www.citizenmediamanchester.wordpress.com

Citizen Media in Russia, Central and Eastern Europe, China and East Asia, and the Arab World

27-28 January 2014

hosted by

Division of Languages and Intercultural Studies

MANCHESTER 1824
The University of Manchester

Workshop Organisers

Mona Baker (Division of Languages and Intercultural Studies, School of Arts, Languages & Cultures)
Elena Barabantseva (Politics, School of Social Sciences)
Gabi Hendry, Division of Languages & Intercultural studies, School of Arts, Languages & Cultures)
Adi Kuntsman (Anthropology, School of Social Sciences)

Acknowledgements

The conference organisers wish to thank the following for their support:

- The following centres that have sponsored the event: The Centre for East European Language-Based Area Studies; Centre for Russian, Central and East European Studies; White Rose East Asia Centre; Centre for the Advanced Study of the Arab World and The British Inter-University China Centre.

- The School of Arts, Languages and Cultures, University of Manchester, for logistic support.
- Fiona Daniel, Research Office, School of Arts, Languages and Cultures, for advice and logistical support.
- Li-Wen Chang, Centre for Translation & Intercultural Studies, for technical support and videotaping the event.

Notes to Delegates

- If you would like to be kept informed of the latest developments in citizen media and receive information on new initiatives led by the University of Manchester team, please visit the website and click on the 'Follow Citizen Media at Manchester' button at the bottom of the page: http://citizenmediamanchester.wordpress.com.

- You can also follow us on Twitter: @CitMediaCentre.

- The University of Manchester invests in a wide range of activities that address or overlap with the theme of citizen media. You might like to check some of the following links:

  - In Place of War: http://inplaceofwar.net/home.
  - Manchester Digital Media Network: http://www.socialsciences.manchester.ac.uk/ricc/projects/MDMN/.
  - Activist Performance – Gestural Notes: http://activistperformance.wordpress.com/about/.
  - Granada Centre for Visual Anthropology: http://www.socialsciences.manchester.ac.uk/disciplines/socialanthropology/visualanthropology.

Table of Contents

Citizen Media in Russia, Central and Eastern Europe, China and East Asia and the Arab World

The term 'citizen media', or 'participatory media', covers a wide range of activities undertaken by ordinary, non-professional citizens who lay a claim to an area of public life and politics and seek to transform it in some way. From videos circulated on Youtube to graffiti, street performance and other forms of street art, and from community radio to blogging, crowd sourcing, tweeting, flashmob protest and hacktivism, new forms of civic engagement continue to develop, expand and shape the relationship between the private and the public, the local and the global, mainstream and alternative media, corporations and clients, the state and civil society. The aim of the workshop is to bring together doctoral students and early career researchers who work on citizen media in Russia and Central and Eastern Europe, China and East Asia, and the Arab world – areas where citizen media has been at the centre of political contestations, censorship and everyday struggles. The focus of the workshop is on methodological challenges of researching citizen media, whether these are conceptual, practical, ethical or political.

The programme is designed to ensure maximum participation by all attendees, and to allow sufficient time for discussion and exchange of views.

Citizen Media in Russia, Central and Eastern Europe, China and East Asia and the Arab World

Outline Programme

Monday 27 January 2014

09.00-09.15	**Registration**	Penthouse Conference Room
09.15-09.30	**Introduction and welcome**	Penthouse Conference Room
09.30-11.30	**Plenary I** – Arts and Politics John Johnston, Goldsmiths College, University of London, UK Georgiana Nicoarea, University of Bucharest, Romania	Penthouse Conference Room
11.30-12.00	**Coffee Break**	Penthouse Conference Room
12.00-13.30	**Panel 1** – *Understanding Citizen Participation*	Penthouse Conference Room
13.30-14.30	**Lunch**	Restaurant
14.30-17.00	**Training Workshop: Theory and Methods** Luis Pérez-González, University of Manchester, UK *Theoretical and Methodological Perspectives on Citizen Media*	Penthouse Conference Room
18.00	**Conference Dinner**	Restaurant

Tuesday 28 January 2014

09.30-11.30	**Plenary II** - Protest and Resistance Astrid Nordin, University of Lancaster, UK Evgenia Nim, Altai State University, Russia	Penthouse Conference Room
11.30-12.00	**Coffee Break**	Penthouse Conference Room
12.00-13.30	**Panel 2** – *Exploring Research Tools*	Penthouse Conference Room
13.30-14.30	**Lunch**	Restaurant
14.30-16.00	**Panel 3** – *Looking for Interpretations*	Penthouse Conference Room
16.00-16.15	**Closing remarks**	Penthouse Conference Room

