



Media and Communications
PhD Symposium

Struggle and Resistance in Media and Communications: Structure versus Agency?

Friday 19 June 2015, 09:00–18:00

Wolfson Theatre, New Academic Building (NAB.LG.01) at LSE

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Department of Media and Communications

Welcome to the 7th LSE Media & Communications PhD Symposium

A very warm welcome from me, as Head of LSE's Department of Media and Communications, to our annual doctoral symposium. We place great importance on supporting networking opportunities for our and other doctoral researchers in our growing field. Alongside this symposium, we participate in the Westminster-run London symposium and also an annual symposium run collaboratively with Goldsmiths, Södertörn University in Stockholm and University of Bremen. Such opportunities to share ideas and problems, and to position one's own research against that of smart colleagues from other institutions, are absolutely vital to one's growth as a researcher!

Our particular theme this year is *Struggle and Resistance in Media and Communications: Structure Versus Agency?* This title is much more than a formal nod to the agendas of historic social theory. Media interfaces simply are one of the key sites of struggle in contemporary societies, as writers from Alberto Melucci onwards have foregrounded. As major concentrations of symbolic resources, media institutions help shape how the realities of society get defined, and by whom. Exclusion from media resources is much more than an incidental detail of particular lives; it helps shape how deep inequalities are worked through and reproduced. And while, on the face of it, we live in times of expanding opportunities for symbolic action, new, and subtly hidden, forms of exclusion are emerging too.

So this year's symposium has an exciting potential agenda to which you will all be contributing, and I hope you enjoy taking part. My apologies that, due to a clash with another conference sponsored by the Department, I cannot this year participate myself, but I know that Dr. Myria Georgiou, Deputy Head of Department, is looking forward to opening proceedings today.

Please do enjoy and, I hope, take away some inspiration today!



June 2015

Nick Couldry

Professor of Media, Communications and Social Theory
Head of the Department of Media and Communications
London School of Economics and Political Science

Schedule

- 09:00 Registration
- 09:30 Opening remarks Dr. Myria Georgiou
- 09:45 Keynote speech Dr. Bart Cammaerts
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- 10:30 **Panel 1: Representing Resistance**
Chair: Paula Kiel, Respondent: Dr. Myria Georgiou
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- 10:30 Hannah Barton – “Memes of Protest”
- 10:40 Eva Cheuk-Yin Li – “Festivalisation of Protest: A Study of Protest Art of Social Movements in Post-Colonial Hong Kong”
- 10:50 İmge Yıldırım – “Struggle and Resistance within Media through Media: An Extraordinary Case from Turkey”
- 11:00 Ayesha Omer – “Sit-ins with the Dead: Hazara Protests in Pakistan”
- 11:10 Response and Q&A
-
- 11:40 Coffee break
-
- 11:55 **Panel 2: Agency and Elites**
Chair: Angelos Kissas
-
- 11:55 Vladimir Cotal San Martin – “It’s Not You and Me! – Labour Media on the Web and the representation of Workers’ Working Conditions”
- 12:05 Juan Ramos Martín – “Rhizomatic Structures of Alternative and Community Media: Influence on Bolivian Policy Making”
- 12:15 Brooks DeCillia – “Hegemony, Struggle & Resistance: The Contested Framing Dynamic of Canada’s Military Mission in Afghanistan”
- 12:25 Brieuc Lits – “Astroturfing: When Power Entities Create Their Own Resistance Movements”
- 12:35 Nicholas Benequista – “From Resistance to Recognition: Reconceptualizing Journalistic Autonomy After the Moral Turn”
- 12:45 Response and Q&A

