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Abstracts

TWG 5

Onlife: Digital Media Sociology in a Digital Cross-Platform World
Thursday, 17 August

16.00-18.00

Anja Bechmann (Aarhus University)
“The Facebook newsfeed as news source”

Bente Kalsnes (Oslo and Akershus University College of Applied Science)
“The social media logic of political communication”

Johanna Sumiala (University of Helsinki), Minttu Tikka (University of Helsinki), Katja Valaskivi (University of Tampere)
“‘Liveness’ and the acceleration of conflict in a hybrid, violent media event”
The Facebook newsfeed as news source
Anja Bechmann, UCI & Aarhus University, anjabechmann@cc.au.dk

Abstract

Within journalism studies and media management a popular topic is the discussion of users leaning towards social media as their primary digital news outlets (e.g. Baresch et al, 2011). Still, several studies indicate that social media news streams rely heavily on links to legacy media news content. Kvak et al (2010) conclude that 85% of the Twitter streams contain headline news and Newman et al (2014) show that between 14-18% of internet users share links to news stories every week on social media. This social referral led by Facebook in turn account for an increasing large percentage of the total site views on legacy media news websites (Newman et al, 2014; Schrøder & Nielsen, 2015).

However, two interesting perspectives remain to be addressed in the existing studies on social media as news source focusing on Facebook as the largest social media service. First, what is news in a social media setting like Facebook and does the traditional concept of news prevails. Second, what does the actual Facebook news stream data tells us about the patterns of news shared by and among users in social media streams?

Studies examining social media as news source (e.g. Baresch et al, 2011; Newman et al., 2012) seldom question the concept of news, merely adapting the concept of news as being stories deriving from legacy news organizations. On the other hand, social media research points to other incentives for users to share, create and view content on social media that rely heavily on self-portraying, everyday reports, connectivity and relationship building (see e.g. Humphreys et al, 2013; Bechmann & Lomborg, 2013). Instead of examining news from a traditional conceptual angle this article seeks to analyze news on Facebook from the ground up by looking at topics derived from content in the newsfeed.

Few studies have looked at the Twitter news streams (see e.g. Kvak et al, 2010; Zhao et al, 2010), but to my knowledge no studies have looked at a broad sample of Facebook news streams with a focus on the character of news on Facebook. Instead knowledge of news in social media is based on survey data (e.g. Newman et al, 2014; Schrøder & Nielsen, 2015). Looking at Facebook newsfeed data will enable a more nuanced discussion Facebook newsfeed as news source.

Aiming at analyzing and discussing Facebook newsfeed as news source the article will examine the newsfeed data of a broad sample mirroring the demographics of a nation (here the Danish Facebook population). Based on 14 days’ newsfeed for 1000 participants the paper aims to register topics of the exposed news in
the feeds correlated with ‘age’. The article will make use of quantitative content analysis in the form of a hand coded subset and topic modelling on the total dataset similar to the method used by Zhao et al (2011) in their study of Twitter news data. The findings will form the basis for a general discussion on the concept of news in social media.

Abstract submitted to Convergence special issue Users Across Media

References


Kvak et al (2010). What is Twitter, a social network or a news media?


The social media logic of political communication

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Media logics can be understood as the inherent communication norms and practices of a particular medium (Altheide & Snow, 1979), and scholars have typically used it to describe the function and formats of mass media. Typically, media logic refers to the format, rules or ‘codes’ for defining, selecting, organising, presenting and recognising information as one thing rather than another (Altheide & Snow, 1979). Researchers have recently started to argue that a new mechanism is in play in the interaction between social media platforms, the mass media, users and social institutions. New hybrid media landscapes are characterized by political actors who can bypass media as gatekeepers and communicate directly with voters on their own Facebook pages. Simultaneously, social media platforms such as Facebook and Twitter are important traffic drivers for mass media, as well as convenient ways for political journalists to reach readers and political sources. The changing dynamics between mass media and social media are highly relevant to how people inform themselves about the world, which issues are given salience, how we make decisions, and, consequently, how democracy functions. But the new mechanisms for attention, visibility and popularity on social media platforms is not sufficiently articulated or understood in the existing research literature.

In this study, I propose a conceptual and theoretical framework which allows us to analyse and make sense of how political communication occurs on social media platforms. Central to the proposed framework is a critical understanding of social media logic and the affordances of communication technologies such as social media platforms. Here I understand affordances to be the action possibilities (Gibson, 1979) that communication technologies allow for (liking or sharing an item on Facebook, for example). Recently, a new media logic has been identified by researchers, the social media logic (Van Dijck & Poell, 2013; Klinger & Svensson, 2014). Social media logic (Van Dijck & Poell, 2013) and network media logic (Klinger & Svensson, 2014) are models that frame the ways in which the mechanisms of the social media platform impact social interactions and information selection among its users. Through this framework based on Facebook and Twitter, I explore whether we can talk about a social media logic and what it means in a political communication context.
The interplay between actors and communication technology is central in my approach. This framework relies upon five high-level affordances, which are described as abstract communication outcomes of technology (Bucher & Helmond, 2016), and I argue these affordances are the building blocks of the social media logic in political communication: Publishing, visibility, networking, connectivity, and segmentation. By developing this innovative framework, I connect affordances and social media logic to political communication, a set of theoretical terms not frequently combined in this manner before, but as I will argue, this is a productive approach to study political communication in digital environments. The conceptual framework can be used to examine how the social media logic have practical implications for political communication among different actors.

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Table 3. Conceptual framework for political communication on social media. An affordance approach to outline Facebook and Twitter’s social media logic through Function, Purpose and Implication.

