOLOGY: INTRODUCTION

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A psychology that cannot interpret ordinary experience is ignoring almost
the whole range of its natural subject matter.
Neisser (1976, p. 4)

In recent years, societies worldwide are being reshaped by constant changes brought about by information and communication technologies. No part of the world, no human activity seems untouched. These changes, embedded in every aspect of human life, pose questions as to how we understand the human experience in this new mediated communication environment. The necessity of exploring and understanding this highly complex phenomenon of technologically mediated human communication as well as human relations with modern electronic and mechanical systems at an individual, intragroup, intergroup and social level led to the creation of a subfield within psychology: "Media Psychology and Technology". Media Psychology and Technology aims to study the ways in which media and the growing use of technology impacts upon people's perceptions and interpretations of, responses to and interactions within a media rich world, in which they participate as consumers and increasingly, as producers and content distributors. The editor of the *The Oxford handbook of Media Psychology*, Karen Dill (2013, p. 5) defines Media Psychology as "the scientific study of human behavior, thoughts and feelings experienced in the context of media use and creation". It requires the use of concepts, methods and theories of psychology in order to study both the psychological and social parameters of all forms of human communication mediated by technology and human-machine interaction.

The idea that psychology is related to media, or that innovations in communications technologies impact human psychology, is nothing new. Various research questions which Media Psychology and Technology might address have been formulated within many disciplines. "Media studies", "Communication studies", "Popular culture", "Sociology", "Critical studies", amongst others, have a long tradition of addressing such issues. Much of its work has been done in these disciplines, but this must not obscure the long history and tradition that leads to the development of Media Psychology and Technology within the field of psychology, as a discipline where mainstream psychological research and theory formulation is used as the backbone of media psychology and guide the discipline itself. Fischhoff (2005, p. 1) points

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out that “the subject matter of media psychology is a mother lode of material that psychology has actively mined for decades but only within the last years has the enterprise emerged as a distinct and explicit subdivision of psychology”. According to this author, media psychology’s conceptual roots can be found within the discipline of social psychology in the early work of Hugo Münsterberg on the psychology and the psychological impact of film. Münsterberg’s book *Photoplay: A psychological study* (published in 1916) is considered as the first empirical study of an audience reacting to a film. Some years later, again in the field of social psychology, Louis L. Thurstone, who was considered the father of attitude scale construction and measurement, developed scales for the measurement of children’s attitudes toward movies for the Payne Fund Research, which took place between 1929-1933.³ A lot of psychologists followed Münsterberg and Thurstone into media influences and effects studies.

Psychologist Carl Hovland, well known for his works and research in persuasion and attitude change, and later considered as one of the fathers of communication studies, was also interested in how media such as films and other forms of communication could affect people’s behavior. In 1942, he worked on a government study to test if military films were able to change army morale. The aim of his experimental design was to discover the impact of particular military films on American soldiers in three areas: cognition, attitudes, and behavioral aspects.⁴ Psychologists Handley Cantril and Gordon Allport in their seminal work *The psychology of radio* (published in 1935) equate the psychology of radio with that of the listener so that radio becomes intimately linked with the psychology of the listener. As (Tuma, 2013, p. 7) points out, Cantril is introducing a different role of media by opening up the possibility of “otherness”: “That is, the context that happens between people is as important as the relationship between the individual and the medium”. Thirteen years earlier the journalist Walter Lippmann (1922/1988) had published his classic work *Public Opinion* that bridged political philosophy, social psychology and media. According to Tuma (2013, p. 67): “The core of the relationship between media and cognition for Lippmann lies with the psychology of perception. He understood that the pictures we get from media were an important component driving cognition”. Hildegard Himmelweit, also a social psychologist, contributed to the understanding of television’s impact in society, as director of the Nuffield Foundation television inquiry (1954-58) and the subsequent book *Television and the child* (Himmelweit, Oppenheim, & Vince, 1958).

As a specific research domain within psychology, “media psychology and technology” is evolving more or less recently. Giles (2003, p. 3) points that: “No field of psychology can emerge without a significant number of psychologists simultaneously addressing the same issues and identifying communalities in each other’s work”. In the U.S., the official emergence of media psychology as a field is attributed to the formation of the Media Psychology Division 46 in the American Psychological Association (APA) in 1987, which became in 2012 the “Society for Media Psychology and Technology-Division 46”. This new name acknowledges the difference between media and technology and at the same time indicates that media does not only mean mass media. Thus, although “Media psychology and Technology” is not directly concerned with the science and technology behind devices for mediated communications per se, it is increasingly

3. The Payne Fund Research was a series of studies conducted to determine the effects of movies on the behavior of children and adolescents. Louis L. Thurstone with Ruth C. Peterson wrote the report «Motion pictures and the social attitudes of children». The studies were summarized in the book *Our movie made children* (Forman, 1934).

