'New Communications and Demonstrations'

‘New communications and demonstrations’ was a day symposium hosted at the University of Leicester on 13th July, 2011. The event organised by the British Sociological Association Media Study Group in collaboration with the News and Journalism Research Group at the Department of Media and Communication, University of Leicester, brought together scholars from different disciplines with combined interests in the relationship between the media, protest and demonstration.

After some open remarks by the coordinator of the BSA Media Group, Julian Matthews, the event proceeded with presentations that examined various aspects of the media - protest nexus, starting with a discussion of media reporting. Ian Taylor exploring local and mainstream media coverage of the anti-war protests in 2005 discussed fluctuations in the levels and content of coverage across different newspapers - an observation that runs contrary to established theoretical claims. In ‘Every little hurts: Rumour, misinformation and the Stokes Croft riots’, Cassian Vian employing a reflexive observational perspective moved the focus to the disturbances in Stokes Croft, Bristol (2011) and argued that frames in media coverage ignored the complex realities of those involved in the disturbances and the reasons behind their involvement. The framing of protest action was also a theme developed in Christella Michael’s paper that addressed the reporting of the J18 London carnival against capitalism protest and argued that the news media presented a consensus view on the impact of new media on the form and make-up of contemporary political demonstrations.

The activities and strategies of those who protest was the subject of the second session of the day. Pollyanna Ruiz discussed protesters use of masks as a communicative strategy, these utilized she suggested to present, sometimes contradictory, protest positions in the public sphere. In contrast to Ruiz’s reading of protest activities, Jonathon Cable discussed the media strategies of three different protest actions gained through interview and media analysis to show how such strategies helped considerably groups to secure various political and media access opportunities. Returning to the case study of the Stokes Croft disturbances, Paul Reilly’s paper used the concept of ‘susveillance’ to order an analysis of clips and posted comments on Youtube and to suggest form this that observers used technologies to knowingly record the actions of the police during the disturbance.
The final section of the day offered some theoretical reflections on protest and media. Stuart Price’s presentation examined the ways that formal authority seek to influence the interpretation of public dissent. Introducing his ethnographic observations of coordinating protest action, Mark Carrigan reflected on the role that social media plays in the genesis, sustainability and character of political movements. The day was concluded with a reflection session where all participants were invited to discuss the main themes and ideas of the day.

A big thank you to all the presenters for helping to produce an enjoyable and productive day!

Regards,
Julian
Dr Julian Matthews, Convener, BSA Media Group.

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