Citizen Media in Russia, Central and Eastern Europe, China and East Asia and the Arab World

Detailed Programme

Monday 27 January 2014

09.00-09.15	**Registration**	Penthouse Conference Room
09.15-09.30	**Introduction and welcome**	Penthouse Conference Room
09.30-11.30	**Plenary I** – Arts and Politics **John Johnston, Goldsmiths College, University of London, UK** *When Words Fail* **Georgiana Nicoarea, University of Bucharest, Romania** *Cairo's Graffiti Goes Vit(tu)al: Facebook walls, their graffiti avenues and the afterlife* **Chair: Elena Barabantseva**	Penthouse Conference Room
11.30-12.00	**Coffee Break**	
12.00-13.30	**Panel 1** – *Understanding Citizen Participation* **Andrey Pavlov, Russian State University for the Humanities, Russia** *Discourses of Hatred in Russian Social Media, Civic Resistance and Anti-extremist Legislation: The Case of vk.com* **Jianfei Zhao, Zhejiang University of Media and Communications, P.R. China / University of Leeds, UK** *Full Swing of Commercialization, Twilight of Grassroots Creativity: An Alternative View on the Chinese Micro-movie Wave* **Sara Beretta, Università di Milano Bicocca, Italy** *Media Participation and Desiring Subjects* **Katarzyna Walasek, Jagiellonian University, Poland** *The Cursed Soldiers on our Streets: Citizen Media, the Case of Poland* **Chair: Diane Williams**	Penthouse Conference Room
13.30-14.30	**Lunch**	Restaurant
14.30-17.00	**Training Workshop: Theory and Methods** Luis Pérez-González, University of Manchester, UK *Theoretical and Methodological Perspectives on Citizen Media* **Chair: Gabi Hendry**	Penthouse Conference Room
18.00	**Conference Dinner**	Restaurant

Tuesday 28 January 2014

09.30-11.30	**Plenary II** - Protest and Resistance **Astrid Nordin, University of Lancaster, UK** *Ironic 'Resistance' in Chinese Citizen Media Online* **Evgenia Nim, Altai State University, Russia** *'Nanodemonstrations' as Media Events: Networked forms of the Russian Protest Movement* **Chair: Adi Kuntsman**	Penthouse Conference Room
11.30-12.00	**Coffee Break**	
12.00-13.30	**Panel 2** – *Exploring Research Tools* **Juli Rone, European University Institute in Florence, Italy** *The Silence of the Lambs: Researching 'Anonymous Bulgaria'* **Dounia Mahlouly & Filippo Trevisan, University of Glasgow, UK** *Googling for Heroes: Using Search Engine Accessory Tools to Study Political Turmoil in Egypt* **Dima Saber, Birmingham Centre for Media and Cultural Research, Birmingham City University, UK** *Checkdesk: Sorting, Developing and Disseminating Citizen Reporting in the MENA Region* **Adel Abdel Ghafar, The Centre for Arab and Islamic Studies, The Australian National University/ The American University in Cairo** *Social Media & Egyptian Activism After The January 25th Uprising: A Social Movement Theory Approach* **Chair: Neil Sadler**	Penthouse Conference Room
13.30-14.30	**Lunch**	Restaurant
14.30-16.00	**Panel 3** – *Looking for Interpretations* **Leigh Llewellyn Graham, Columbia University, US** Looking at 2013: A Revolutionary Year in the Saudi Twittersphere **Gillian Bolsover, Oxford Internet Institute, UK** *Using Cross-National Comparative Research to Study Citizen Media* **Lingjuan Fan, University of Manchester, UK** *Citizen Media as the Site of Post-humanitarian Action* **Galina Miazhevich, Leicester University, UK** *Online Political Satire as the Case of Civic Resistance in a Post-Soviet Space* **Chair: Rebecca Johnson**	Penthouse Conference Room

16.45-17.00	**Closing remarks** Mona Baker, Division of Languages & Intercultural Studies, University of Manchester	Penthouse Conference Room

