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What's "positive" during Shanghai's Lockdown for COVID-19? Authoritarianism, Collectivism, and Constructive Journalism in China

Authors

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Abstract

In public crises like the breakouts of COVID-19, to "combat the proliferation of misinformation and the impact of negative news", positive journalism such as constructive journalism and solution-oriented journalism is usually emphasized (Antwerpen et al., 2022). Due to the difference in ideology and political system, the definition of such positive journalism in China is typical, and so do its corresponding connotations. In recent years, it has been named "*ZhengNengLiang*" (literally referring to "positive energy"), which is considered a term that is difficult to match perfectly with any existing concept of journalism. Because relevant academic investigations in China often paid attention to state-owned media (e.g. Le, 2021), their results more likely reflected the ideological requirements of the authority rather than public awareness.

From March to June 2022, citizens of Shanghai encountered an unprecedented outbreak of COVID-19. To curb the outbreak, harsh lockdown measures were implemented following the "Zero-COVID" policy, and people's daily activities were thus restricted inside their communities (Nam et al., 2022). These policies indeed led to several social problems such as the inconvenience of everyday life and individuals' mental health symptoms. Thus, publicity of state-owned media was not enough to alleviate such problems, several non-professionals or semi-professionals were employed as the content producers of "*ZhengNengLiang*". These grass-roots individuals consisted of a wider population and did not necessarily rely on the government's payment. The audience was also more engaged because such content was a topic of widespread concern. These enabled us to explore people's understanding of "*ZhengNengLiang*" in a more general manner.

Therefore, this study aims to take Shanghai's lockdown as an example to clarify the connotations of "*ZhengNengLiang*" and its effects on the audience. Adopting grounded theory, semi-structured in-depth interviews with 15 practitioners of community media were conducted, and 3016 valid subjective questionnaires were collected from participants who were on behalf of the audience. All materials were coded by applying thematic analysis. It is found that producers tended to emphasize adherence to mainstream ideology, upholding opinion climate in communities, and promoting neighborly mutual assistance. Audiences' understandings of it were partially in line with the producers', but they put practicality as the priority.

These findings resonate with some established theories like constructive journalism. However, China's political system and cultural tradition make communication during crises more complex. Content producers tend to first consider "political correctness" and their own "political

security", even if they do not rely on authoritarian funding. By comparison, most audiences still pay more attention to their immediate interests. Therefore, it is discussed why such patterns are found in terms of the authoritarianism tradition of China. We suggest policymakers provide grass-roots content producers more room to create "*ZhengNengLiang*" content with more practical significance. Also, we hope that this study can provide more empirical materials to facilitate scholars to better understand how positive journalism works in China.

Key Words

ZhengNengLiang, COVID-19, health communication, constructive journalism, participatory journalism, community communication

Why state matters? Media trust and institutional trust in authoritarian China

Authors

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Abstract

For a long time, the main results of media trust studies have focused on democratic countries based on liberal democracy, but in authoritarian countries, the media is subordinated to the state and parties and is an instrument of their governing. Therefore, the concept and connotation of media trust in authoritarian states should present a different situation from that in democracies. This distinction has not been taken seriously by researchers, and this paper is devoted to answering the question of how media trust is understood in authoritarian states.

The results of the mainstream media trust research, i.e., the media trust scale design（Meyer,1988; Gaziano & McGrath, 1986; Yale et al., 2015）, reflect the media system and social culture in which researchers and audiences are embedded, and they all point to one empirical result: what determines media trust is the content of media releases. Researchers arguing that "Virtually all research on news media trust and news media credibility in fact shares an understanding that what matters is trust in the information coming from news media, although that is not always sufficiently mirrored in the measurements used"(Strömbäck et al., 2020).

The mainstream research path has resulted in a systematic neglect of the state, and it's not appropriate for authoritarian states, where the relationship between politics and journalism tends to be closer, where partisan media practices are the core business of journalism, and where journalism is more likely to be under direct control from politics.

In China, for example, the issue of the relationship between the party newspaper and the party organization has been resolved since 1942, when the Jiefang Daily was reformed and the party newspaper came under the party's management, and then all of China's official media carried the attributes of party media. As a result, a large number of Chinese researchers argue that audiences trust the media primarily out of trust in the party and government, rather than the media's own charisma.

This paper introduces institutional trust to explain the problem of media trust in authoritarian states. Institutional trust points to the extent to which audiences recognize the media system, which encompasses the ownership relationship between the state and the media and a set of control policies that reflect the actual association between the state and the media. We therefore focus on the association between institutional trust and media trust.

