

**45th EPRA Meeting Edinburgh
18-19 May 2017**

**Plenary Session 2: Promises and challenges of Digital Disruption
Filters, algorithms and diversity – turning concerns into opportunities?
Introductory Document**

1. Introduction, concept and context

When consulting on topics to include in the [Work Programme for 2017](#), the Secretariat received many suggestions from EPRA members to consider how technology continues to “disrupt” established practices, and to analyse the potential impact on market players, business models and regulation.

The term “disruption”, often associated with innovation, usually refers to a change to the market that is so powerful and different that it requires others in the field to follow suit or be left behind as opposed to incremental innovation that takes place slowly across time and allows for a gradual development of the product and its marketplace. Yet, it has also been pointed out that disruption is not necessarily a bad thing¹ as successful disruptors might build better models for the benefit of all.

The general objective of this biannual session on “Promises and challenges of Digital Disruption” is to document and analyse some of the major shifts recently brought about by emerging technology. This is in keeping with one key strategic objective of EPRA: to remain future-focussed and responsive to change.

2016 saw the launch of Facebook Live giving anyone with a phone the power to broadcast to anyone in the world. In this context, there are many topics that call for an analysis of how technology and policy and regulation interact, such as media distribution over networks, platforms and app stores, or media personalization of content.

In an attempt to provide the best expertise for this future-oriented session, the Executive Board decided to involve external Content Producers from industry or academia. The concept for this first plenary session of the year has been developed by **Prof. Dr. Natali Helberger** of the University of Amsterdam.

Natali Helberger is professor in Information Law at the Institute for Information Law. She specializes in the regulation of converging information and communications markets. Focus points of her research are the interface between technology and information law, user rights and the changing role of the user in information law and policy. Exploring the interaction between media law, privacy and data protection law, consumer law and communications law is an important driver behind her research.

¹ <https://hbr.org/2015/05/lets-stop-arguing-about-whether-disruption-is-good-or-bad>

2. Objective and format of the Edinburgh session

The goal of the Edinburgh plenary session will be **to raise awareness** for:

- a) the importance of media pluralism, also online,
- b) the potential of algorithmic recommendations to promote media diversity and
- c) the need to revisit for this purpose the notion of pluralism.

The format will be that of an **interactive panel session**. Four panellists will present in short presentations their most important key messages. The presentations will be followed by a discussion between panel members and the audience.

3. Structure, panellists & choreography

3.1. The bigger picture

To kick-off the plenary session, and to prepare the basis for the discussion, Prof. Dr. [Natali Helberger](#) of the University of Amsterdam will give a brief introduction into the shift from mass-media to personalised media, the resulting concerns about filterbubbles, information intermediaries and the state of research. She will then make the argument that in order to truly understand the impact that algorithmic recommendations have for society, we need to look with a fresh eye at the concept of media pluralism.

3.2. The perspective of regulators: reflections on the regulatory discourse in France

Mr. [Olivier Schrameck](#), President of the French CSA will present the state of discussion in France: how does the CSA view the debate about filterbubbles and diversity? How is the legal situation right now, and are there new regulatory proposals? Are there any attempts to measure the impact of algorithms and personalised media such as Facebook on media diversity?

3.3. Academic perspective: Do people value diversity, and what is the potential of algorithmic recommender design?

Dr. [Judith Möller](#) of the University of Amsterdam, will then take up the challenge, and present first results of a number of ongoing research projects. The first is a representative survey of Dutch users in which users' attitudes towards diversity and personalised recommendations were asked, and demonstrate that diversity is a concept that matters to users. The other project analyses the effects of different recommendation logics on media diversity, using data supplied by a major Dutch newspaper (Volkskrant), and demonstrates that personalisation does not per se need to reduce diversity. Dr. Moeller will also reflect more generally on the challenges of measuring and interpreting the impact of personalised recommendations.

3.4. Practice perspective: exploring the full potential of algorithmic recommendations

[Blendle](#) is an innovative Dutch start-up company that offers access to articles from more than 100 publishers in the Netherlands, Germany and Belgium, and is a forerunner in experimenting with algorithmic recommendations. Dr. [Anne Schuth](#), data scientist at Blendle, will explain Blendle's perspective on diversity, and some insights into their experimentation with richer, more diverse recommendation logics, as well as the challenges encountered along the way.