Plenary Abstracts

When Words Fail

John Johnston, Goldsmiths College, University of London, UK

Each year on a given spring day, the towns, villages and cities of Israel stand still on the sound of a siren. In a precursor to the fireworks and celebrations of independence day or Palestinian 'Nakba' (Disaster Day), the state of Israel is remembering its war dead. Private and public transport comes to a stop when the siren sounds. Public spaces are adorned with the blue and white flags of Israel. The largest buildings of Tel Aviv and the highest hills that overlook the West Bank are dressed and coloured, utilized as visual props to proclaim the presence and some would say dominance of the state of within the region. Schools and other public institutions are expected to honor this moment of remembrance through closure or collective acts of reflection. But what of the 1.6 million Arabs who live within the political borders of Israel – do they fall quiet, do they close their shops and businesses as a mark of remembrance? This illustrated talk will follow the story of one school in the Arab town of Kafr Qara that sits firmly within the political borders of Israel. The presentation will explore the tensions between teachers, pupils and the community as they struggle to remain true to the school's identity as a place of bilingual and cross cultural learning. The workshop will explore how a small group of artist teachers from the UK worked with the pupils' teachers and families in an attempt to keep the school open through this highly charged and contested time. I will discuss the practical, ethical and political challenges that the project unearthed. With direct reference to 'citizen media' I will also examine how this form of art pedagogy acts as a tool for intervention against the commentary and often reactive nature of street art. I would like us to question the value of each form of intervention within the paradigm of resistance and political progression.

Cairo's Graffiti Goes Vit(tu)al: Facebook walls, their graffiti avenues and the afterlife

Georgiana Nicoarea, University of Bucharest, Romania

The graffiti of downtown Cairo has become one of the trademarks of the January 25 Revolution. What looked at first like an over-productive artistic practice appears to be fuelling, through its overwhelming presence, the construction of the revolution's imagery. Egyptian graffiti has travelled in various forms from real-life walls to Facebook walls and from there to official media and bookstores. This dynamic was initiated by what seemed to be a very natural step into virtual space where liberation graffiti accompanies citizen media and illustrates creative netizen activism. What can this journey tell us about the dynamics of Cairo's urban inscriptions? Can the virtual public's interaction with graffiti give more information about its outreach? Does this exposure help Cairo's graffiti go viral or just virtual? These are the key questions that will be addressed in this talk.

'Nanodemonstrations' as Media Events: Networked Forms of the Russian Protest Movement

Evgenia Nim, Altai State University, Russia

'Nanodemonstrations' first became part of the Russian protest movement in 2012. Originating in the northern town of Apatity, a wave of 'doll protests' – demonstrations and other citizen actions which were staged by using lego dolls and soft toys – swept over many Russian cities. Forbes Magazine included the nanodemonstrations which took place in the Siberian city of Barnaul in the list of 'the 12 loudest art protest actions in Russia'. The activists used social media to organise these actions; nanodemonstrations were planned as media events from the start. In my talk, I will attempt to apply different methodological approaches to the phenomenon of nanodemonstrations – from the theories of mediatisation of politics to the conceptions of contested urban spaces. My discussion will offer the potential theoretical models and frameworks that can be developed to analyse similar mediatised and theatrical forms of civil resistance.

Ironic 'Resistance' in Chinese Citizen Media Online

Astrid Nordin, University of Lancaster, UK

The 'online generation' of Chinese citizens, or 'netizens', have developed numerous strategies for criticizing and avoiding the heavy online censorship regime to which they are subjected. One aspect of the ironic ego culture of particular interest here is the play with homonymous or near-homonymous words that can help an individual evade censorship software whilst simultaneously critiquing and ridiculing this censorship. Where the methodology of previous scholarship has attempted to pin down this form of expression to mean only one thing (resistance to politics, Bakhtinian carnival), this presentation argues that what is methodologically most interesting about these homonyms is their undecidability as simultaneously either/or and neither/nor. Such a methodological approach can make us better appreciate the complexity of this aspect of Chinese citizen media beyond the resistance/not-resistance binary.

Workshop Abstract

Training Workshop: Theory and Methods

Theoretical and Methodological Perspectives on Citizen Media

Luis Pérez González, University of Manchester, UK

The first part of this workshop will deliver an overview of key theoretical approaches and conceptual networks driving current research on citizen media and different instances of self-mediation. Participants will then be introduced to a range of methods of data collection and analysis in the field, with particular emphasis on qualitative approaches. The final part of the session will involve an interactive discussion of two exploratory case studies illustrating different theoretical and methodological perspectives on the study of citizen media.