¹ https://analytics.twitter.com
Charlie Hebdo, 2015 - ‘Liveness’ and the Acceleration of Conflict in a Hybrid, Violent Media Event

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In this paper we wish to analyze Charlie Hebdo attacks in Paris in 2015 by looking at in particular the ways in which the idea of liveness shapes the social construction of the violent media event of hybrid nature. We revisit the existing theoretical literature on the theory of media events in the framework of time and liveness and interpret those ideas against our empirical work on Charlie Hebdo attacks.

Our analysis is based on a multi-method approach developed for the empirical study of hybrid media events. In this approach, computational social science—more specifically, a combination of automated content analysis (ACA) and computational social network analytics (SNA) is used in concert with a qualitative approach—specifically, digital ethnography. A combination of the qualitative approach and digital ethnography is applied to provide a more nuanced, in-depth interpretation of what (substance/content) is circulating and when, and how this material connects with the ‘where’ in the digital landscape, hence constituting time-related effects in the hybrid media event.

Our primary Twitter data consists of some five million tweets on the hashtags and search terms #jesuischarlie, #jenesuispascharlie and #jesuisahmed in English, French and Arabic. This data is complemented with other media materials such as online news by international media houses, including the BBC, CNN and the New York Times.

In conclusion, we argue that the type of liveness performed in the Charlie Hebdo attacks gives preference to instant, emotional reactions of interpretation and related identifications. These interpretations are inclined to depend on the interpretative frameworks of the past that have become ritualized in previous media events of terrorist violence. The intensified and multiplied temporalities, activated in the ‘live’ communication of hybrid media events, accelerates those underlying conflicts between the different parties involved in the media event, in particular, those who ‘were’ and those who ‘were not’ Charlie.
Friday, 18 August

09.00-10.00

Heikki Heikkilä (University of Tampere)

*Privacy under ‘Surveillance Capitalism’*

Sara Leckner (Malmö University), Ester Appelgren (Södertörns högskola)

*Skeptics of online privacy and supporters of companies using behavioral data: a study of changing attitudes towards sharing behavioral data in the Swedish population*

Discussant: Heikki Heikkilä

Karin Fast (Karlstad University), Linda Ryan Bengtsson (Karlstad University), Raul Ferrer Conill (Karlstad University)

*Geographies of free labor: mobilizing consumers access immersive transmediascapes*
Privacy under ‘Surveillance Capitalism’

Heikki Heikkilä, University of Tampere

The rapid and remarkable developments in digital platforms and services have been spurred by promises of openness and connection, marking better access, horizontal dialogue and flattened hierarchies. The project for digitally-enhanced life is neither on halt nor completed, as we can witness in the dynamic innovations in and experiments with Big Data and Internet of Things.

At least since Edward Snowden’s revelations on the intelligence community’s capacity to sweepingly monitor all mobile phone and internet communications, however, we have become aware of the other side of the coin. Beneath or beside the open infrastructure, there exists another infrastructure designed for mass surveillance of users. There seems to be, as Nick Couldry argues, a price we need to for our participation in the digitally-enhanced life. For Couldry, the problems is not connection itself, but “what comes with connection: “the infrastructure of surveillance that comprises the Faustian bargain we need to evaluate”. It has now become apparent that this infrastructure of surveillance is operated not merely by intelligence agencies but also by internet service providers, media organizations and advertisers. This observation compels us to agree with Shoshanna Zuboff in that surveillance is not separated from economy but rather that it has arguably become a modus operandi for the market. Thus, for making an updated analysis of Capitalism, we should start talking about Surveillance Capitalism.

Given the powerful institutional interests in privacy, it is not surprising that there is a growing political and popular concern over social implications, such as the legitimacy of politics and businesses, and individual freedoms. Unfortunately, it seems that media and communication scholars are not too well prepared for addressing such questions. To some degree, this problem results from the fact that the study on the concept of privacy has mainly taken place at distance from media studies, most notably within legal theory, ontological philosophy and surveillance studies. While all these research fields are important in their own right, they surely leave room for complementing or alternative approaches from the perspective of media and cultural studies. This paper aims to elaborate on the analytical framework of privacy that focuses on what people do in – and with – their privacy. In this context, four set of practices call for closer investigation: Those related to (1) maintaining dignity, (2) pursuit of retreat, (3) keeping anonymity and (4) engaging in secret communications.

This framework will be applied in two ways. It helps to locate the historical and conceptual roots of each set of practice and contextual shifts of their meanings. In other words, we should take into account that people’s possibilities to, for instance pursue for quietness and tranquility (retreat) depend on their material
conditions of living. Secondly, the analytical framework enables us to look into how distinct practices of privacy may be shaped by contemporary technological, economic and political developments. In this context, we may ask, for instance, what are the implications of algorithmic analysis of media users to how media producers understand their (anonymous) audiences. Or, does the awareness of mass surveillance undermine possibilities for political dissidence and freedom of speech?

