Digital Networks and Communication Research Cluster

ANNUAL ACTIVITY REPORT 2016
1. INTRODUCTION
The Digital Networks and Communication research cluster, based in the Department of Media and Communication at the University of Leicester, was launched in 2016. It incorporates the digital media research group led previously by Dr. Panayiota Tsatsou and in 2015/16 is run by Dr. Athina Karatzogianni.

The cluster focuses on the digital, both as an object of inquiry and a field of study. It explores the differences the digital might make to our research methods, and to our broader understandings of social, political and psychological life.

One key area of inquiry focuses on big data, but also on online behaviour and group dynamics, including information-foraging and decision-making processes, as well as the social and political life of algorithms online. Another important concern is with the digital society and its identities and inequalities, as well as how vulnerable minorities make use of ICTs. We also explore new developments in the converged and rapidly-transforming worlds of digital production and economy.

A further emphasis is on digital activism, especially in authoritarian and newly democratic countries, and on the use of digital media in different social- and single-issue movements and advocacy groups. Overall we aim at studying the relationships between societal transformations and digital media networks in terms of substantive effects after their novelty and hype have passed.

Contributing researchers to the cluster included this year: Jess Bain, Alison Harvey, Athina Karatzogianni, Kaitlynn Mendes, Galina Miazhevich, Jonathan Ong, Rozlyn Redd, Jingrong Tong, Panayiota Tsatsou, Stefania Vicari, Giuseppe Veltri, and Yimei Zhu, Brett Matulis, Ioanna Ferra, Wei Cui, Patricia Routh, and Dafni Mangalousi. A wide range of research activities take place within the cluster, including regular meetings, the hosting of research seminars and public events, a reading group, and mechanisms for peer review. Jingrong and Stefania will soon be leaving Leicester to take up new appointments; we would like to take this opportunity to thank them for their contributions to the cluster and to wish them all the best in their new roles.

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https://www.facebook.com/DigitalMediaResearchLeicester/?fref=ts
2. PROJECTS
Bain, Jessica: Digital Dress Making: Gender, Technology and Craft in Britain’s Contemporary Sewing Communities (British Academy)

Harvey, Alison: Refiguring Innovation in Games (SSHRC) and Developing Feminist Digital Research Methods (SSHRC)

Karatzogianni, Athina: The Common Good: Ethics and Rights in Cyber Security (ESRC)

Mendes, Kaitlynn: Documenting Digital Feminist Activism (AHRC)

Tsatsou, Panayiota: The role of digital technologies in social research in the UK (EPSRC)

Giuseppe Veltri, Redd, Rozlyn and Zhu, Yimei: Re.Cri.Re – Between the representation of the crisis and the crisis of representation (Horizon 2020). Giuseppe Veltri is part of a team that has been awarded a 4 year research framework contract on applied behavioural research and consumer protection (European Commission)

Vicari, Stefania: Twitting rare diseases on and off the "Jolie effect": A study of twitter affordances for health public debate (Wellcome Trust).

**Featured projects:**

**Alison Harvey:** The Digital Cluster funded Dr Alison Harvey’s participation in the first working meeting of the Feminist Digital Research Methods Network (Les Fourchettes), an international collaboration of emerging scholars focused on innovative, community-engaged, and critical research methods. This collective, funded by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada, aims to develop rigorous protocols for feminist digital research methods as a contribution to strengthening the relevance of scholarly research to contemporary networked life. To this end, at our writing workshop we planned a suite of events in Canada, the United States, the United Kingdom, and within Europe related to key issues such as Activism and Advocacy, Technology and Ecology, Platforms and Politics, Experimental Mapping Methods, Arts and Cultural Policy, and others. Dr Harvey will be leading a Fishbowl discussion on Feminist Digital Methods at the Association of Internet Researchers conference in Berlin and an event on Creative Work in Post-Brexit Times at the University of Leicester, both in October. The network aims to feature this work in a book tentatively entitled Dirty Deeds Done Dirt Cheap in the Communication Undisciplined series published by Wilfred Laurier University Press, and to extend our network via an AHRC Research Network grant (both in preparation).

**Jonathan Corpus Ong:** Co-I of the ESRC-funded Humanitarian Technologies Project, has completed papers examining the role of digital media in disaster recovery.
He presented papers at the International Communication Association examining 1) the role of social media in practices of mourning and memorialization after disaster, and 2) the uses of mobile media for feedback and accountability in humanitarian response. His research in communications in disaster recovery continues as he convenes the British Council-funded Newton Network on Disasters and Development. Leicester hosts the first workshop of the network in the autumn.

