Erasmus University Rotterdam, the Netherlands
CSC PhD 2019 Project Description

School/Department:	Department of Media and Communication ERMeCC Erasmus School of History, Culture and Communication
Project Title:	Media & Popular Culture Representations of Digital Technologies
Abstract:	In January 2007, influential US magazine Time declared a generic 'You' the person of the year. Featuring a big white desktop, the cover explained "Yes, You. You control the Information Age. Welcome to your world". The issue featured a diverse range of people who, thanks to opportunities offered by social media, were challenging the status quo and the power hierarchies. The World Wide Web appeared as the great social equalizer, signifying "an opportunity to build a new kind of international understanding, not political to politician, great man to great man, but person to person" (Grossman, 2006). But by 2016, the same magazine announced that "we are losing the Internet to the culture of hate". The Internet's "personality", we were told, was changing from a harbinger of freedom and equality to a dark space where trolls and extremist groups, previously at the margins of society, were increasingly becoming normalized. This example illustrates the interest of this project, namely the discursive shifts in the construction of digital technologies as they are represented in diverse texts such as magazines, newspapers, films, novels, etc. Representations such as these capture and contribute to wider social anxieties around technological development and are thus implicated in the symbolic construction of the social body. They talk not only about what technologies can or cannot do for us, but also (re)produce horizons of expectations on how society and technology influence each other. As Wyatt (2004) has argued, the ways in which digital technologies are collectively imagined is important "not only because they reveal what different actors think it is, but also because they tell us something about what they want it to become" (p. 244). Thus, in mapping and interpreting the representation of digital technologies in media and/or popular culture, this project asks how digitally mediated societies are simultaneously imagined and constructed, and to what normative implications for how individuals should lead their lives. Furthermore, while media representations in US technology magazines such as Time or Wired are critically engaged with in

scholarly literature, there is little empirical research on this topic outside the Western world. For instance, Yoon (2006) examines the ways in which young mobile phone users are represented in South Korea. Szablewicz (2010) examines the symbolic construction of moral panics over Internet gaming and Internet addiction in China. Yet, such examples remain rather rare particularly in relation to China, as Chinese Internet research has generally gravitated toward other areas of inquiry (Herold and de Seta, 2015). This PHD position thus addresses an empirical gap and potentially contributes to a comparison between Western and non-Western representations of digital technologies.

In my own research, I have focused on celebratory visions of the impact of digital technologies in politics and education (Dumitrica and Bakardjieva, 2017; Dumitrica, 2017; Dumitrica and Williams, 2016). As a PhD student in this project, you should have a keen interest in media representation and/or discourse theory. Depending on your interests, you may want to compare Asian and Western representations of digital technologies in the media (e.g. news media, technology magazines) and/or in the wider popular culture (e.g. film, TV series, novels, etc.). In practice, the project could take the form of analyzing different types of texts (e.g. advertisements, magazine covers, feature stories, novels, films, etc.) and, possibly, their reception by audiences. The right candidate should thus demonstrate interest and proficiency in one (or several) of the following theoretical areas: media representations; media framing; discourse theory; audience reception; or, sociology of technology. In your application, please indicate how your prior degrees and/or written papers at the graduate level deal with any of these areas. If you have any papers on these topics, please include one of them in your application file.

The PhD student will work under the joint supervision of Dr. Delia Dumitrica and Prof. Dr. Jeroen Jansz, who will act as the formal promoter for the student. Dr. Dumitrica is an Assistant Professor in Media and Communication at Erasmus University Rotterdam, currently involved in a SSHRC-funded project examining emerging practices of democratic participation via social media in Canada. Prof. Dr. Jansz is an international expert on participating audiences. His research deals with topics such as user-generated content, serious games, and media and emotions. He is currently supervising several PhD students working on topics such as social media use in health communication; the role of media in the development of identities and engagement of young, urban media produsers; and representations