Children's and young people's rights in the digital age
Call for papers for a special issue of *NEW MEDIA & SOCIETY*

Editors: Sonia Livingstone and Amanda Third
Abstracts due (400-500 words): 15th September 2015

In 1989, Sir Tim Berners Lee released the code that would form the foundation of the World Wide Web, which now boasts an audience of three billion users worldwide. The same year, the United Nations adopted the Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC), the most widely ratified human rights treaty in the history of the UN. The trajectories thereby set in motion have recently become explicitly intertwined, with growing momentum behind calls for the recognition of the potential of online and networked media for promoting children's rights. At the same time, researchers, child rights' advocates and internet governance experts, among others, are concerned that children's rights are being newly infringed rather than enhanced in the digital age.

While the past quarter of a century has seen the emergence of a significant literature examining the broad issue of children's rights and, in parallel, a burgeoning field of research on children's new media and digital practices in a variety of national and international contexts, the question of children's rights in the digital age has yet to receive sustained scholarly attention, especially compared with the attention paid to adult rights online. Within popular discourse, children and young people are frequently configured as riding at the forefront of the 'digital revolution'. Nonetheless, as high level debates about global internet provision and governance extend their geographic, political and economic scope, the position of children and young people is barely acknowledged. Further, in the twists and turns of often heated policy debates, children's own experiences, voices and interests are vastly under-considered. This special issue thus seeks to contribute to the definition, empirical evidence base, and theorisation of the field internationally.

Not only are children's needs and experiences in the digital age often treated as merely a minority interest but they are also often seen as essentially problematic, as demanding exceptional treatment from adult society or causing unwarranted restrictions on adult freedoms. It is important to recognise the fundamental nature of the challenges – this is not just a matter of 'digital rights' but of all children's rights as they may be being transformed in a 'digital age'. Nor is it just a matter of the exceptional circumstances that apply to children, for addressing the rights of children and young people also has implications for adult rights in a digital age. How does a consideration of children compel a wider re-examination of the concepts both of the digital and of human rights?

If children's rights in the digital age have yet to receive attention in the global North, this is even more acute in the global South. The tipping point has already passed, with two thirds of the world's nearly three billion internet users living in developing countries, many of them children. At present, the evidence regarding their online activities is very patchy, too often drawing on anecdote, practitioners' observations and institutional reports or media accounts. There is thus an urgent need for a scholarly focus on the rights of children and young people within this larger picture of expanding connectivity in the global South. This is vital to foster debates about children's rights informed by dialogues among diverse epistemologies, experiences and normative frameworks.

This special issue seeks to unpack the ways digital media are impacting – both positively and negatively – children's rights today and, in doing so, to reflect on the ways that children's rights might provide a meaningful counterpoint from which to consider the role of 'the digital' in advancing human rights more broadly. Assembling contributions from leading scholars

and practitioners in the field internationally, this special issue seeks to bring fully into view the ways in which children's rights – indeed rights generally – may be being reconfigured by the appropriation of digital networked technologies around the world. Submissions will critically examine the normative and socio-technological assumptions embedded in conceptual, policy and practitioner perspectives. To catalyse the debates, we now call for **reflective papers of 6000-7000 words analysing key dilemmas or tensions shaping children's rights in the digital age, as well as shorter empirical or practitioner pieces (3000-4000 words each)**.

Papers on key dilemmas or tensions that respondents to the call might address include:

- The tension between universal or fundamental human rights and the specific rights demanded by the digital age
- The tensions between 'adult rights' and 'children's rights'
- The relationship between children's rights and their citizenship
- Collective rights versus individual rights
- The tension between 'adult power' and 'children's rights'
- The tension between the universal ('the child', 'rights') and the specific (the lived experiences of children)
- Hierarchies of children's rights in the digital age
- Children's rights in the digital age in the global North and global South

Empirical or practitioner pieces might address:

- Children's privacy rights and the role of peers and peer culture
- Youth participation rights in the mediated public sphere
- Historical shifts in children's communication rights
- Child protection in the global South: is the internet helping or hindering?
- From principles to practice: applying arguments about digital rights in particular domains
- Who is (or should be) ensuring children's rights online – parents, government, industry?
- Children's creative workarounds to gain health resources online
- Evaluating initiatives for e-learning and other digital educational programmes
- How are children's rights represented or abused in 'big data'
- Digital exclusion as a barrier to children's communication rights
- Rethinking possibilities for children's identity and expression in the network society
- Problems of reputation for networked youth
- Public policy /multi-stakeholder governance regarding children's rights in the digital age
- Children's information rights: what are the dilemmas?
- Education for all – newly possible in the network society?
- Grooming, hacking, cyberstalking, trolling and other crimes against children online
- Meanings/limits of "voice" in participatory research on children's rights in the digital age
- The intergenerational dimensions of children's rights

Please submit abstracts for either the 'dilemma' papers or 'empirical/practitioner papers' by **15th September 2015 to both editors – Sonia Livingstone (s.livingstone@lse.ac.uk) and Amanda Third (A.Third@uws.edu.au)**.

The editors will invite full papers from selected submissions by early October, with **full papers to be submitted for independent review by 1st February 2016**. It is anticipated that the special issue will be published via Online First by late 2016.