



TREND/Paris 8/USC International Symposium

(De)Mobilizing with digital media

March 16, 2020

Université Paris 8, Espace Deleuze—Salle des conseils

Coordinated by Ann Crigler (USC) & Violaine Roussel (Paris 8)

Presentation

This event explores political mobilization in the digital age, at the intersection of news and entertainment media:

> Storytelling and politics: We propose to explore how different categories of social actors (political representatives/candidates and their staffs, political activists or advocacy groups, but also journalists and digital media specialists, as well as entertainment professionals) tell political stories with social and digital media, and how the boundary between politics and entertainment gets blurred and moved in the process. The parameters of our discussions will be broad and include: issues of "fake news" and the controversies around it, as well as the study of any new forms that political storytelling takes, whether they are written (tweets...) or visual (deepfakes, memes...), or presented as news or fiction (e.g. the multiplication of political films/shows and documentaries available on streaming).

> The socioeconomic processes behind the production of such stories will also be a focus of our event. We will look at the changing relationships between the media or entertainment field, on one hand, and the political sphere, on the other hand, in the digital age. We will welcome contributions shedding light on the newcomers who have become major players in creating online content (who they are, from digitally savvy young activists to traditional Hollywood professionals increasingly involved in the shaping of political campaigns and the writing of political narratives, among others), and the ways in which political organizations deal with them, competing or collaborating with them. Our discussions will also address how the political economy of the Internet and the increasing dominance of a few platforms impact the democratic potential/power of citizens and creators in political storytelling.

Event schedule

9:00 Welcome | Breakfast

9:30 Introduction

Ann Crigler (Professor, Political Science, USC)

9:45-12:00 | Panel 1—Digital Tools and Change in/of the Entertainment Industries

David Craig and Stuart Cunningham “ALT CENTER: Civic Spheres and Creator Communities”

The “techlash” has evidenced heightened critical concerns around the politics of platforms with regards to free speech, content moderation, political radicalization, data use, and privacy and informs how policy makers are rethinking the fundamental legal modelling of platform principle, policy, and practice. However, these debates offer limited account for the influence of creators. Also referred to as influencers, micro-celebrities, youtubers, key opinion leaders (KOL), and wanghong, “creators” refers to social media users who derive varying forms of commercial and cultural value across multiple platforms within the emerging social media entertainment industry (Cunningham and Craig, 2019). One notable exception is Rebecca Lewis (2018) who describes alternate influence networks (AINs) led by commercializing YouTubers promoting extremist, anti-progressive, alt-right, and counter-factual claims. This paper compliments Lewis’ work to consider how moderate, diverse, politically progressive creators and their communities operate across platforms; a phenomenon which we refer to as “Alt-Center”. Our research evidences how, relative to their presence in legacy media, the Alt-Center over-indexes in terms of representation and commercial viability while simultaneously advancing a “civic trajectory” towards greater cultural diplomacy and political activism. Creators like Philip DeFranco and Casey Neistat have engaged massive global fan communities around their progressive and civic-minded interest. The Vlogbrothers and their Nerdfighter communities as well as Jerome Jarre’s #LoveArmy have used the platforms to raise awareness around social and political causes as well as millions in funds to provide support for refugees, famine sufferers, and victims of war, gun violence, and natural disasters.

David Craig is a Clinical Associate Professor at USC Annenberg where he teaches masters courses in media industries, management, and practice and is a veteran media producer and activist.

Stuart Cunningham is Distinguished Professor of Media and Communications, Queensland University of Technology, Australia. Together, they have co-authored *Social Media Entertainment: The New Intersection of Hollywood and Silicon Valley* (NYU Press, 2019), *Creator Culture: Studying the Social Media Entertainment Industry* (NYUP; forthcoming) and *Wanghong: China’s Social Media Entertainment Industry* (Palgrave; under contract).

Keivan Djavadzadeh “Still Fighting The Power? The Political Commitment of Hip-hop Artists in the Age of Digital Media”

At odds with the popular idea of a depoliticization of rap music, this paper highlights a strong and renewed commitment of hip-hop artists in the age of digital media. Campaigning on behalf of Barack Obama in 2008 after years of getting-out-the-vote efforts, many hip-hop artists also weighed in on Black Lives Matter in the wake of protests, speaking out against racial injustices and police brutality. Feeling a responsibility to speak for the “voiceless”, these artists turned to social media to fight the power and let the world know that eventually, “we gon’ be alright”.