**Giuseppe A. Veltri, Rozlyn Redd and Yimei Zhu: Re.Cri.Re.** The project Re.Cri.Re aims to understand what kind of social identity change is going on within European societies in time of crisis. Sixteen Universities and Research Centres, covering 13 European countries, are working together on this Horizon 2020 project. The three-year project started in May 2015. It is aimed at analyzing cultures of European societies and the impacts of the socio-economic crisis on them, in order to frame better policies at local, national and European level. The project carried out by Leicester team collected and analyses national and local newspaper articles from 2000 to 2015 in relation to the topics of health, immigration, Islam, homosexuality, political participation and subjectivity and survey data using a regionally stratified probability sample. Semantic analysis with a network approach was adopted to identify the core elements of social representations. Such elements can be analysed in conjunction with survey data collected to combine latent semantic structures that emerged from textual and survey data at the local level. The result of the analysis can be used to draw strategic and methodological implications for policy-making.

3. PUBLICATIONS 2015-2016


Miazhevich is co-editing a special issue ‘Theorizing Media in Place/Nation Branding’ for the European Journal of Cultural studies (forthcoming), which includes her article ‘Rebranding the nation branding in a post-broadcast era: the case of RT’.


4. CONFERENCE PAPERS
Alison Harvey gave the invited talk ‘Dream, Design, and Exclusion: The Aggressive Architecture of the Utopian Internet’ at the Film, Television & Media Studies Research Seminar Series, University of East Anglia, in March 2016. Alison also gave the talk ‘Explosive Misogyny, Spectacular Feminism, and the Sneaky Sexism They Mask for Women in Tech’ to the Kobo Tech Ladies group, in Toronto in April 2016.

Giuseppe A. Veltri was invited by SAGE to give a talk in the Methods Speaker Series in March 2016, at Sage Publishing in London. Giuseppe was also invited to give a talk about social psychology of communication in the digital age at GIGA, The German Institute of Global and Area Studies in Hamburg in May 2016.

Jonathan Corpus Ong was visiting scholar at the Department of Communication of Tulane University from 13-18 January 2016. His public seminar was on ‘The Corrosion of Compassion Protocols’. Jonathan was also visiting scholar at the Department of Sociology in Hong Kong University from 5-11 April 2016. He gave two talks: ‘Typhoon Grindr and Other Stories of Social Media (in) Disasters’ and ‘Obstacles to Voice, Listening and Healing in Post-Haiyan Philippines’.

Stefania Vicari was invited to speak at the ISchool at the University of Sheffield to give a talk on her research on rare disease digital activism in March 2016.

Kaitlynn Mendes gave the keynote address at the international Promediar conference in Santiago de Compostela in March 2016. Her talk was entitled ‘SlutWalk, sex workers and the media’. Kaitlynn Mendes also gave the keynote talk “Oh sorry, does my dress make you feel like a rapist today?” Representations of Slutwalk in global newspapers and feminist blogs’ at the MeCCSA PGN conference in Leicester in July 2016.

Movement’ 2. ‘The vision of interdisciplinariry and the reality of digital research in the UK’.