This paper aims to contribute to our theoretical and analytical understanding of privacy in the digital era. At the same time, it tries to draw empirical insights of ongoing media and policy debates on security and technology. The paper lends support from the author’s recent publications and teaching on ‘the structural transformation of privacy’ and comparative analysis of the media coverage of Edward Snowden.
Sceptics of online privacy and supporters of companies using behavioral data: a study of changing attitudes towards sharing behavioral data in the Swedish population

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Ester Appelgren, Södertörns högskola, ester.appelgren@sh.se

Personal integrity in digital environments is an area that recently has gained new-found interest. The new GDPR regulation (General Data Protection Regulation) from the European Commission that will be applied in 2018 puts pressure on companies, authorities and organizations to be more transparent in terms of how they collect, process and use behavioral data. In Sweden, large media companies such as Schibsted and Bonnier are simultaneously threatening to abandon current transparent industry initiatives like the Swedish KIA Index, which aggregates audience data from members. Such a move would contribute to a less transparent environment for audience data. Furthermore, in recent years, the issue of sharing personal data has mainly been discussed in the public debate in terms of monitoring and misuse, rather than in terms of advantages and benefits (e.g., Bergström, 2015; Findahl, 2014; Martin et al., 2015). These types of events can affect peoples’ attitudes toward corporate data collection, and especially the attitudes of people who are not very tech-savvy.

We have measured the attitudes of people in Sweden toward the sharing of behavioral data in digital environments over two consecutive years, using survey data collected in 2015 and 2016 through the Swedish national SOM survey (Society, Opinion, Media). A mixed data collection method was used (email and online) to gather a representative sample of the Swedish population between the ages of 16-85. We asked individuals about their willingness to share behavioral data in different digital contexts and the measures that they take to protect their digital privacy. Methodologically, it is a challenge to ask people about their awareness in a survey, since respondents might answer questions about awareness without having sufficient knowledge about the phenomenon at hand.

Our results from the 2015 data set show that Swedish residents are negative about sharing data with corporations, but they do so quite extensively anyway. We suggest that there is a gap in the knowledge of the population between when and where data are shared and collected. As changes that reshape our understanding of digital privacy are introduced (Regan et al., 2013; Waldo et al., 2007), the question that arises is whether increased awareness will lead to a more positive attitude about sharing data or the opposite.
The results of previous research on attitudes toward companies that collect audience data is ambiguous. Researchers have suggested several different variables to explain attitudes and concerns, but since the results across the studies have been inconsistent there is a need to continue to monitor these attitudes over time. In this study, we will present the results in terms of the change in attitudes. Amended legislation, the public debate and coverage of digital integrity in the media, as well as increased and/or changing use of media technology during the two years in question, will also be discussed in relation to the attitudes found. Because the survey data set from 2016 is not yet ready for analysis, we cannot provide preliminary results. However, we intend to do factorial ANOVA, analyze correlations and conduct multiple regression analysis to explain in this paper user attitudes toward sharing data.

References


When Swedish artist Tove Styrke released her album Kiddo on Spotify in 2015, she simultaneously released an 8-bit game for her fans to play on kiddogame.com. By sharing high scores, users could win merchandise especially put together by the artist. The game was also promoted by one of the most well-known Swedish gaming streamers, posting his own Kiddo Game competition to his followers. A week after the release, Tove performed at Dreamhack, which also shared the game on their website and on Twitter. Later that summer, a live version of the game was staged at a major Swedish music festival, where Tove also performed. The game was easily shared via Facebook and twitter, and while playing the game the album played via Spotify.

Worldwide, the music industry struggles to come to terms with how to make profit in times of illegal downloading, streaming, and Spotifyication. One apparent strategy is to rely on consumer engagement. The Tove Styrke campaign could be read as a contemporary example of so called transmedia marketing; that is, as a “holistic content creation approach” (Zeiser, 2015: xv) that simultaneously involves multiple content platforms. The attraction of transmedia marketing lies in its potential to foster engaged consumers who are ready to “haunt” a brand experience across several content platforms. In this paper, we join with the burgeoning critical scholarship that interprets consumer “engagement” as a form of labor. Since much of this labor gets paid in affect rather than money, such labor has rightfully been recognized as a form of free labor.

While both transmedia marketing and free labor has been subjected to many studies over the last decade, there is a lack of research initiatives that explicitly address the spatiality of both of these phenomena (though see e.g. Stork’s [2014] engagement with the “transmedia geography” of the Glee franchise). What is more; if it is rare to talk about the geographies of transmediality in the first place, it is equally rare to talk about transmediality, at all, in relation to music. Perhaps not so surprisingly but all the more inaccurately, there seems to be a prevailing perception that transmedia productions are exclusive to, at least traditionally, more narrative-bound franchises such as television, film, game, or comic books. However, storytelling is becoming all the more important also to music brands. Consequently, we identify a need for studies that acknowledge that 1) the notion of transmediality is applicable also to music, and 2) that the spatiality of transmedia endeavors is worthy scholarly review. Our conviction is that just as work-places constitute
obvious research objects in relation to other kinds of labor, so do the transmedia “social factories” warrant scholarly attention.

As to compensate for the identified research lack then, this paper investigates several actual cases of transmedia marketing in the music industry – and the free labor that such marketing potentially engenders – by way of qualitative content analyses that employ a cross-disciplinary conceptual framework. The framework combines theoretical perspectives from the ‘spatial turn’ and the ‘labor turn’ in media studies and allows us to approach, and visually present, transmedia marketing as a landscape – what we call a transmediascape. Such transmediascapes, our results indicate, can be read as the perfect soil for free labor since they mobilize consumers in more than one respect: they assemble consumer affect and, at the same time, encourage physical as well as virtual fan movement. Thus, due to its multifaceted connotation, pointing towards both affectivity and mobility, we find that the term ‘mobilization’ serves as a fruitful link between spatial theory and labor theory and a key concept for analyzing the geographies of free labor.
Friday, 18 August

14.15-15.15

Göran Bolin (Södertörns högskola)
The metric mindset: a quantified relation to the social?

Nanna Bonde Thylstrup (University of Copenhagen), Stine Lomborg (University of Copenhagen)
Self-tracking as flow
The metric mindset: A quantified relation to the social?