Keivan Djavadzadeh is Assistant Professor of Communication and Media Studies at Université Paris 8. Prior to that, he has been a visiting research fellow at Brown University in the Center for the Study of Race and Ethnicity in America. His research focuses on discourses and representations about race, gender and sexuality in the music industry, with an emphasis on hip-hop. More recently, he has expanded his analysis to include celebrity practice and professionalization of female rappers in the digital age.

Violaine Roussel “Mobilizing with Algorithms: The Work of Data Analysts and the Transformation of Entertainment”

Recent studies point to new processes of “algorithmic governance” based on the use of big data, permeating various sectors of society, especially the media and entertainment industries. This paper explores how data are used in Hollywood and how it relates to the current transformation of entertainment. Streaming companies, especially the main ones (Netflix, Amazon studios, and Hulu) that have become major “buyers” in Hollywood have proprietary access to unique data giving them with unprecedented knowledge about consumer behaviors. These data are used, not only to more effectively sell content to users and attract new consumers, but also to shape decisions regarding what is produced and licensed by the streamers (which is where the novelty really resides). This presentation will show how this transformation happens when new professional groups massively enter the occupational world of Hollywood. This paper is based on sociological interviews and in situ observations conducted in Los Angeles in 2018 and 2019.

Violaine Roussel is Professor of Sociology at Université Paris VIII and Research Fellow at CRESPPA (Center for Sociological and Political Research in Paris). Her recent publications include *Representing Talent. Hollywood Agents and the Making of Movies* (University of Chicago Press, 2017), *Brokerage and Production in the American and French Entertainment Industries* (Lexington Books, 2015, with D. Bielby), and *Art & contestation aux Etats-Unis* (PUF, 2019).

Alison Dundes Renteln “Misappropriation of Symbols Online: A Case Study of Rescuing Pepe the Frog”

Symbols inevitably play an important role in politics, both domestic and international. When they are circulated in “viral” fashion through cyberspace to promote a cause, they may be even more provocative. How should images that are traumatic be regulated in the twenty-first century? In this paper I examine the “Pepe the Frog” meme to scrutinize how the alt-right co-opted an image from a children’s storybook and the subsequent litigation challenging this usage. By analyzing this case study, I consider how international law governing hate speech law

applies to the dissemination of memes that convey messages of hate. The question is whether the law is ultimately capable of regulating cultural appropriation of this sort.

Alison Dundes Renteln is Professor of Political Science at USC, with joint appointments in Anthropology, Law, and Public Policy. Her publications include *The Cultural Defense* (Oxford, 2004), *Folk Law* (University of Wisconsin, 1995), *Multicultural Jurisprudence* (Hart, 2009), *Cultural Law* (Cambridge, 2010), *Global Bioethics and Human Rights* (Rowman & Littlefield, 2014), *Images and Human Rights* (Cambridge Scholars 2018), *Personal Autonomy in Plural Societies: A Principle and Its Paradoxes* (Routledge, 2018).

Discussants: Laure de Verdalle (CNRS-Printemps) & Ninon Grangé (Université Paris 8)

Lunch break

1:30-3:45 | Panel 2—Mobilizing and Building Memory Online

Jacob Matthews and Athina Karatzogianni “Fractal Leadership Emergence in Contemporary Social and Political Movements”

This research produces an account of contemporary fractal leadership emergence in social movements through mapping: a. the structural, international, national, local political and social context the leader evolves or has evolved in; b. their personal biography in terms of ideologisation processes they are involved in c. their broader strategies within the scope of algorithmic communication structures and how they compare to historical media strategies of past leaders (continuities and discontinuities).

Jacob Matthews is a professor in information and communication sciences at Université Paris 8. His research now primarily focuses on the political economy of the Internet and digital intermediation platforms.

Athina Karatzogianni is an associate professor in media and communication at the University of Leicester. She researches the use of digital technologies by emerging sociopolitical and economic formations.