Panel Abstracts

Media Participation and Desiring Subjects

Sara Beretta, Università di Milano Bicocca, Italy

"Media participation" has been a growing phenomenon in China since the late 90's, from the "New Chinese Documentary" to *egao* and *shanzhai* videos on the Internet, from semi-journalistic reportages to satirical spoofs, up to cellflix sharing on social networks like *WeChat*. Such a wide range of products not only involves artists and professionals but also amateurs and citizens, delineating plural forms of participation and activism, a growing "public opinion", especially among the *wangmin* (Chinese netizens). In both urban and rural areas, videos and blogs empower citizens to narrate and express private and public matters, like the "citizen reporter", Zhou Shuguang (aka Zola), who became an Internet celebrity. Beyond the hidden transcripts, media participation and the communication market are often interlinked: social commentary, information and personal aspiration all play a role, between individualism and social responsibility. The State also shows a sort of ambivalence in this respect: commercial media and the Internet are considered to be both a resource and a threat at the same time, the desiring subjects are encouraged but also controlled. How are such activities related to off-line life? Along with online activism and participation, individualism, enjoyment and desire are core elements of production and consumption of media, especially video, as the growing number of amateur and personal videos produced with small, mobile devices seems to reveal. The case studies described can be regarded as citizen media because they are concerned with social issues - such as house demolition and urban alienation - taking part in public debates but from a subjective perspective. Due to their peculiar features, my fieldwork involves not only videos (Voci 2010) and websites (Hine 2000), but also daily practices (mainly in Shanghai and Beijing), involving media products and subjectivity (Ortner 2002). In so doing, what emerges is the relevance of aspiration (Appadurai 2011) and desire (Rofel 2007, Yan 2010) in both media and daily life.

Using Cross-National Comparative Research to Study Citizen Media

Gillian Bolsover, Oxford Internet Institute, UK

This talk will describe the importance of cross-national, comparative research using examples of my own work comparing online, political participation on microblogs and social networking sites in the US and China. These platforms are an important venue for citizens to exercise greater control over public opinion and the political agenda, particularly in China where more traditional media forms, such as print and radio, are tightly controlled by the government. This talk will comprise three sections. The first section will briefly introduce survey data collected online from the World Internet Values survey, illustrating differences in the use of traditional and citizen media by netizens in the West, China and the Middle East in order to justify why cross-national comparative research is important in this context. This section will explain the importance of comparative research, and the advantages and limitations of conducting cross-national analyses. In researching citizen media in an increasingly globalized world, cross-national comparisons are particularly useful for helping to investigate the ways in which existing theories might need to be modified to apply in non-Western contexts, and also to guard against the uncritical application of theories generated in the West in other contexts. Using an example from my own work, the second section will illustrate how cross-national comparative research can contribute to de-westernizing academic thought and generating new theories appropriate to non-Western contexts. This research addresses the question of whether existing theories of communication can be applied in the Chinese context or whether new theories of communication are necessary. Using comment data on news stories collected from Weibo and Facebook APIs, this research performed a content analysis of netizens comments in order to assess whether political speech on Weibo and Facebook aligns with traditionally understood differences between Chinese and Western styles of communication. The third section will lay out some of the difficulties associated with conducting cross-national comparative research of online citizen media, including accounting for demographic, social and cultural differences; conducting research in multiple languages, and choosing appropriate platforms and cases for comparison. I will outline some of the questions I have faced in developing my thesis project, which examines the potential of social networking sites and microblogs to reinforce and redistribute power in different political contexts, as well as the different options I considered in order to construct an appropriate comparative sample of online political power in the US and China.

Citizen Media as the Site of Post-humanitarian Action

Lingjuan Fan, University of Manchester, UK

Traditionally, humanitarianism has been restricted to Western countries, where citizens have witnessed the suffering of distant non-Westerners as 'ironic spectators' (Chouliaraki, 2013). Drawing on Chouliaraki's concepts, this presentation will examine to what extent the 'technologization of solidarity' is leading to the emergence and consolidation of 'post-humanitarianism' in the Chinese society. Zhu Ling's case stands as a perfect example and allows us to examine how the Internet has become a site for Chinese citizens to mobilize and aspire to achieve humanitarian goals. In 1994, Zhu Ling, a talented student at a top Chinese University, was intentionally poisoned twice with Thallium in her dormitory. She was miraculously saved thanks to the electronic correspondence between Zhu's classmates and medical experts based in Western countries, who were able to identify the cause of her illness through medical reports exchanged over the Internet. Although the police were able to identify the person responsible for Zhu's poisoning after the diagnosis, their investigation was soon suspended. Since 1995, netizens have been at the forefront of campaign against the perceived police indifference in this case. They have widely disseminated information through their 'Help ZHU Ling Foundation' site, online forums and social media. The presentation will focus on methodological challenges of application and adaptation of Western theories/concepts to the Chinese context. The talk will also address ethical considerations in handling personal information hacked by online activists for humanitarian purposes.

Social Media & Egyptian Activism After The January 25th Uprising: A Social Movement Theory Approach

Adel Abdel Ghafar, The Centre for Arab and Islamic Studies, The Australian National University/ The American University in Cairo.