- 13:15 Lunch break
- 14:15 **Panel 3: Conceptual and Structural Instabilities**
Chair: Nora Kroeger, Respondent: Dr. Wendy Willems
- 14:15 César Jiménez-Martínez – *“From the Streets to the Stadiums – Struggling for the Image of Brazil in a Time of Crisis”*
- 14:25 José Antonio Brambila – *“The Subnational Comparative Approach in Communication Studies”*
- 14:35 Ayman Alrehaili – *“Media (re)organization in the Arab Spring Countries: How Social Media Redefined Journalism and the Wider Media in Egypt and Tunisia During the Arab Spring”*
- 14:45 Richard Fern – *“Are Environmental Correspondents Extinct?”*
- 14:55 Response and Q&A
- 15:25 Coffee break
- 15:40 **Panel 4: Agency – Virtual and Actual**
Chair: Anthony Kelly, Respondent: Dr. Alison Powell
- 15:40 Rupert Knox – *“Exploring Mexico's Recent Human Rights-Based Resistance Movements and the Role of Social Media”*
- 15:50 Güneş Tavmen – *“Open Data in the City: Smart Citizens and Agency”*
- 16:00 Arash Anghaei – *“Interactive Media, Female Participation and Democracy: Lessons from Iran's Green Movement”*
- 16:10 Jacob Johanssen – *“Affect, Data Ownership, and Agency”*
- 16:20 Response and Q&A
- 16:50 Overall Response to Panels Dr. Bart Cammaerts
- 17:00 Closing Discussion
- 17:30 Reception

All presentations and the reception take place in Wolfson Theatre (NAB.LG.01) in the New Academic Building at LSE.

Abstracts

Panel 1: Representing Resistance

Hannah Barton

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"Memes of Protest"

Internet memes are arguably the most recognisable form of online vernacular; a proliferation of expressive pictorial and / or textual compositions, frequently characterised by running jokes expressed via informality and intended errors. Limor Shifman's (2013) framing of memes as constituents of shared cultural experience' indicates that they afford multitudinous, nuanced, variable readings of the same sentiment, each tailored to suit the interiority of the readers sociological habitus

When manifest as folkloric, localized vernacular, memes pose significant challenges algorithmic interpretation – where overt jokes of a typical linguistic structure can be recognized and read, machine learning cannot meaningfully analyze covert, hermetic humours, such as irony.

This exciting quality should be considered in the context of struggle and resistance against dominant power dynamics and official discourse. I argue that memes can be taken seriously as tools of protest and participation by individuals, groups, and movements. Furthermore, the use of coded humour can be better understood via historical perspectives: for example, the thinking of the Situationists International, notably Guy Debord, who understood the power of humour in protest, mobilisation, expression; deploying détournements, culture-jamming, pranks, and carnivalesque in social critiques.

Memes, as recursive, humorous vernaculars, can be theorized in this context, and this paper will argue that this perspective is necessary; for when language as a whole can be viewed as commodifiable data, power is not so much tied up in data transfer, but in interpretation.

Eva Cheuk-Yin Li

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"Festivalisation of Protest: A Study of Protest Art of Social Movements in Post-Colonial Hong Kong"

This paper is an initial attempt to understand the strategy and tendency of festivalisation in social movements in post-colonial Hong Kong under the increasing threat of re-sinicisation. I draw from the concept 'festivalisation of culture' (Bennett, Taylor, and Woodward 2014), which illustrates the contemporary relations between festivals and the expression of cultural identities, lifestyle practices, or community building, to study the protest art in two major protests in 2014: the 'red guard parody' protest against mainland Chinese tourists and the massive civil disobedience for universal suffrage, the Umbrella Movement, aka Umbrella Revolution or Occupy Central with Love and Peace.

The construction and re-configuration of citizenship in Hong Kong has embarked on a unique path under the transition from soft authoritarian colonial rule to the uncertain political fate as a quasi-city state under Chinese sovereignty (Ku and Pun 2004). Parallel with the growth of civil society and (re)discovery of local identity since the 2000s, there has been a growing emphasis on 'non-violent and rational protest' and 'happy resistance' in social movements, which have been accentuated in the two examples offered. I posit that the festivalisation of protest enables the continuous articulation of Hong Kong identity, strengthens local community building, and empowers individual citizens. However, it simultaneously risks trivialising its agenda and losing its political momentum, given the internal schism and pessimistic political reality in Hong Kong.