Göran Bolin, Södertörns högskola

Following digitization, increasingly more spheres in society has become permeated with metrics. To a certain extent, metrics has always existed as measures of knowledge (school grades), estimates of economic wealth, calculations of calories, collecting stamps for discounts, etc., but it could be argued that digitization affects the ways in which metrics enter into our lifeworlds in both private and public spheres.

When it comes to people’s immediate lifeworlds, social life has thus become more manifestly measurable through social networking media, constantly reminding us on our status when it comes to amounts of followers, friends, contacts, and constantly prompting us to respond to metric triggers while we are navigating the interactive web (for examples, through apps that record our health status, our recent performance in physical exercise, etc.). And within universities, academic success is increasingly becoming measured through amounts of citations, publications, external research funding, production of exams, etc.

Following from these processes, and especially related to the media, it has been suggested that we might be facing a shift in the attitudes or mindsets of media users (which we all are to a greater or lesser extent), where the algorithmic principles of data capturing on the internet and the metrics associated with social networking sites would produce what might be called “big data mindset” (van Dijck 2014), or a ‘metricated mindset’ (Bolin & Andersson Schwarz 2015), focussing on the responses to the privileged quantitative ‘triggers’ on the interactive web. A metricated mindset would suggest an increased inclination to quantify human relations, knowledge, friendships, that is, social life as such, and such arguments have been developed theoretically by myself (Bolin & Andersson Schwarz 2015) as well as others (Grosser 2014, van Dijck 2013), but have not yet been systematically tested empirically. The transformative nature of such changes would presumably produce a gradual and long-term change in people’s disposition to act in relation to others and to the surrounding world, revealing itself in attitudes and ways of evaluating certain social actions.

The problem for research is how to empirically grasp such possible long-term changes, and capture processes of what could possibly be called processes of “deep datafication” of our lifeworlds. The task of this paper is to discuss the possibilities and challenges of such a project, and to develop a theoretical framework for analysing metrics in various social settings. Such a framework needs to be equipped to deal with, on the one hand, long-term mediatisation and datafication processes, and, on the other, with questions related to spatial categories concerning the possible “depth”, “penetration”, “reach”, of these processes into the landscapes of the social.


Göran Bolin is Professor in Media & Communication Studies at Södertörn University, Stockholm, Sweden. His research spans both media production analysis and audience studies, and his latest work is focused on how media production and consumption are interrelated in the wake of digitization. He is the author of Value and the Media. Production and Consumption in Digital Markets (Ashgate, 2011), and Media Generations: Experience, Identity and Mediatised Social Change (Routledge, 2016).
Self-tracking as flow

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Stine Lomborg, University of Copenhagen, slomborg@hum.ku.dk

This paper conceptualizes contemporary self-tracking cultures in terms of ‘flow’. Not only do data flow from self-trackers to systems and back, users flow, too, using self-tracking techniques to sift through everyday life and extract habitual and meaningful practices. In fact the very experience of self-tracking may be conceptualized as flow, a central technique, utilized by digital media companies to “hook” their users (Dow Schüll, 2012). Yet, while flow is experienced everywhere, the notion is rarely mobilized as a central conceptual framework for understanding contemporary media culture. We develop our framework of self-tracking as flow to explore the ‘self-tracking experience’ by bringing into dialogue two classic frameworks of flow from media and psychology studies; Raymond Williams’ writings on television as programmed flow (1974) and psychologist Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi’s notion of flow as pleasurable, immersive experience (1990).

For Williams, writing on television, flow denotes the organization of different content elements in a single sequence. At the level of flow, television is a montage of segments organized strategically to retain audiences in a specific channel. By sticking audiences to the channel, flow becomes the system logic undergirding television as a medium. While William’s concept was developed in a media reality, where the emblematic victim of flow was a “couch potato”, the concept flow in television studies was later developed to account for audience agency and choice when stepping into and out of the (television) flow (Jensen, 1995).

In a different context, Csikszentmihalyi developed the term flow to describe the subjective phenomenology of intrinsically motivated activity. Theoretically unfolded in the framework of positive psychology, flow here describes the pleasurable experience that occurs when a user is absorbed in just-manageable challenges, tackling a series of goals and continuously processing feedback and adjusting action. Departing from Williams in emphasizing the user agency and positive experience of flow, Csikszentmihalyi’s works have nevertheless recently served as inspiration for app-developers, whose ambition resemble the strategic attempts described by Williams to retain users on their platform in an increasingly distracting media environment (Bucher and Fieseler, 2016).

Csikszentmihalyi’s concept thus in many ways share – underexplored – traits with Williams’s concept. Both suggest that flow is not only a matter of technique and pleasurable experience, but also raise questions of
power, self-surrender, and even addiction. Bringing them together, we propose, offers a theoretical framework that can help us study user engagement in cross-media environments, in particular the temporal regimes, logics of attention and agency that undergird self-tracking technologies.

The intricate relations between pleasure and self-surrender in self-tracking are explored through examples from ongoing empirical work on the uses and experiences of self-tracking based on the In Flow Mood Diary and Endomondo Fitness Tracker apps. We demonstrate that the logic of flow, interlacing segments to hook the user, is present in the self-tracking applications’ offerings of means to accumulate and aggregate segments and use these to visualize the user’s progress. Users find meaning in this datafied self, always ‘in process’ of improvement, but also problematize their attachment to specific tracking regimes and applications.

