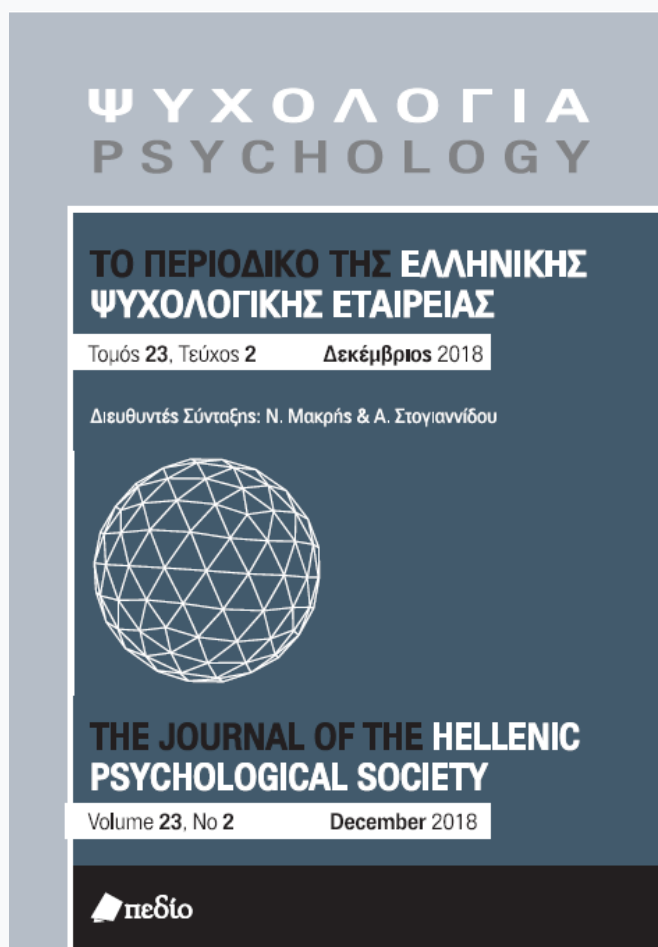


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Media psychology and technology special issue: A Discussion

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“Media psychology and technology special issue: A Discussion”

PETROS ROUSSOS¹

I would like to thank Evangelia Kourti and Angeliki Gazi for the invitation to serve as the discussant of the present special section of *Psychology*, which includes a collection of five top-quality research papers related to the Media Psychology and Technology. The study and discussion of the papers as well as the collaboration with the editors has been a pleasure and a privilege.

The development of novel web-based technologies, smart devices, products, services and environments, and the evolution of social computing are the reasons behind the ever-growing role of ICT in our lives and have set an extremely challenging context for research. This is even truer for younger generations who were born into a world enveloped by the internet (Amichai-Hamburger & Barak, 2009). Two papers, using a qualitative research methodology, focus on influences of the Web phenomena on young people. The first (Sidiropoulou, this issue) addresses young adults' perceptions of ICTs, whereas the second (Kourti, Kordoutis and Madoglou, this issue) studies university students' perceptions of friendship on social media, such as Facebook. With billions of young users online through the use of hand-held devices, this research is essential as, among others, it

addresses the paradox in this field that older generations -researchers included- have less knowledge and are less exposed than the younger ones, who are more experienced technologically and approach the net as the “natural” way to do things. Adult users are expected to learn new ways of carrying out familiar tasks, whereas for youngsters many of their social interactions, learning and leisure activities take place on the web.

The relationship between media and political participation has been the subject of scholarly scrutiny for a long time now and the democratizing potential of ICTs has provided the stimulus for a renewed interest in this area of research. The extensive use of digital media for organization and mobilization has been the distinctive feature of mass protest movements since 2011 and elicited much commentary and speculation about the political effectiveness and democratizing potential of the web. Gardikiotis, Navrozidou and Euangelou-Navarro (this issue) address the question of the predictive relation between social media use and political participation and engagement and provide some interesting findings on a very understudied topic. However, the study, like the majority of similar contributions, relies on cross-sectional data, therefore

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the causal effect of social media remains unclear (I am aware of only one recent experimental study which examined how Facebook use influenced political participation and used a Greek sample; Theocharis & Lowe, 2016).

The special issue could not ignore the topic of internet addiction, especially when so many Greek researchers are currently working on this area. Soranidou and Papastylianou (this issue) focus on the relationship between web addiction, alexithymia and perceived parenting during childhood, and their findings (extremely low or insignificant correlations between internet addiction and the study's variables) are similar to the ones published in other studies which aim to address internet overuse. I would like to use this opportunity and raise two issues, one conceptual and one methodological. The conceptual issue around this topic is whether internet addiction is a valid disorder (DSM-V does not recognize it per se) or the term confuses pathology that can occur both online and offline and misdirects researchers' attention from more clinically relevant interpretations of the pathological use of the technology. To give an example, a gambler who gambles online is not addicted to the Web. The methodological issue is related to the tools developed and used for the measurement of the "disorder". Both the definitional criteria and the early measurement tools of the disorder have been largely informed by researchers who were in the fields of substance addictions and problem gambling. Instead of scales which are introduced in the field by simply substituting terms related to substances with "Internet", we need more rigorous studies that will focus on the nature of the problem. It is also important that the

researchers do not lose sight of the potential benefits that most web-based technologies grant to users, and consider this knowledge to inform useful definitions and guidelines for healthy use. I would strongly recommend that the Division of Media Psychology and Technology should consider a special issue of *Psychology* on the topic of problems and disorders related to online applications and activities.

As digital technologies like the Internet become established norms for carrying out communication, work, and entertainment, so they are used for research purposes. Gazi, Rizopoulos and Christidis (this issue) developed a mobile application which provided participants with the ability to indicate emotional states and, although my feeling is that their paper belongs rather to the field of environmental psychology, it is a good example of how New Technologies can enhance the way we conduct research.

It is obvious that the papers of the present issue are very few to cover a diverse range of topics. Furthermore, they are not representative of the research conducted in this field in our country, a fact that I hope will act as a motive to repeat the enterprise very soon.

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