İmge Yıldırım

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"Struggle and Resistance within Media through Media: An Extraordinary Case from Turkey"

Turkish daily newspaper Karşı Gazete (Counter Newspaper) was first published on 9th February 2014 and remained a hot spot of debate till its closure on 14th April 2014. Overtly anti-government, the newspaper was associated with the Gezi Park Uprising both due to its coverage and columnists including those who came to the forefront over the course of the civil unrest in 2013. Scrutinized through the lens of alternative media theories, Karşı Gazete can be considered as a 'mainstream' medium especially in terms of its organizational structure. However, it was also

distinguished from several other mainstream newspapers in terms of its coverage of the dissidents. In such a short period of time, the newspaper might not have left an indelible mark in journalism or media history in Turkey. Yet, the closure of the newspaper gave away to a very peculiar experience as the reporters claiming their reimbursements decided to occupy the headquarters of the newspaper and started to publish an online newspaper under the name Karşı Direniş (Counter Resistance). This paper analyzes Karşı Direniş both as a form of struggle and resistance within /against a media institution and as an alternative medium against mainstream media.

Ayesha Omer

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"Sit-ins with the Dead: Hazara Protests in Pakistan"

This paper studies the dead body as a mediated site of protest. It focuses on an embodied mobilization by Hazaras in January 2013 against ethno-sectarian violence in Pakistan. On 10th January 2013, more than one hundred Hazaras were killed in twin bomb blasts at a snooker hall on Alamdar Road in Quetta, Pakistan. Hazara women refused to bury them and sat in protest with the dead bodies on Alamdar Road. As social media stories of the sit-in went viral, thousands of Shias, Sunnis, Hindus and Christians, rich and poor, men and especially women, occupied and remediated major traffic junctions of Pakistan until the Government of Pakistan met the demands of the protestors on Alamdar Road.

Drawing upon participatory observation of protests in Karachi, and conversations with protestors in Quetta and London, this paper traces the confluence of historical and socio-political contexts that made protesting with the dead body possible, and accounted for its mediatic moment and appeal. It explores the visual sensibilities of an embodied mobilization that seeks to make visceral the traumatic abnormalities of the Hazara lived, civic experience. It then proceeds to analyze the memory of the dead body, as witnessed in the remediation of public space, and through mediatic storytelling practices, as an embodiment aimed at re-membering the dismembered dead to produce an alternative normalcy for the Hazaras.

Panel 2: Agency and Elites

Vladimir Cotal San Martin

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"It's Not You and Me! – Labour Media on the Web and the representation of Workers' Working Conditions"

Representations of workers' working conditions in developing countries are seldom covered in traditional mainstream (Swedish) print media. When it occasionally appears in the news, the subject matter tends to be deeply embedded in neoliberal discourses of causality and responsibility, highlighting individual agency rather than (capitalist) structural factors. Historically and internationally, the working class has developed its own communication tools, offering counter-narratives and engagement in terms of exposing the dynamics of capitalism, power and inequality. Conceptualised as "alternative media", labour media therefore have the potential to offer alternative perspectives. Without exaggerating its counter-hegemonic potentials, the Internet means new opportunities for labour media. It could work as a useful tool for global dissemination of information, which is available to anyone who has access to the Web. In this paper, by means of a discourse study approach, the aim is to analyse different labour webpages, such as Equal Times, that exemplify political engagement in workers' working conditions in developing countries. Particular attention is paid to digital labour media as a form of global journalism.

Juan Ramos Martín

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"Rhizomatic Structures of Alternative and Community Media: Influence on Bolivian Policy Making"

Alternative and community media networks have been, during decades, one of the most important actors in socio-political resistance and struggle processes in Bolivia, established as guarantors of the consolidation of real democratic communication and public service media. Immersed in a declining public international context, since 2000 in Latin America re-emerges the interest in community communication public policies and media regulation (e.g. Venezuela, Uruguay, Argentina, Ecuador, Bolivia) by the creation and promotion of citizen empowerment mechanisms, evolving and re-empowering the old and new community media networks as an important actor in the Bolivian political scene.

The aim of this paper is the construction of a critical reading of the processes

of convergence, dialogue and response by the State to the networking of the main community and alternative media movements in Bolivia and their claims (communication rights, intercultural diversity, socio-political inclusion,...) and their institution as policy networks within the legislative discussions, whether in the creation of a self community communication legislation or in the institutionalization of their actors as guarantors of their own support.