There has been a growing body of research on the impact of social media on the 2011 Egyptian uprising, however much less attention has been given to grassroots activism since then. This presentation uses a social movement theory approach to investigate two case studies of causes that have utilized social media to advance their aims, namely, the 'No To Military Trials' campaign and the 'End Sexual Harassment' campaign. The presentation seeks to highlight the continued convergence between citizen media and activism potently conceptualized by Egyptian activist Hossam el Hamalawy who argues that 'in a dictatorship, independent journalism by default becomes a form of activism & the spread of information is essentially an act of agitation' (http://www.arabawy.org/) . Conceptually, the presentation uses the framing perspective of social movement theory to show how activists have used cognitive processes of reality construction to rally people around their respective causes. The presentation will argue that the effective use of Twitter hashtags, such as, #NoMilTrials and #EndSH have been successful in rallying support. Using the concepts of social movement *diffusion* and *spillover*, the presentation will aim to highlight how some activists from each cause inadvertently join the other cause, bringing with them their tactics and networks. Methodologically, this presentation uses data gathered on a fieldwork trip in Egypt (January – October 2013) which includes interviews with activists, as well as content analysis of news articles, tweets and hashtags. Twitter analytics tools such as Tweet Reach, Tweetbinder, Tweetcategory and Hashtracking, are used to assess the reach and impact of tweets and hashtags. In the same period, traditional media is researched to assess the convergence and divergence of related news stories, and the impact of citizen journalism in influencing traditional media. To that end, news stories in the independent Egyptian daily *Al Masry Al Youm*, related to both campaigns, are collated and content analysis of them is undertaken. The presentation aims to highlight two main limitations of the methodologies utilized. The first is that by interviewing activists and conducting content analysis of their tweets, activists themselves carry their own biases which would seep into their content, potentially causing distortions. The second is that assessing the impact of social media on mobilization and quantifying it can be problematic. By highlighting the methodology and its limitations, this presentation aims to critically assess, and engage with the attendees on, these methodological issues, considering how they can potentially be overcome.

Looking at 2013: A Revolutionary Year in the Saudi Twittersphere

Leigh Llewellyn Graham, Columbia University, US

In January 2013, thirty women were appointed to the Shura Council, Saudi Arabia's primary legislative body and highest legal authority under the king. The inauguration was memorialized on Twitter when an ultraconservative male cleric posted a misogynistic tweet about the female council members, calling them "prostitutes" as they entered the chambers. The tweet went viral. While the state remained silent, the Twittersphere responded with a backlash. This paper provides a year-in-review look at revolutionary developments within Saudi society through the lens of citizen tweets. Throughout 2013, political pushback continued online and was paralleled offline by sustained public conversation and significant legal action. In August, the kingdom passed its first domestic violence law and in October, an online campaign went offline when women defied the customary ban on women driving and got behind the wheel. Several female cyberactivists were detained and arrested; however, they were all eventually released. The campaign highlighted discontinuities between normative and legal behaviour and the need for education about Saudi citizens' rights and responsibilities under the law. Such events have drawn international attention and support from human rights organizations. However, few connections have been made between Twitter's role in public education and shifting legal and social practices in Saudi Arabia. Saudi Arabia has the highest penetration of active Twitter users in the world, accounting for 4.1 percent of global use. Twitter is a gallery of commentary on contemporary Saudi social issues. Women, in particular, have challenged longstanding exclusion from state politics through production of a vibrant body of online discourse. Social network sites such as Twitter, Facebook, and YouTube may be understood as curated public spaces, and online discourse therein may be approached as artifacts on display. *Online discourse as artifact* embodies a mashup of linguistic, visual, temporal and cultural meaning. Thus, it may be viewed as a product of material intercourse within a larger historical, materialist framework. This paper presents online ethnography as a tool to uncover such contemporary artifacts. If we situate a tweet as an artifact somewhere between object and performance, we can examine it on multiple levels. Different analytical approaches may be viable to help us make sense of the Internet's dynamic ecology as a locus of contemporary social life where cultural imagination is at play and political expression happens. By crafting new lenses of inquiry and challenging classic notions of "being there" and "doing fieldwork," this paper repositions ethnographic research in the digital age.

Googling for Heroes: Using Search Engine Accessory Tools to Study Political Turmoil in Egypt