4. The study tested Frank Capra’s series of films called *Why we fight* that were meant to be motivational films used to train American soldiers.

reliant on knowledge of how media function, and acknowledges that psychological theory and other fields related to media and technology can and should inform each other. In Europe, the first biennial meeting of European Media Psychology was held at a symposium conducted at the 2nd European Congress of Psychology in Budapest, July 1991. One of the conclusions reached at this symposium was that Media Psychology had developed into a relatively autonomous branch of psychology mainly in Northern Europe and especially in Germany (van der Voort & Winterhoff-Spurk, 1997). Also, a growing number of introductory handbooks on Media Psychology (Batinic & Apple, 2008; Brewer, 2011; Ferguson, 2016; Giles, 2003; Trepte & Reinecke, 2013; Winterhoff-Spurk, 1999) as well as scientific journals devoted to this field of study⁵ begun to be available in Europe and USA covering a broad range of media psychological research reflecting the large theoretical and methodological spectrum of this discipline.⁶ Subsequently, Media Psychology postgraduate programs were founded within the field of Psychology or independent Departments and some times in congenial university Departments other than Psychology (Communication or Journalist Departments). Nowadays, there is a growing number of courses, Masters and PhD degrees programs in Media Psychology in colleges and universities worldwide⁷ and many national and international conferences are organized on this topic by Media Psychology divisions or psychology associations in all parts of the world.⁸ The increasing number of these enterprises highlights the importance of studying mediated communication in the context of the rapidly growing incorporation of media technologies into the personal, social and professional lives of people. According to the APA's Division 46 (Dill, 2013, p. 5): "Media Psychology can be described as the merging of communication and human behavior. It is central to understanding behavior within many disciplines, including, in part, technology; public policy and government; telecommunications; software; education; health care; and entertainment".

For many years, psychological research on media was essentially "problem-oriented", as one of the key driving forces within Media Psychology was to consider the negative influence that certain types of media can have on human behavior. Thus, the "research has been conducted in response to calls for scientific evidence for the harmful influence of media, rather than an intellectual need to understand how media in general might influence behavior" (Giles, 2003, p. 10).⁹ This narrow focus persists today but it has to be noted, that recent media and technology

5. See "Zeitschrift für Medienpsychologie" (first edited in 1989, renamed *Journal of Media Psychology* in 2008), *The Journal of Media Psychology* (first edited in 1996), *Media Psychology* (first edited in 1999), *The American Journal of Media Psychology* (first edited in 2008), *Media Psychology Review* (first edited in 2008).

6. For example, the papers included in van der Voort & Winterhoff-Spurk published proceedings of the third biennial meeting of European media psychologists (a three-day workshop on "Psychology of Media in Europe", which was held in Otzenhausen, Germany in May 21-23, 1995), focused on media users and audiences perceptions of media content, viewers' aggressive and emotional responses to products of screen media, the role of media in foreign language acquisition and in school performance and contemplative contributions.

7. See for example in USA the Fielding Graduate University (offering since 2002 PhD and MA programs in media psychology). For examples in Europe, see the Media Psychology Department at the University of Hohenheim, the MSc in Media psychology at the University of Sanford (School of Health Sciences), and the MA in Media Psychology at Business School Berlin.

8. See the annual conference of the Society of Media Psychology and Technology (APA Division 46), the Biennial Conference of the Media Psychology Division of the German Psychological Society.

9. In this context, academic psychology's interest was largely centered on television's use by children and how it influenced their acquisition of reading skills and imitation of anti-social behavior.

research does not only involve research into media effects but has become the interface between the human experience and all forms of media (Luskin, 2016) and it is impossible to foresee where it will lead. As Rutledge (2010) wrote humorously: “This is a field that changes every time *iTunes* releases a new mobile app”.

In Greece, the field of media psychology and technology has been identified in the late 1980s. Initially, research focused on the audience perception, on the relationship between self and identity with respect to the media, and has been developing with important publications on interpersonal, intragroup, interpersonal relationships, emotions, roles, representations, social media, mobile technologies, education, etc.

The Media Psychology and Technology Division of the Hellenic Psychological Society (ΕΛ-ΨΕ) was founded in 2014 by twelve psychologists working in the field of Media Psychology and Technology in different (but epistemologically related) university departments (Psychology, Media Studies, Education Departments....).¹⁰ The Division’s main objectives are to develop and highlight issues related to the field of Media Psychology and Technology in Greece, to support relative research, to bring together academics, researchers and practitioners involved in this field in order to create a scientific community in Greece for the discussion and development of theoretical frameworks for the study and practice of Media Psychology and Technology. The Division aims also to enrich and encourage the teaching, training, and practice of Media Psychology and to develop ethical standards and guidelines in the study and research of Media Psychology and Technology.