Brooks DeCillia

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"Hegemony, Struggle & Resistance: The Contested Framing Dynamic of Canada's Military Mission in Afghanistan"

Canada's government and military struggled to frame its military mission in Afghanistan in the news media. The journalists covering the war often resisted the political rhetoric and hegemonic positions sponsored by government and military officials. This research examines the mediated struggle and resistance surrounding framing Canada's military mission in Afghanistan between 2006 to 2011. Substantial scholarly analysis interrogates the news media's coverage of the U.S. "War on Terror" and that country's invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq. Yet, assessments of the Canadian news media's coverage of Canada's military mission in Afghanistan are decidedly less conspicuous. This research responds to that deficit with a comprehensive content analysis of new media (TV, radio and newspapers). Combining a classic content analysis with the conceptual frameworks of hegemony, indexing and framing, this research analyzes how military and government elites struggled to dominate the mediated framing of Canada's combat operations in the volatile southern region of Afghanistan. Specifically, this work assesses, critically, what role journalists played in resisting the preferred frames of Canada's military and government elites. Despite considerable theoretical assumptions and empirical evidence suggesting that journalists largely echo and amplify elite discourse, this research suggests journalists can — and did — resist the preferred frames of elites.

Brieuc Lits

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"Astroturfing: When Power Entities Create Their Own Resistance Movements"

All over the world, social movements appear and disappear but crystalize the resistance against hegemonic powers (Pleyers, 2010). Be it the Occupy

movement in the United States, Los Indignados in Spain or the Arab Spring, many scholars and journalists were eager to link their success with new technologies (Huang, 2011).

Even though the impact of social media in these movements is being relativized nowadays, an emerging phenomenon is appearing in Europe and consists in the creation of fake grassroots movements by public and private actors (McNutt, 2008). Whilst keeping their identity secret, these actors aim at simulating a citizen support in order to influence policy-makers or sway public opinion regarding an issue (Boulay, 2013). In this regard, the Internet and the anonymity it provides make it the perfect platform for this phenomenon called "Astroturfing" (Zhang et al., 2013).

There is a growing interest by communication scholars to study social movements as symptoms of resistance to a hegemonic power (Castells, 2011). But attention must be paid to who is really behind grassroots movement because it might be the elite in power trying to manufacture citizen support (Beder, 1998) and frame the debate in order to set the agenda in their direction (Benford & Snow, 2000).

Nicholas Benequista

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"From Resistance to Recognition: Reconceptualizing Journalistic Autonomy After the Moral Turn"

The moral turn in media studies has represented a 'dramatic' shift indeed; by bringing theoretical attention to the morally structuring power of the media, this body of scholarship offers an opportunity to break from the Marxist legacy that has dogged "critical" media research.

The opportunity for critique and innovative theorizing is especially promising in the sociology of journalism, which has long conceived of "journalistic autonomy" in ways that reflect a Marxist concern with the influence commercialism and elite control in the field. Drawing from the sociology of journalism also offers an opportunity to address the neglect of *production* within the current literature on media and morality.

This paper draws on Roger Silverstone's *mediapolis* to reconceptualise the notion of journalistic autonomy in line with the moral turn. It traces the notion of journalistic autonomy through what might be described as the politics of resistance and the politics of representation to the politics of recognition – arguing that a moral framework offers a powerful actor-oriented perspective that is well suited for developing a normative *praxis* for journalism.

Panel 3: Conceptual and Structural Instabilities

César Jiménez-Martínez

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"From the Streets to the Stadiums – Struggling for the Image of Brazil in a Time of Crisis"

Media studies have tended to conceptualise nations as 'imagined communities', of allegedly equal individuals (Anderson). While influential, this approach has overlooked the fact that nations are essentially unstable. In fact, nations are actually constituted by different groups, which struggle with each other in order to carry on their own nationalist projects (Calhoun). A productive moment to study these issues, particularly in relation to the media, are the protests that spread all over Brazil in June 2013. Their relevance was due not only to the fact that they were the biggest demonstrations experienced by Brazil in two decades, but also because the protests cast a shadow of doubt over the World Cup of the following year. My paper will be grounded on original research gathered in more than 60 interviews with Brazilian journalists, foreign correspondents, activists and representatives of the Brazilian government, examining issues regarding the tensions over the symbolic representation of the nation, in a global, chaotic, multi-layered contemporary media space, subject to the gaze of both domestic and foreign audiences.