Nancy Hernandez “The Language of Affordable Housing: Social Media’s Role in Public Policy”

Social media’s extensive use makes it easier for people to stay up to date with recent news, connect with like-minded people, express ideas and views, and engage with a wider audience. Likewise, social movements use social media platforms to raise awareness of social issues, inform people of their cause, gain support, and share members’ narratives to illustrate the problem(s) they are trying to address. It is a tool that assists movements in their attempts to cause change; specifically, it may be an instrument used to influence political changes. In their efforts to garner support, social movements are careful in constructing an argument and narrative that is relatable and accepted by a majority of people. The language that is used in their discourse is essential in mobilizing members and gaining new supporters. The questions posed in this research intend to understand how urban social movements use social media platforms as tools to capture people’s response to the housing crisis. Following Bennett’s and

Seegerberg's theory of connective action, the research will explore whether inclusive frames are used by California's urban social movement organizations, and it will study whether a central message is shared throughout their posts on Twitter. Through content analysis the research will analyze the language of the Tweets posted by the organizations who advocate for tenants' rights in their endeavors to influence public policy.

Nancy Hernandez is a first-year Ph.D. student in the Political Science and International Relations program at the University of Southern California. Her fields of study are American Politics and Comparative Politics. Her research interests consist of race and ethnic politics, inequality, media and politics, and state and local politics.

Nora El Qadim "Digital Archive Fever? Archival Images on Social Media as a Tool for Political Mobilization"

Based on the redefinition and expansion of the notion of archives carried out by M. Foucault in *The Archeology of Knowledge*, then by J. Derrida in *Archive Fever*, the "archival turn" in the social sciences has modified the ways in which we consider and analyze archives. Archives are now not only used as sources, but also examined as a mental, social and political construction. The articulation of archives and power has also been examined: in this perspective, archives appear as a tool of state power, and as such are the product of state machines that also participates, as a government technology, in the very production of these States (Stoler 2002). Therefore, considering the archive as a construction leads to questioning not only what is present in the archives, but also what is absent. In this perspective, mobilizations for community archives appear as a way to contest this monopolization of archival power. Such initiatives also participate in establishing the presence of minority communities, in the assertion of their existence, and in a way in creating or consolidating a community through a sense of history and memory. The growing movement for documentation of marginalized groups, often self-organized and participatory, has even been interpreted as a new paradigm of archiving, involving a shift in some core principles of archiving, for example from exclusive to shared custodianship and stewardship. Community archiving should thus be seen as more than a local, amateur practice, but as relying on long-standing and well-established alternative archiving practices that question ownership of the archives (Cook 2013).

How has the emergence of digital media affected to such practices of community archiving? Since the second half of the 2010s, several Instagram accounts have appeared that are specifically dedicated to archival images, usually on the basis of community, but not in all cases. This paper will examine some of these accounts, concentrating mainly on feminist and black community archiving. I will interrogate the origins of their creation (mainly after 2015), the ways in which they use the term archive and how (if at all) they relate to physical and more institutionalized archives. I will look at how these online archival practices are defined by the practitioners and related to the question of power and community. Looking at how followers engage on the accounts, I will seek to determine the difference between community archiving and participatory archiving, and to tease out a definition of archival communities. Finally, this paper will examine not only how digitization and digital practices have affected archives and control over the archive, but also what specific, additional role social media might play in this process, through its power of reach and through other characteristics, such as the prevalence of images over other types of archives.

Nora El Qadim is Associate Professor of Political Science at Université Paris 8, and a researcher at CRESPPA-Labtop and ICM. She has mostly worked on migration policies, and is currently developing a research project on archival policies. On this topic, she has recently published “Born digital? Digitisation and the creation of the Moroccan national archives” (*History in Africa*, 2020).

Rémi Rouge “Social Media and Memory Services: A Digital Politics of Memory”

While digital media are often presented as focused on the present time and the future, since 2011, several applications and functionalities suggesting “digital memories” by resurfacing old content have been created. The economic competition for data appropriation is here inseparable from the competition for the definition of what makes a “good memory.” By analyzing the activities of engineers and designers who produce these apps and functionalities, I show how they contribute to shaping a new politics of memory.