Dounia Mahlouly and Filippo Trevisan, University of Glasgow, UK

This paper draws on ESRC comparative cross-country research (http://voterecology.com) of user behaviour to highlight the challenges and opportunities involved in using search engine accessory tools (Google Trends) to study the role of search as an alternative information source in times of political turmoil. While the use of social media during the Arab Spring has been at the centre of extensive scholarly scrutiny since 2011, there is still a dearth of work examining the role of search engines in these crises. Using data collected for a study of the impact of search on the political information environment in four different countries (the UK, the United States, Italy and Egypt), this paper addresses the particularity of the Egyptian case by examining search trends for key topics from the 2012 presidential election campaign until the 2013 post-revolutionary coup d'état. By setting the behaviour of search engine users in the context of Egypt's post-revolutionary media ecology, this study argues that Egypt's "wired" citizens used the Internet to develop their own informational agenda, escaping the frames imposed by the news media outlets and traditional political institutions. In particular, search records collected through Google Trends showed that Egyptian users were far more likely to search for information about political activists and protesters killed during the demonstrations than for content about politicians and institutions more generally. As the popularity of activists and revolution "martyrs" extended into social media platforms, where pages and hashtags dedicated to these figures became crucial nodes of online political discourse, this paper proposes a new approach to study the informational trajectories of key messages connected to large scale rebellions across different forms of mass media. Finally, this paper shows that user-generated content can influence news framing when "legacy" media seek to augment their credibility and legitimacy among citizens.

Online Political Satire as the Case of Civic Resistance in a Post-Soviet Space

Galina Miazhevich, Leicester University, UK

The democratizing power of the Internet has been at the heart of public debate since its advent. An optimistic viewpoint on the potential of the e-government and e-infrastructure (Rheingold, 1993) goes hand in hand with a more sceptical account (e.g. Morozov, 2011) about the democratizing potential of the information and communication technologies (ICT). This study investigates whether the Internet can be turned into an effective tool for democratization and civic mobilization in a context in which differentials in power relations are particularly acute (the former Soviet Union). It offers the first three-way comparative study of new media's democratizing potential in three post-Soviet states – Russia, Ukraine and Belarus. They can be extremely informative about the usage of new media and its democratic potential in transitional societies. Even more so, as they have embarked on diverging political pathways: Belarus is an authoritarian dictatorship; the Ukraine is an aspiring democracy, which can potentially be taken over by a creeping authoritarianism and the Russian state with its 'virtual democracy'. Insights into the potential of social media in these countries for fostering civic engagement and social change, as well as the limitations to that potential, can be gained from investigating *how citizens in these countries use, produce and relate to the political satire online*. The issues of broader concern are: whether the Internet will be able to fill the democratic gap in transitional semi/authoritarian states and whether it can challenge the norm of government control and self-censorship? A number of methodological challenges encountered during my research include: an ephemerality of the data (most of the cases of online political satire I discuss are no longer on the web); difficulty in establishing popularity of the cases; tracing the sources from where the political satire emerges, and associated ethical issues (endangering activists, etc.).

Discourses of Hatred in Russian Social Media, Civic Resistance and Anti-extremist Legislation: The Case of vk.com

Andrey Pavlov, Russian State University for the Humanities, Russia

Social media plays a key role in the process of users' self-identification and creates situational or stable forms of their solidarity. Over the last decade, social media in Russia has been increasingly deployed as a tool of civic and political mobilization, including protest movements and a vast range of non-institutional projects. At the same time, networking mobilization frequently goes hand in hand with various types of verbal and visual aggression against different groups of "others" and "enemies". Such aggression may be traditionally defined as hate speech or, more precisely, as discourses of hatred. While hate speech in Russian off-line media and other institutional formats of public communication was restricted, so called "Runet" (the Russian-language internet) carried on unrestricted for a long time. In more recent years, however, the enforcement of anti-extremist and anti-separatist legislation has led to increasing online censorship in Russia. The most popular - and the most prosecuted - social networking site in Russia is *vk.com*, a local version of Facebook, with a similar design and functions. *Vk.com* is used, not only by civic activists, but also by different extremist forces. My presentation will use *vk.com* to examine several empirical and methodological issues with regards to on-line citizen participation in Russia, by addressing the following questions: Which main hate groups recruit there and which groups are victimized? What types of political and cultural conflicts are implied by digital hatred? Which cases of mediatised hate speech are prosecuted by Russian authorities and which remain invisible to them? Finally, how should we distinguish between extremist discourses of hatred and civic resistance in social media? Some samples of digital hatred will be analyzed in order to answer these questions, as well to discuss the applicability of critical discourse analysis as conceptualized by T. van Dijk – a notion of discourse to reveal, primarily off-line, language and social practices of discrimination – for studies of internet hatred. Drawing on N. Fraser's notion of public sphere opposition and counter publics and L. Gudkov's ideas of negative identity and negative mobilization, I will propose some possible explanatory models for a correlation between hate speech and Russian networking activism.