José Antonio Brambila

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"The Subnational Comparative Approach in Communication Studies"

For Beck (2000) research focuses on the nation-state as a unit of analysis is embedded in a "methodological nationalism", an approach in which "the nation-state is taken as the organizing principle of modernity". This "national-fixation", as Gibson (2013) calls it, faces methodological and theory building problems when it comes to subnational comparisons. To fit this gap, media scholars have called for the introduction of additional units of analysis, above or below the nation-state (Esser, 2013). Following this idea, the primary focus of this research is to build a case for the argument that subnational media comparison allows us to understand media and communication phenomenon that has remained unnoticed with research focus in national-state as unit of analysis.

Drawing upon comparative politics literature (Gibson, 2012), the paper argues that the recognition of the subnational comparative approach not

only avoid some methodological fallacies –such as “invalid part to whole mapping” (Snyder, 2001), or “whole-nation bias” (1970)–, but also affects theory development. By doing an extensive review of the field, the paper advances a general classification of the subnational studies (I classify those studies in three general categories: actor, culturalist and structuralist approaches).

Ayman Alrehaili

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“Media (re)organization in the Arab Spring Countries: How Social Media Redefined Journalism and the Wider Media in Egypt and Tunisia During the Arab Spring”

The revolutions in Egypt and Tunisia in 2011 brought about vast political and social upheaval, but they also redefined journalism and media in the countries. At the heart of this transformation was social media, particularly websites such as Facebook, Twitter and Blogger.

This study will explore the role social media played in changing the wider media landscape in Egypt and Tunisia during this tumultuous period. It will draw on theoretical frameworks of media transformation by exploring the debate over the extent of influence social media had on the revolutions. In this regard, it will attempt to find a balance between the popular narratives (Kiss, 2011) that expounded the importance of social media with empirical studies (Abassi, 2012 and Reardon, 2012) that questioned their impact. I will argue that social media usage during the Arab Spring served to accelerate a process of media transformation that was already well underway.

Through this framework I will then examine my original empirical research which will take the form of a series of qualitative interviews with relevant bloggers, social media users and journalists from the two countries. These interviews will show the processes by which social media has transformed journalism in Egypt and Tunisia.

This is an important study for creating a framework and a better understanding of the way media evolves during periods of political change. During a time when many millions of people around the world live in countries ruled by autocratic governments and restricted media, the lessons learned in Egypt and Tunisia could be applicable in the years ahead.

Richard Fern

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"Are Environmental Correspondents Extinct?"

Increasing pressures on news-room structure - and a rapidly evolving media context - are driving regional newspaper managers to axe specialist correspondents in favour of general reporting staff. One effect of this has been the loss of Environmental Correspondents, popular with regional newspapers in the first decade of this century, but now largely defunct. However, others - notably industrial and political - have been retained. This could have serious consequences for news-sources, news-framing and political communication.

This paper surveys regional newspapers and maps the presence of environmental, industrial and political correspondents over the past 10 years - indicating where changes have taken place. It will show if there is a pattern to hiring decisions - providing a convenient sample and proxy for the doxic assumptions underlying newsroom resourcing. The paper will also include semi-structured interviews with environmental correspondents past and present, with the aim of giving commentary to the tensions and conflicts present in the field of environmental reporting and the wider newsroom context.

The findings imply a doxic assumption in the necessity of covering selected news-beats, but not others with potential impacts on news-framing, as well as access to and for alternative non-hegemonic news sources.