Rémi Rouge is a doctoral student in Political Science at Université Paris 8 and a member of CRESPPA-Labtop.

Discussants: Lilian Mathieu (CNRS-Centre Max Weber) & Clemens Zobel (Université Paris 8)

Break

4:15-6:00 | Panel 3—(Fake) News & Digital Storytelling

Emeline Jaillais-Neliaz “What is at stake with the French ‘anti-fake news’ law? Controversies about the French ‘anti-fake news’ law in mainstream newspapers in France and in the USA”

Following the American presidential election, “Fake news” controversies have multiplied in a changing media context as a result of the development of social media and the emergence of new players in the media sphere. Fake News have been defined as a Public Problem by media and politics. French President Emmanuel Macron announced an “anti-fake news law” in January 2018, a law approved by the French national assembly in July 2018. I will study the way the “anti-fake news” law has been discussed by participants in public controversies on Fake news. Therefore, I will analyze four internationally recognized newspapers in France and in the USA (Le Monde, Le Figaro, The New York Times, and The Wall Street Journal), from the announcement of this bill in January 2018 to its adoption in July 2018. The study of this debate, I will try to understand the role mainstream Media want to assign to public authorities regarding the media sphere. By doing so, I will explore contemporary struggles over the legitimate authority to regulate news and define what it is.

Emeline Jaillais-Neliaz is a doctoral student in Political Science at Université Paris 8 and member of CRESPPA-Labtop. Her PhD research explores the various ways in which political actors and media professionals use the terms “Fake News” and what these discursive strategies reveal, the social representations they convey, and how they travel beyond national

boundaries. Her main research areas include: sociology of the media, sociology of journalism, sociology of the art worlds.

Avery Ruth "A Discussion on the Existence of News"

A trope common in fiction and in history is that of the cycle, and how most events and ideas tend to repeat themselves over time. I would argue that the modern trend of "Fake News" is another part of this historical cycle. "Fake News" seems to be exceedingly comparable to previous eras of sensationalist news, in particular, the American trend of "Yellow Journalism" at the turn of the 20th century. A pure debate between the two of these eras seems fairly redundant, as the conclusion in all likelihood would be that the two eras are exceedingly similar. I would argue, however, that the Internet and social media make "Fake News" a seemingly similar, but fundamentally different phenomenon than "Yellow Journalism" or any other era in the historical cycle of news reporting. This article brings together an analysis of multiple political-historical case studies to establish a trend of sensationalism that never truly ended but seems to be behaving differently now due to the advent of the digital age.

Avery Ruth is currently a PhD student in the University of Southern California's Political Science and International Relations program. His three fields of study are American Politics, Comparative Politics, and Political Theory. His research interests lie in Comparative Religious Law, at the intersection of the rapidly changing legal landscape and changing demographics in regard to the entrenched pressure of religion in the United States.

Gregory Treverton "Intelligence Narratives"

Intelligence is story-telling; it is about narratives. If there is no story, new information is likely to remain just a factoid. At the other extreme, if the story is too widely shared, it can become a mind-set. Those are at the root of most so-called intelligence failures. An example from a related domain, medicine, illustrates the point. The medical community had a story about Ebola: it would flare up in isolated regions, but because the sick would die before they could communicate the disease, it would die. The story was right until better rural to urban communication made it wrong. Now, the rise of social media, and the exponential increase in data has made the study of narratives at a large scale much more practical. Yet the challenges derive from the fact that "narratives" now comprise pictures as well as words and from not just the rise of "deep fakes" but from the wider concern that truth itself is under assault.

Gregory Treverton is Professor of the Practice at the University of Southern California. Before that, he has taught at Harvard and Columbia universities, in addition to directing the RAND Corporation's Center for Global Risk and Security, among other positions and responsibilities. His latest books are *Dividing Divided States*, University of Pennsylvania Press, 2014; *Beyond the Great Divide: Relevance and Uncertainty in National Intelligence and Science for Policy* (with Wilhelm Agrell), Oxford University Press, 2015; and *Telling Truth to Power: A History of the National Intelligence Council* (edited, with Robert Hutchings), Oxford University Press, 2019.

Discussant: Thomas Brisson (Université Paris 8)

6pm Reception

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