The Silence of the Lambs: Researching 'Anonymous Bulgaria'

Juli Rone, European University Institute in Florence, Italy

What is it like to enter a chat room and realise that all participants are changing their nick-names to variations of 'silent lamb' as a reaction to your appearance? And then to have a two-hour conversation with *silentlamb, stilenlamb, siletlamb, silenlamb, Silentlamb, stilenlabm* and a series of bots? What is it like to be constantly suspected as a police agent while trying to do qualitative interviewing? In my presentation, I would like to discuss the challenges of researching *Anonymous Bulgaria* and its involvement in the initial phase of protests in the country (June, 2013). I pay particular attention to issues of sampling respondents from an organization which is at the same time incredibly open, un-hierarchical and secretive. How did I approach people from *Anonymous* and what kind of power imbalances were created by disclosing my personal information to respondents who remained anonymous? How was trust built in a completely digital environment? In addition, I will focus on the ethical challenges of doing research on subversive hacking and the fine balance between empathy as approval and empathy as understanding. Most importantly, I will discuss the hostility of *Anonymous Bulgaria*, not only to traditional audio-visual and print media, but also to established public intellectuals and bloggers. Has the end of Web 2.0 come? And can *Anonymous* move beyond hacking and establish a more open and democratic model of information sharing? By analyzing the ways in which the group used Facebook pages and different online forums to shame public intellectuals and the whole NGO sector, I will try to show how the very notions of 'civil society' and 'citizen media' are undergoing a critical transformation in an atmosphere of radicalized suspicion.

Checkdesk: Sorting, Developing and Disseminating Citizen Reporting in the MENA Region

Dima Saber, Birmingham Centre for Media and Cultural Research, Birmingham City University, UK

As the Arab region continues to face political, social and economic uncertainty, social media and citizen journalism have come to the forefront as a means for organising social movements that challenge existing powers and protest for social change. Although the 2011 uprisings have demonstrated how new information and communication technologies can provide an effective channel for dissent, Arab citizens still need support to establish practices of evidence-based journalism, limit the effects of rumors and misinformation, and play a more effective role in the democratisation of political communication. While there is a consensus among media scholars that advancements in technology have opened up a new kind of "participatory citizenry", where civic participation is enhanced by media and information literacy (Culver & Jacobson, 2012), effective citizen participation in the Arab world still needs a stronger culture of critical enquiry if governments are to become more accountable, and citizens more informed. This is particularly true amid setbacks to democratic transitions that have challenged assumptions about the effectiveness of online publishing in aiding democratic change, especially in countries like Egypt and Syria. This presentation examines how the Birmingham Centre for Media and Cultural Research, partnered with *Meedan*, and six Arab media outlets in Lebanon, Syria, Egypt, Jordan and Palestine aiming to improve awareness of issues relating to media literacy among citizen journalists in the MENA region. My talk will present the logical matrix that was set-up for the overall assessment of the project with specific quantitative and qualitative indicators of achievement. While it was relatively easy to design a quantitative monitoring and evaluation framework based on background data of the Arab citizen journalism landscape (demographics of internet users, penetration rates, devices citizens use and average amount of time they spend online), the assessment of overall objectives, such as the level of awareness in issues related to media literacy, or the improvement of critical thinking in news media consumption, required a more in-depth, qualitative evaluation (one-to-one interviews, focus groups, pre and post training surveys). This presentation will explore both methodological approaches by looking at the work undertaken by BCMCR and its partners over the course of two years, supporting and training the region's next generation of transparency advocates.

The Cursed Soldiers on our Streets: Citizen Media, the Case of Poland

Katarzyna Walasek, Jagiellonian University, Poland

In 1989, as part of the post-communist transformation in Poland, the most important national holiday, National Independence Day - celebrated on 11th November to commemorate the establishment of The Second Polish Republic - was restored. From that moment, Poland and the Poles have begun to slowly revive the national past. New museums have emerged, such as the Museum of the Warsaw Uprising and the Museum of the Home Army and The Institute of National Remembrance was created. Since 1989, Polish society as a whole, and young people in particular, began discussing topics previously banned under the communist rule. This presentation is part of a broader field of memory, remembrance and commemoration in Eastern Europe. In Poland, and elsewhere in the region, no homogeneous culture of remembrance exists; rather, memory of the past is a field of rapid changes and constant negotiation. I will argue that discussing the past is not merely a matter of memory, but that by discovering their past, Poles are also building the present. My presentation looks at one example of such building of the present: the symbolic return of the "Cursed soldiers", that is, the soldiers of the Anti-communist resistance in Poland. The commemoration of the Cursed soldiers in today's Poland takes place largely due to the efforts of non-professional, ordinary citizens. My presentation will discuss one important site of the soldiers' commemoration through citizen action: graffiti in the streets of Polish cities. I approach the soldiers' commemoration using Jan Assmann's concept of *communication memory*. According to Assmann, *communicative memory* is shared and conveyed within a social group defined by common memories of personal interaction through the means of verbal communication over a time span of only about 80 years. Poland's grandchildren were told stories about the Anti-communist resistance by their grandparents, which they used to understand their own belonging. Listening to the stories was also a means to encourage the generation of their parents to talk aloud about formerly forbidden topics. In my analysis of the graffiti, I will argue that citizen media is a site where communicative memory is visualized in the public space.