References


Friday 18, August

15.45-17.15

Kirsten Frandsen (Aarhus University)
Fitness apps in networked societies - institutional change from individual use

Ane Kathrine Gammelby (Aarhus University)
Mapping the situational cross-media landscape of health-related peer-discussion online

Amanda Karlsson (Aarhus University)
Tracking menstrual cycles digitally - exploring the datafied female body

Kjetil Vaage Øie (Volda University College), Ivar John Erdal (Volda University College)
How locative are locative media? Towards a typology of locativeness in mobile media
Fitness apps in networked societies – institutional change from individual use.

Kirsten Frandsen, Aarhus University

As digital and mobile media and communication technologies increasingly saturate almost every aspect of everyday life in Northern Europe, they have also come to intervene with the institution of sport in a variety of new ways. The overall question that will be addressed in this paper is: How do we conceive of digital media as agents of social and cultural change in the institution of sport?

The focal point in the paper will be leisure-time sports and the widespread use of social media and fitness apps like Endomondo, Strava, Garmin Connect and Runkeeper where GPS based tracking and digital logging and archiving is integrated with social networked media. These digital media facilitate both new forms of organisation and social interaction in sport. And they are communicative phenomenons, that in different ways make training and exercise practices meaningful among self-organized athletes (Lomborg & Frandsen 2015).

The general theoretical framework for the paper is an institutional approach to mediatization (Hjarvard 2013, 2016). The idea is to discuss how the mentioned media’s capacity as networked digital media bring in changes in the institution of sport from the bottom up. Drawing on empirical material from a qualitative study of the uses of fitness apps among Danes, it will first be illustrated how mediatization of sport is a process, where mediated communication in very tangible ways becomes embedded in and affects the practices of the exercising individuals. The social and cultural activity of sport is performed through interaction with a medium, which brings various forms of meaning to the activity. Next, the paper will critically discuss these individual communicative practices in the light of the concept of connectivity as a social media logic (Van Dijk & Poell 2013) and Hjarvard’s conceptualization of mediatization as a stimulating force for the development of a ‘soft individualism’ (Hjarvard 2009). In Hjarvards perspective the individual in late modernity has become more disposed to monitor the surroundings through peer groups and media in order to get normative orientation, enter into social relations and get recognition. And the connective logic that is inherent in social media supports this. Following these perspectives fitness apps are not necessarily to be seen as instruments for deeper individualization within sport. They enable sociability online and offline – often in concert with other social media – and are thus in good keeping with basic mechanisms in the core of the institution of sport, as they provide an arena for getting social recognition (Caillois 1958/2001, Frandsen 2013).
Fitness apps and social media accentuate a structural change towards more self-organized practices that for a long time has been in progress in the institution of sport in a North European context. Therefore the paper will end up by discussing the role of digital media in relation to institutional changes within sport. Here Borgers et al.’s (2016) conceptualization of leisure-time sports participation as reflecting both processes of deinstitutionalization and reinstitutionalization, will be connected with a specific understanding of mediatization as a matter of inter-institutional change (Hjarvard 2014). One of the effects of mediatization seem to be not only a breakdown of established distinctions and the creation of more porous boundaries around established societal institutions (Hoover 2009). Fitness apps and related social network media support practices and exercise by recreational athletes with a wide range of goals and values. They also enable more fluid forms of organizational frameworks around training practices and competitive events. In that sense these media are pivotal engines for challenging hegemonic structures and for bringing in greater diversity in the institution of sport.
Mapping the situational cross-media landscape of health-related peer-discussion online

Ane Kathrine Gammelby, Aarhus University, ak@cc.au.dk

For lay people who struggle with health-related issues, consulting the internet on these issues has become a particularly common practice that is increasingly and more and more seamlessly integrated into the more general practice of mending one’s health. Many of these lay people employ digitally mediated peer communities such as Facebook-groups to retrieve as well as discuss information relating to their mutual health-issues of concern, sometimes supplementary, sometimes alternatively to consulting a medical doctor.

In the past couple of years Danish national news media have regularly featured stories, fierce discussion and severe institutional concern regarding citizens who defy medical institutions’ recommendations on a range of health-related matters. Among the cases that have recently made it to the headlines are the growing number of people who decide to opt out of the national HPV-vaccine programme, people who autonomously decide to stick to special diets (gluten free diets, low-carb diets, fasting, etc.), people who get their ears pierced in a certain way in order to combat migraines, and people who do autonomously decide to treat their illnesses with cannabis or consult foreign medical clinics in order to undergo diagnostic procedures and receive treatments that are not provided or acknowledged within the Danish national healthcare system.

These cases display civic decision-making and sense-making practices that significantly clash with and challenge the hegemony of medical authority and authoritative (knowledge) institutions. My research shows that common for these cases (and for several other cases that have been featured less prominently in the news media) is that they share a strong digital backbone, where social media platforms such as Facebook-groups, Instagram-profiles, and personal blogs allow lay people to compile and crowdsourcer personal health experiences and to discuss various forms of health information, retrieved autonomously, very often online, as well as from authorized healthcare institutions. In this way digital media technologies do widely exhibit and render transparent, which services are offered by the healthcare system and elsewhere, and where the healthcare system happens to fall short or cause problems according to lay people experiences. Such digital display of lay knowledge invites lay people to take a more critical stance towards medical authorities.

In this paper, I present a situational mapping of the central features of the digital cross-media landscape of health-related information and peer-discussion as it appears from a Danish point of view. This work is based
on ethnographic fieldwork conducted over the past five years in various health-related online environments and in face-to-face settings with lay people who struggle with long-term health-issues.