**Athina Karatzogianni** participated at the ID2020 summit at the United Nations, 20 May 2016 ([http://www.id2020summit.org/](http://www.id2020summit.org/)). She presented at the International Society for Third Sector Research conference held 28 June in Stockholm ([http://www.istr.org/?StockholmConference](http://www.istr.org/?StockholmConference)) She was a plenary speaker in Barcelona 20 June at the Open University of Catalonia (UOC) at a workshop on sharing economy/digital alternative cultural economies and 22 April in Paris 8 at a workshop on crowdfunding for political purposes. On 20 April as a visiting professor at the University of Paris, she presented work from her recent monograph. She gave talks at staff research seminars at Canterbury Christchurch and Bournemouth in February, whilst on 3-4 November 2015, she presented 'Willy-nilley Human: Technosocial Agency and Orders of Dissent in Network Activism', Paris, Maison Suger, II Congresso Internacional de Net-Ativismo é organizado pelo Centro de Pesquisa Atopos, Universidade de São Paulo (ECA-USP). In October 2015, she was invited to give a talk for union leaders and journalists, Lisbon, IPPS-IUL e o ISCTE-IUL Conferência Internacional - A sul do Euro: Novos Contextos Sociais e Económico. Nearer to home she kicked off the year with that bizarre paper 'Grusin's Premediation and the Curious Case of ISIS on Social Media' at Capitalism, Culture and Media conference at that University of Leeds. Athina will end her academic year presenting ‘In the name of the collaborative economy: Digital intermediation platforms as a new material and ideological vanguard for capitalist expansion?’ with Jacob Matthews (Paris 8) and David Pucheau (Université Bordeaux 3) at the panel **Infrastructures of Evil: Participation, Collaboration, Maintenance** at the EASST Conference in Barcelona in August.
5. PhD STUDENTS
• Aini, Fitiha: Rhetoric, and the hidden influences of news media on immigration policy
• Alakija, Oluwafunmilayo: Mediating Home in Diaspora: Identity Construction of First and Second Generation Nigerian Migrants in Peckham
• Baba Zain, Hada: New media and public TV influence on formation of public opinion in Malaysia
• Bilanceri, Serena: Analysing interaction in virtual reality: ethnicity and identity
• Bosah, Genevieve: To investigate the space new 'alternative' media is negotiating within Nigeria's media landscape.
• Boursinou, Maria Nerina: Immigration and Detention in UK
• Caruana, Paul: Why me? Victims, vulnerabilities and cyber based interpersonal violence.
• Cui, Wei: Chinese Media Policies in the Public Crisis Context
• Dusu Bot, Diretnan: Female Blogging and Democratic Policy-Making in Nigeria
• Ferra, Ionna: ‘Social Media Activism and the Greek Crisis’.
• Henry, Lucelle Shevonne: Development communication in Malawi.
• Khoja, Asia Yusef: An on-line Community for Developing Social Media Literacy Skills: A Mixed-method Study
• Makke, Ali: Winning Post.
• Martin, Jess: Representations of Feminism and Domestic Cultures during Austerity in Britain
• McLeod, Josh: Tattooed bodies and reality television
• McMillan, Callum: The Post Human in Sci-Fi Literature and Video-games
• Qutub, Afnan: The Representation of Saudi Women Identity on Social Networking Sites
• Routh, Patricia: New Digital Aesthetics and Art in Mobile Phoneography
• Supapong, Jantiga: Partisanship in selective exposure on social network sites in Thailand during the time of political fragmentation
• Wilson, Michael Raphael: The role of news media and its influence on political and social issues
• Xue, Chen: The Development and Impact of China's Media Internationalization
• Zainudin, Sofia: Self-disclosure and Relationship Development among Malaysian Female Bloggers

**Featured Profile: Patricia Routh**

Patricia Routh is a Digital Artist and Doctoral Candidate at the University of Leicester, Department of Media and Communication. Her research interests cover a range of topics related to digital visual culture, online performativity of gender and identity within vernacular digital photographic practices. Her PhD research focuses on amateur digital self-portraits shared on social media or 'Selfies, focusing on groups of individuals normally marginalised within the commoditised and hegemonic visual discourse in society to understand how they engage with and distribute selfies and if their journey of producing themselves online is transformative. She is also interested in instances of activism, (mobile phone citizen journalism), or so called 'empowerment' away from the hegemonic visual rhetoric, through instances of mediating the self and producing oneself on-line within established cultural photographic practices, such as with social media trends in wedding and lifestyle photography.
6. EVENTS
Members of the cluster participated in the Forced Migration and Media Series which was held at the University of Leicester in June and July 2016.

Alison Harvey organized a workshop, funded by the Teaching Enhancement Fund at Leicester, called ‘Games as Education in the UK’, in May, 2016. Alison is also organizing ‘The Practices and Politics of Inclusivity in Games’, September 15, 2016, as well as the event ‘Creative Work in Post-Brexit United Kingdom’ in October, both at the University of Leicester.

Kaitlynn Mendes co-organized the conference 'Mediated Feminisms' at the Institute of Education in London in May 2016, which was held at the end of the AHRC grant Documenting Digital Feminist Activism.

Jonathan Corpus Ong co-organized the one-day workshop ‘Camp Convivialities and Refugee Communications’ in July 2016.

The Digital Networks and Communication cluster is hosting the IAMCR pre-conference ‘Surveillance and Security in the Age of Algorithmic Communication’ on July 26th, 2016, organised by Athina Karatzogianni and Arne Hintz.