The Media Psychology and Technology division organized its Inaugural Symposium, in the context of the 15th Panhellenic Conference of Psychological Research titled *Psychology in Greece and the Mediterranean* and held between 27 and 31 May 2015 at the University of Cyprus in Nicosia. The Symposium invited speakers included Jerry Lynn Hogg, PhD, President - elect of the Society for Media Psychology and Technology (APA - Division 46), as well as Georgios N. Yannakakis, PhD, Associate Professor at the Institute of Digital Games, University of Malta. The topic of the keynote addresses lay at the intersections of research in social media, games, new technologies in education, social advocacy, entertainment, emotions and therapeutic intervention. Additionally, the Division organized another symposium on *Hybrid Communication Environments and Digital Platforms for Social, Political, Emotional, and Educational Mediated Experiences*.

The aim of this special issue of *Psychology* on “Media Psychology and Technology” is to introduce, inform and foster a knowledge community which comprises psychologists from diverse disciplines who seek to understand and explain the roles, uses, processes and effects of mediated communication and technology in complex information societies. It also aims to provide a common ground for facilitating the productive discourse of kindred spirits from this and other disparate disciplines within psychology. As such, it belongs to all of us.

A closer examination of the content of this special issue illustrates a summary of the research areas.

The first paper in this special issue, titled *Relationship of internet addiction with alexithymia and childhood’s perceived parenting in university students* and authored by Panagiota Soranidou

10. Communication and Media Departments (N. Christakis, B. Davou A. Gardikiotis), Film Studies Department (P. Pantazis - 1954-2018), Education Department (E. Kourti, D. Sakka), Communication, Media and Culture Department (A. Gazi), Psychology Departments (P. Kordoutis, I. Katerelos, K. Navridis, P. Roussos,) History and Ethnology Department (E. Lambridis).

and Antonia Papastyliou, focuses on the relationship among web addiction, alexithymia and childhood's perceived parenting while controlling for the indirect effect of depression. A wide range of instruments measuring Internet addiction was used and findings are discussed from the perspective of highlighting the relationship between alexithymia and Internet addiction and, consequently, the efficacy of these instruments for clinical and therapeutic practice.

Subsequently, Anthi Sidiropoulou, in her paper titled *Multitasking of existence: Technological mediation in the daily life of the new digital generation*, employs qualitative methods (diary study, thematic analysis) in order to investigate the way in which young adults of the net generation get involved with ICTs and what types of meaning they attribute to ICT use. Findings indicate that young adults do not receive the psychological gratification they seek while using ICTs, which in turn contributes to extended multitasking that gives rise to new forms of anxiety and feelings of being trapped in a permanently escaping reality that requires constant presence and participation.

Antonis Gardikiotis, Evropi Navrozidou, & Olympia Euaggelou-Navarro in their paper titled *Social media and political participation: the role of social psychological and social media variables*, examined, in a survey study (N= 238), the relationships among social psychological variables (political identification, political self-efficacy), social media variables (social media use, presumed social media influence) and political participation. A structural equation model provided corroborating evidence to these relationships, suggesting a complementary and mediational function of social media in predicting political participation.

Evangelia Kourti, Panos Kordoutis, and Anna Madoglou, in their paper titled *Social perception of Facebook friendship among Greek students*, using quantitative and qualitative methods, investigate the perceived role of Facebook in the formation of friendship among Greek students. According to the conclusions of this study, Facebook-based friendship was predominantly perceived as a means of socialization and aggregation of social capital, a tool for the maintenance and expansion of one's social capital and the promotion of desirable social identities.

The final paper in this volume is titled *Localizing emotions: Soundscape representation through smartphone use* and has been authored by Angeliki Gazi, Charalampos Rizopoulos, and Yiannis Christidis. It explores the role of the soundscape in the formation of an emotional bond with urban space, as expressed by means of the circumplex model of affect. Also, it showcases a way in which the emotional qualities of urban space may be self-reported by city dwellers and represented as an overlay on a map of the city in question. To that end, a field study was undertaken in Limassol, Cyprus using a mobile app that allowed participants to indicate their emotional response towards the soundscape in the course of a soundwalk.

The special issue concludes with two commentaries by Bettina Davou and Petros Roussos, who engage in a discussion on the issues expounded in the submitted contributions and highlight the necessity and the prospects of conducting research in the field of Media Psychology in Greece and internationally.

Media and Technology is by definition a reflection of its creators. To study media and technology is to study the creators, their creations and the use of these creations. In that sense, Media Psychology is about all that is human and all that is of interest to humans. As Fischhoff points out (2005, p. 21) "to study Media Psychology is, in the final scene, to study how humans represent themselves to themselves through lenses, through harmonics and through spectra and how humans send these self-images across time and space in a fierce proclamation of existence".

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- Journal of Media Psychology. Theories, Methods, and Applications (published until 2007 as *Zeitschrift für Medienpsychologie*) <https://www.hogrefe.de/produkte/zeitschriften/journal-of-media-psychology>
- Media Psychology Review <http://mprcenter.org/review/>
- Media Psychology <https://www.tandfonline.com/loi/hmep20>
- The Amplifier: A magazine of the Society for Media Psychology and Technology, Division 46 of the American Psychological Association <https://div46amplifier.com>