The mapping is intended to provide a tentative overview of the health-related digital media platforms that appear to be central in a Danish language context and to characterize the complex interplays between these platforms as well as identify their respective communicative affordances. Furthermore, the mapping renders visible key situational affordances of health-related digital media; e.g. patterns in the perceived outcomes and motivations for using (or deciding not to use) certain digital media platforms in relation to one’s health-issues. Such patterns are closely related to the everyday requirements and uncertainties prompted by certain health-related challenges or stages of coping, but it also relates significantly to the – from a patient’s perspective – (in)adequacy with which the healthcare system responds to specific cases of illness.

Thus, by empirically mapping the situational cross-media landscape of health-discussions in a Danish context, this paper presents an analysis of how digital media in relation to health are both extensively cross-media and analytically inseparable from other everyday practices, which provides a methodological argument for studying such practices in their situational, onlife complexities.
Tracking menstrual cycles digitally – exploring the datafied female body

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Background

The increasing smartphone use has given rise to a huge number of apps to track and monitor various health aspects. Self-surveillance is part of our everyday lives and today it is common to track one’s menstrual cycle, how fast we run and how much we eat. We can upload our data on social media platforms to compete and compare or meet up with other self-trackers to share what we did, how we did it and what we’ve learned.

Today there are more than 200 QSM-groups within the quantified-self movement across the globe. Special groups for women are arranged to create a “private” space for them to showcase their QS projects and discuss sensitive data (e.g. period, fertility). The discourse of trusting data over embodied knowledge is evident (Lupton 2013) While these new apps offer freedom, certainty and control with their systems of notifications of future menstruation dates and calories burned, they could also present advanced digital forms of gendered body management and even self-discipline (Foucault 1991) of the female body (Young 1980; Grosz 1994). However, little research has empirically examined self-tracking practices from a user- and gender perspective and looked at gender specific usage of gender specific apps such as female cycle trackers. We have poor knowledge on how these technologies are embedded in and affects the everyday lives of women – and since the QSM originated in a US male environment not much focus has been placed on either Europeans nor on females.

Aim

Drawing on digital sociology (Lupton 2013, 2014, 2015, 2016), feminist STS (Wajcman 1991) and feminist philosophy (Grosz 1994, Dolezal 2015) this study is particularly interested in how self-tracking practices are embedded in women’s everyday lives and the aim is to explore the dynamics between the fleshly body and the datafied body – how are the two connected via the tracking app? Do these technologies raise or inhibit bodily intuition – or anxiety? Do matters of privacy differ from the fleshly body to the datafied body? There seems to be a lot of opinions but few empirically grounded studies to rely on. Based on individual interviews with Danish women tracking their menstrual cycles, for various reasons, this presentation examines communicative and bodily patterns in female self-tracking, and in the possible sharing of more or less sensitive data (Yin 2004). These patterns are used to discuss how self-tracking affects the embodied experience of the women, and the relationship between the datafied body and privacy (Nissenbaum 2010).
How locative are locative media? Towards a typology of locativeness in mobile media.

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Keywords: Mobile technologies, digital journalism, locative media, theory building

Abstract:

One of the key new affordances of mobile devices is the possibility for gathering and representing information about the user’s location. Mobility and location-awareness are underlying characteristics of today’s wireless communication systems, and the term “locative media” has gained fairly wide-spread use in mobile media research (e.g., Goggin et al. 2015, Wilken 2012).

The literature on locative media covers a wide variety of approaches/uses of mobile devices, from map services like Google Maps to social applications like Instagram that lets users tag photos with location information (Farman 2014; Frith 2015; Goggin and Wilken 2012; Sutko and de Souza e Silva 2011; de Souza e Silva and Sheller 2015). A common ground is that location data plays an increasingly important part in the development of different kinds of digital information. However, the definition of the term is still somewhat difficult to pin down (Oppegaard 2015, Wilken and Goggin 2015). The current use or collective understanding of the term locative media conceals as much as it illuminates. Therefore, it could potentially neglect relevant aspects and affordances within the design and production of locative media; its form, creativity and aesthetics and other aspects such as educational or political impact.

This paper aims to create an overview of the variety of locative mobile content in a media environment characterised by falling print revenues and a viable business model for online news still waiting to emerge, just as technology intermediaries such as Google, Facebook and Apple are maneuvering to become “makers of ‘everything’ in our digital lives” (Pavlik and Bridges 2013, p. 16). After reviewing and synthesizing research on mobile technology as related to new media art, games, interpersonal communication, social media, geography, urban space, and journalism, the paper outlines a typology for describing and categorising the different expressions of mobility and location found in the current media landscape.
References


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Saturday, 19 August
9.00-10.00

Jiyoung Kim (Aarhus University), Anja Bechmann (Aarhus University)

*Gender social capital inequality on Facebook groups. A cross-country comparative study between Denmark and South Korea*

Anders Kristian Munk (Aalborg University)

*On the notions of the quali-quantitative in digital sociology*

Kristian Møller (Roskilde University)

*Assembling media, medicine, and men: Approaching gay sex culture as an ecosystem*
Gender Social Capital Inequality on Facebook Groups - A cross-country comparative study between Denmark and South Korea

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Do men and women have the same amount of friends online? If there is a difference in the amount of friends, why and how does glass ceiling on social network affect our social life? To answer this question this study applied Dunbar’s number and social capital as theoretical frame. Dunbar’s number explains that people can maintain a limited amount of stable social relationships (Dunbar, 1992; 2012). Dunbar’s number, 150, is defined after the human brain capacity. We considered the number of friends and the number of memberships of groups on Facebook as social capital that can be used practically to produce or reproduce inequality (Bourdieu, 1986). Korea and Denmark were chosen since both countries have a high Internet and Facebook penetration, but differ in gender equality (GDI, GEM, GII Index).