Panel 4: Agency – Virtual and Actual

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“Exploring Mexico's Recent Human Rights-Based Resistance Movements and the Role of Social Media”

The relationship between social movements and social media platforms continues to be widely contested between those who argue that it generates a new liberational model of social movement practice, such as Manuel Castells, to skeptics such as Evgeny Morozov, who dismiss its transformational impact and warn of the pernicious delusions of optimists. In order to draw out the nuances in this debate it is important to examine specific contexts where social media features in the practice of social movements on the basis of empirical research. Mexico has a long tradition of local and national social movements sustaining conflictual relations with the authorities and forming collective identities in the pursuit of concrete social change objectives. In this paper I explore my proposed doctoral research to examine the emergence and configuration of three recent interconnected social movements demanding human rights in Mexico (43 disappeared Ayotzinapa students, #Iam132 and the Movement for Peace and Justice with Dignity). The research will address the dynamics of the specific social context and development of the movements; considering how social media platforms have facilitated action, strengthened networks and legitimized human rights demands in a constrained media environment. I will also explore the limits of the influence of these platforms and their vulnerability to counter measures. I hypothesize their important but not decisive role and suggest that the resulting empirical evidence will provide a nuanced understanding of the interplay of these elements which will contribute to clarifying aspects of this ongoing debate.

Güneş Tavmen

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“Open Data in the City: Smart Citizens and Agency”

Lately, the narratives around the smart city projects have shifted towards “data driven city”, which hints at seamless real time data gathering through ubiquitous computing in the urban realm. One of the drivers of this shift is given as to empower citizens through opening up these data and making it accessible to the inhabitants. Especially for London, urban policy makers frequently underline the argument that “citizens will be smart, not the cities per se”, which implies that the real time data available in the city will enable

urban dwellers to participate in decision making processes actively. This shift is given as an answer to the stances that were critical of the earlier smart city proposals due to their predominantly corporate driven nature. However for the time being, these speculations of strengthening the agency of inhabitants fail to offer substantial evidence on new ways of governance that would pave to a more equitable city in which the right to the city is extended to social groups that were previously under-represented. This paper aims to argue the narrative around open data and its implications in terms of emerging of new citizenship forms and the agency of the urban dwellers.

Arash Anghaei

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"Interactive Media, Female Participation and Democracy: Lessons from Iran's Green Movement"

The interplay between gender relations and popular dissent in politically closed contexts is a seldom explored area in Social Sciences. This paper examines the influence of female cyber-activists on shaping the aftermath of Iran's contested presidential elections in June 2009.

In developed nation states, gender equality has been increasingly acknowledged as a relevant factor in Science and Technology Studies. This prevents many Western analyses of cyber-activism from fully explaining the undercurrents of humanitarian innovation in repressive countries. In Iran however, as the author's research reveals, the main body of the local and expatriate cyber-protest network is patriarchal, questioning the democratic degree of its structure.

The extensive underrepresentation of women throughout Iran's online activist community has altered the dynamics of generation, diffusion and use of ICTs within its innovation system, resulting in the absence of an efficient response mechanism during key flashpoints.

Employing a combination of virtual (weblog content analysis) and conventional (semi-structured interviews) data collection methods, the research concludes by highlighting the significance of gender neutrality as a requisite for functional networks of resistance worldwide.

Jacob Johanssen

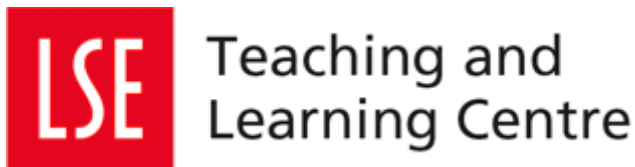
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"Affect, Data Ownership and Agency"

Recent debates on 'big data', revelations of data mining and corporate and governmental spying have led to questions of ownership and control over data that implicitly refer to questions of human agency. We are only beginning to understand what José van Dijk calls the 'essence of new user agency' (van Dijk 2009, 54). This question of human agency in relation to the Internet marks the starting point for this paper. How can subjective agency be conceptualised and researched in light of objective structures that are often marked by contradictory, commercial interests that the users find themselves confronted with (e.g. data mining practices, spying, selling of data, etc.)?

In my paper, I offer analyses of Facebook user posts that deal with questions of data ownership and a lack of control on part of the users on the SNS. A strong emphasis will be placed on how these are affectively experienced and tried to put into words by users. I draw on the Freudian affect model in my analyses. I suggest that a psychoanalytic conception of user agency allows for a complex theorisation of the relationship of structures and subjective power online.

This event is supported by:



LSE Media and Communications PhD Symposium 2015
Organising Committee:

Paula Kiel, Anthony Kelly, James Deeley, Nora Kroeger