Full Swing of Commercialization, Twilight of Grassroots Creativity: An Alternative View on the Chinese Micro-movie Wave

Jianfei Zhao, Zhejiang University of Media and Communications, P.R. China / University of Leeds, UK

A micro-movie is a type of participatory video, produced by private citizens (or 'grassroots' as they are called in China) and distributed on the internet. The term 'micro-movie' first emerged in December, 2010 on the Chinese Internet and was used as a marketing tool by a car firm to advertise its new products. This flexible term quickly spread to include short films, flash mobs and other short-length videos shown on video-sharing websites. It has now become a form of mature cultural industry, an internet cultural wave, and is involved in various areas of influence: professional film workers, grassroots creativity, audience, industry and government. Some news reports and research discuss and analyse the formalization and commercialization of the micro-movie optimistically. They base these analyses on industry circumstance and filmmakers' individual career development. However, in my opinion, the process of formalization and commercialization of the micro-movie could ultimately mean the end of grassroots creativity. In my presentation, I suggest that we need to change the focus of analysis from industry and filmmakers to the actual contents of the micro-movies. By surveying how the content of micro-movies has changed during recent years, I argue that challenges to the official ideology and mainstream aesthetic are declining. This change in content could reflect certain questions relating to the micro-movie industry. Firstly, how does the capital's ambiguous imagination of audience influence their investment? Secondly, will the tighter government supervision of internet video suppress the boom of the micro-movie? What is their attitude and strategy? Thirdly, has the motivation of profit under the tight regulations of the Chinese government meant that all micro-movie makers and video-sharing websites are developing a form of self-censorship that is even more restrictive than that imposed by the Chinese government? Will grassroots creativity decline under such forms of self-censorship? Methodologically, my presentation will make a horizontal comparison between micro-movies and underground films. I will suggest that the six generations of directors and their movies lost most creativity during the process of formalization and commercialization, while the Chinese film industry seems to be more and more prosperous.

Delegate List

Abdel Ghafar, Adel	The Centre for Arab and Islamic Studies, The Australian National University/ The American University in Cairo.
Baker, Mona	Centre for Translation & Intercultural Studies, University of Manchester, UK
Beretta, Sara	Università di Milano Bicocca, Italy
Bolsover, Gillian	Oxford Internet Institute, UK
Butler, Lauren	Rochdale Law Centre, Manchester, UK
Chang, Li-Wen	Centre for Translation & Intercultural Studies, University of Manchester, UK
Li, Dang	Centre for Translation & Intercultural Studies, University of Manchester, UK
Fan, Lingjuan	Centre for Translation & Intercultural Studies, University of Manchester, UK
Goea, Teodora	School of Social Sciences, University of Manchester, UK
Graham, Leigh	Columbia University, US
Hendry, Gabi	Centre for Translation & Intercultural Studies, University of Manchester, UK
Hernández, Tania	Centre for Translation & Intercultural Studies, University of Manchester, UK
Jakimow, Malgorzata	School of Social Sciences, University of Manchester, UK
Johnson, Rebecca	Centre for Translation & Intercultural Studies, University of Manchester, UK
Johnston, John	Goldsmith's College, University of London, UK
Kuntsman, Adi	Department of Anthropology and Research Institute for Cosmopolitan Cultures The University of Manchester, UK
Miazhevich, Galina	Leicester University, UK
Mahouly, Dounia	University of Glasgow, UK
Nicoarea, Georgiana	University of Bucharest, Romania
Nim, Evgenia	Altai State University, Russia
Nordin, Astrid	University of Lancaster, UK
Pavlov, Andrey	Russian State University for the Humanities, Russia
Pérez González, Luis	Centre for Translation & Intercultural Studies, University of Manchester, UK
Rone, Juli	European University Institute in Florence, Italy

Saber, Dima	Birmingham Centre for Media and Cultural Research, Birmingham City University, UK
Sadler, Neil	Centre for Translation & Intercultural Studies, University of Manchester, UK
Walasek, Katarzyna	Jagiellonian University, Poland
Williams, Diane	Centre for Translation & Intercultural Studies, University of Manchester, UK
Yusupova, Marina	Russian and European Studies, University of Manchester, UK
Zhao, Jianfei	Zhejiang University of Media and Communications, P.R. China