The research questions are 1) how the gender’s network size (number of friends) are different on Facebook between two countries? 2) How the gender’s Facebook group usage is different on Facebook in two countries? 3) Is there any relation between personal network size and the usage of three different types of Facebook groups?

To conduct this research, we collected data using the Digital Footprints software developed by Digital Footprints research group in Aarhus University. The Digital Footprints is the data extraction software that allows researchers to extract data from Facebook, public streams, as well as private data with user consent. A quota sampling approach was used in order to mirror the demographics of the Facebook population. A total of 1,121 Korean and 1,000 Danes participants, and associated 12,781 groups were retrieved. The data was collected between January 1st, 2014 and April, 30th 2015. SPSS (v. 22.0 SPSS Inc, Chicago, IL, USA) was used for statistical analysis of all data. Mann-Whitney U test was conducted for the gender differences and Kruskal-wallis test, and one way ANNOVA test ran for the three different of groups (open, closed and secret). The Spearman correlation was used to correlate the network size with group usage and the data retrieved for the two countries.

The obtained results showed that there are statistically significant differences of the gender and between the two countries. In Korea, men had in average 1.5 times more friends than women, 416.9 friends compared to 272.8, respectively, whereas women has more friends that men, 260.9 friends compared to 197.0. It is relevant to mention that in both countries the number of Facebook friends was higher than the
Dunbar’s number. There was also a noticeable difference in the group membership gaps between genders from both countries. The Korean men were members of 7.1 groups in average while women were members of only 2 groups in average. In Denmark, the situation was the opposite, with women subscribing to more groups than men (20.6 for women and 13.3 for men). Denmark uses more groups than Korea. The order of group use in Denmark is closed (8.3), open (7.0) and secret (2.3), whereas in Korea is open (5.0), closed (2.3), and secret (1.3).

The observations of this study indicate that the cultural background might have an influence on the Facebook behavior, namely in between genders. The results of this study lights on the depth understanding of Dunbar’s number and group membership on Facebook. We can also understand the tree types of groups not only regarding their privacy settings, but also their “level of tie (Granovetter, 1973) as social groups; for instance, open group as weak ties, closed as medium ties, secret group as strong ties.” Lastly, the significance of this research is that the gap between the number of friends and the membership of groups has raised the social capital inequality.
On the notions of the quail-quantitative in digital sociology

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One of the widely cited promises of digital sociology is the potential to bridge the quail-quantitative divide (e.g., Later et al. 2011). This can be read in many ways. Is it the fact that digital traces are often both quantifiable (counting shares and likes, or developing network metrics for interaction) and qualitatively rich (comprising unstructured text, user tags, profile data, and the ability to situate within online communities)? Is it in the way we engage with code and numerical data in more ethnographic or exploratory ways? Is it in our newfound capacities to make datascapes available for exploration by our users and peers, and not just the analyst? Is it in the questions we ask about the media environments that constitute ‘the field’? Or a combination of both? Through a set of recent case studies I explore these questions and argue that they depend significantly on the cross-platform nature of digital sociological work.
Assembling media, medicine, and men: Approaching gay sex culture as an ecosystem

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Increasingly, media sociologists are approaching media’s role in social life as not only discreet and contained, but also as something to be studied across technologies, spaces and time in more flexible ways. Efforts of mobility is apparent in recent conceptual innovations such as ‘transmedia’ (Jenkins, 2010), ‘polymedia’ (Madianou & Miller, 2013) and ‘cross-media methodologies’ (Thorhauge, Sandvik & Andersen, 2016).

Not only has this mobility opened up new fields of study for the media scholar, it has led to the introduction of new ontologies. Recently, such uncertainties have lead Nick Couldry and Andreas Hepp to conclude that “...the term social needs some repair work...if the project of social theory is to be renewed”. (Couldry & Hepp, 2016: 2) Assemblage theory (Deleuze & Guattari, 1988) and Actor-Network-Theory (Latour, 2005) deliver powerful new lines of though. Rather radically, they do away with the media users and producers as the sole-proprietors of agency and action, and instead sees agency as distributed in networks of humans and non-humans.

With assemblage theory then, what phenomenon are media scholars able to construct? What analytical strategies and critical perspectives become available? This paper explores some possible answers to these questions by approaching a certain drug and media related sex practice among gay men as an ‘ecosystem’. (DeLanda, 2006)

Gay sex cultures should be understood as a historically thoroughly mediatized culture (Møller, forthcoming). Similarly, both drug use and group sex have at least since the gay liberation movement’s advent in the late 1960s been part of the fabric of gay culture in the west. The rise of ‘chemsex’ has been linked to the locative affordances and explicitly sexual visual culture of ubiquitous hook-up apps like Grindr. Chemsex can be defined as:

...using one or more of these three drugs [crystal meth, mephedrone and GHB], in any combination, to facilitate or enhance sex [...] The heightened sexual focus enables more extreme sex, for longer, often with more partners... (Stuart, 2015)

Thus hook-up apps and drugs are indispensable for understanding chemsex. Here we may lean on DeLanda’s conception of assemblage as occurring between heterogeneous parts, in accordance with the specific
ecosystem in which they take part. Analytically he offers that we approach ecosystems as 1) material and expressive, 2) subject to both territorializing and deterritorializing movements, and 3) influenced by linguistic pressures through discourse. (DeLanda, 2006: 10-15)

Chemsex then, is materially and expressively constituted by a wealth of things: gay men’s sexual habits, drugs and medicines and their delivery systems, hook-up app affordances, cities and their gay scenes, and the private apartments in which chemsex occurs.

Hook-up apps serve territorialize as they are used on-site to get more people attending. Their affordances draw together bodies and drugs ready to be assembled into a chemsex practice. Reversely, deterritorializing may happen when overdosing occurs, due to either “bad” drugs or drug taking skills.

Finally, I show that chemsex is affected by at least three linguistic pressures, in the form of moral panics: First, media use in intimate situations is subject to discourse that posits intimacy to be incompatible with, or polluted by, media. Second, intoxication other than alcohol is widely marked as always dangerous, and nothing but harmful to the intoxicated and their surroundings. Third, gay, non-monogamous sex is often placed outside what is considered “natural”, meaningful and responsible sexuality. These pressures arise both in popular media discourse, in gay media outlet, as well as in hook-up app profile texts and images.

References


Saturday, 19 August

14.30-16.15

Jacob Ørmen (University of Copenhagen)

*Explicating engagement: a clarification of a contested concept*

Nils Gustafsson (Lund University)

*Online lurking and offline action: young people, social media, and (non-)participation*
Explicating Engagement: a Clarification of a Contested Concept

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If we wish to understand how people navigate in the current cross media landscape, then we need a concept that can grasp both the “sense-making” operations and participatory practices (Schrøder, 2011, p. 6) they can take part in as audiences, users, and producers. In this paper, I argue that engagement can achieve such a purpose. On the most basic level, engagement alludes to “a combination of attention and energy (or activity)” (Berger, 2011, p. 3), which makes it a suitable candidate to capture different media use practices.

However, the concept is “stretched” thin (Sartori, 1970) across research disciplines, often with vague connotations and little conceptual ground in common.

Therefore, there is a need to critically explicate engagement as a concept to make it analytically useful for media and communication research. Chaffee (1991) originally advised communications scholars to carefully explicate the important concepts in the field. By explication, he meant: clarifying the origin and different uses of the concept, compare and contrast definitions, evaluate and modify these definitions, and propose new conceptual and operational definitions for further research (Chaffee, 1991). As have been done with other central concepts in communication research (see e.g. Evans, Pearce, Vitak, & Treem, 2017; Kiousis, 2002; Marchionni, 2013), the turn has now come to explicate engagement.

Currently, scholars from various backgrounds put the concept to use for very different purposes. In political science and sociology, there is a long-standing tradition for studying engagement as the ways citizens relate to the political world (political engagement) or participate in civil society (civic engagement). In media research, engagement has traditionally been used in reception studies to understand how people immerse themselves with characters on the screen or stage (affective engagement), and later in audience research as a process whereby people connect with the public world through media (cognitive engagement). With the rise of Web 2.0, research has increasingly turned to how users interact with media services and each other through media, notably on social network sites, as well as produce original content (user engagement). In recent years, engagement has emerged as a regular buzzword in marketing and industry research covering ways consumer activity can be measured and turned into value for media organizations (audience engagement) as well as advertisers (costumer engagement).

To make sense of this contested concept, I propose a model of engagement that integrates key definitions from various perspectives. In this view, engagement is understood as three separate but interrelated modes: attention (to media), circulation (of media), and awareness (through media). These modes capture equally important, yet conceptually distinct, aspects of the way we act as audiences, users, and producers in daily
life. In the end of the paper, I explore the relationships between the different modes and discuss implications of this conceptualization for communication research in general and digital media sociology specifically.

References


Online lurking and offline action: young people, social media, and (non-)participation.

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Research has described political participation as becoming ever more individualised (eg Bennett & Segerberg, 2013). This has been argued to be connected to the general individualisation of society, but also to affordances made possible by new media. One line of research explains political participation combining selective benefits (Olson, 1965), psychological factors (Klandermans & van Stekelburg, 2013) and social incentives (Cialdini, 2009). However, it is not clear how social media and its effects on information, discussion, and peer pressure influences the socialisation of young people and decisions to participate on a micro level.

This paper uses focus group interviews to uncover mechanisms underpinning (non-)participation in relation to social media use and social incentives. It is based on eight focus group interviews with 59 Swedish participants aged 16-25. The design includes four focus groups comprised by high school students; two groups with university students, one group with students in a post-secondary non-university education programme, and one group with people enrolled in a labour market initiative. The choice of method allows for young people to discuss things with peers in a safe setting, teasing out issues that would perhaps not come out in a one-on-one meeting with an adult researcher, or in a survey with pre-formulated questions. In contrast to digital methods, it also allows for the collection of information on cross-platform behaviour and lurking, as well as information on offline conversations. The focus group discussions evolve around the political content in social media, news, peer pressure, and (non-)participation. One focal point is news, discussions and (non-)participation in relation to the 2015 European refugee crisis, which saw a high level of mobilisation as well as news coverage and public discussion among the Swedish population.

The interviews are transcribed and analysed using micro-interlocutor analysis (Onwuegbuzie et al, 2009), thereby placing a higher focus on the dynamic aspects of the focus group interview than is usually done.

A preliminary analysis of the material reveals a complex situation regarding the interaction between social media use, peer pressure, offline discussions and participation. Participants have in general a negative view of young people as uninformed, volatile, and highly impressable. Political discussions in social media are generally avoided as they are deemed to be pointless and overly aggressive (cf. Gustafsson, 2012). Instead, political discussions are preferably held offline with close peers. News are to a very high degree consumed through social media (in complex interaction with the discussions framing topics and stories), and there is a
large insecurity concerning what is fake news and what is proper journalism and trustable facts. Active participation is heavily connected to personal influences by close friends.

References