Why not choose the more academically productive political trust to study this issue? First, political trust is more distant from the interpretation of media trust, and while the two may be related in

quantitative results, there is a gulf in interpretation. In contrast, institutional trust more accurately describes the relationship between the state and the media. Second, past research has shown that there is a stubbornness of reluctance on the part of audiences who will not directly admit in interviews and questionnaires that they will give trust to the media because of their political rank. Direct questioning is likely to yield no real conclusions, so this paper abandons the use of political trust.

Three works were carried out in this paper.

Work 1: In addition to journalism studies, a large number of sociological studies and psychological studies have focused on trust issues and they have a greater understanding of the sources of trust. We need to have a summary of these results in a typological sense to see more clearly the relative position of media trust research in journalism studies, as well as the shortcomings, from an external perspective.

Work 2: We conducted a questionnaire survey in China, in which we used meyer's scale with direct questions to measure media trust, while taking institutional trust into account to examine their relationship.

This work suggests that institutional trust is a core component of media trust in China, and that audience affirmation of media content is not as important as institutional trust. This work also yielded other interesting findings that we will not expand on due to word limits.

Work 3: We argue that media trust studies centered on liberal democracies form a neglect of authoritarian states and that we need to re-anchor media trust studies of authoritarian states from conceptualization to operationalization.

It is worth noting, however, that the relationship between politics and media in different countries and systems is continuous, that past research is not entirely unacceptable, and that a renewed understanding of media trust in authoritarian states needs to critically draw on past research findings.

Key Words
media trust, credibility, Institutional trust, state

Fictionalising power, naturalising conspiracy: Right-wing 'identity journalism' and illiberalism in Poland

Authors

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Abstract

This paper examines right-wing 'identity journalism' in Poland as an actor in the illiberal turn that has been unfolding since the ascent to power of the Law and Justice (PiS) party in 2015. 'Identity journalism' is an emic term invented by right-wing journalists in Poland to describe journalism explicitly geared towards constructing identities and strengthening communities. Unlike other forms of journalism, conservative identity journalism stakes no claims to factuality, neutrality or objectivity: for 'identity journalists', news is less about providing well-researched, veritable information than about amplifying ideas and views that integrate and mobilise conservative communities while reinforcing their sense of righteousness and belonging. Taking an epistemic view on illiberalism as the erosion in a society of the shared perception of reality whose collapse, in turn, enables assaults on democratic values, principles and institutions, the paper zooms in on the role of 'identity journalism' in creating for its audiences a version of reality that is empirically inaccurate but politically potent for PiS.

Empirically, I study the coverage by identity-journalistic media of grassroots actions by minoritised groups against their oppression, which has been intensifying under the PiS's rule. The initiatives in question are: 1) the *Don't Call Me 'Murzyn'* campaign launched by the Afro-Polish community against racism ingrained in the Polish language; 2) the *Stop Bzdurom* queer collective and its struggle for LGBTQ+ rights; and 3) the *All-Poland Women's Strike* movement and its fight for full reproductive rights. Methodologically, I approach identity journalism using the Foucauldian formulation of 'power/knowledge', whereby power relations are seen as supporting and supported by particular types of knowledge.

The paper uncovers that identity journalism upholds the illiberal power exercised by PiS by producing 'knowledge' that, on the one hand, inverts the actual power relations between the privileged majority and the oppressed minoritised groups, and, on the other, naturalises an imagined conspiracy against conservative values and 'traditional' lifestyles. Consequently, identity journalism generates a version of reality in which Poland – the community of 'us' purposefully restricted to conservative, nationalist, and Catholic communities – is continuously under attack by various 'them'. The conspiratorial forces range from the liberal elites within Poland to Putin's Russia to EU institutions, and use minoritised groups inside the country as their pawns. This sense of existential threat works to justify the illiberal mode of governance – as if in a permanent state of exception to democratic values and procedures – practised by PiS.

Key Words

Construction and Differentiation of Identity: Transnational Digital Hashtag Activism in Southeast Asia from a Post-authoritarian Perspective

Authors

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Abstract

Super digital platforms, such as Twitter and Facebook, are reshaping the global media environment. Digital platforms are not only the physical embodiment of the network society, but also the infrastructure for the organization and connection of digital actors. Using hashtags as a link, activists around the world launched numerous digital campaigns across borders. The existing studies, mostly derived from the internal experience of developed countries, argue for the implications of the digital activism in the birth of counter public, and directly state its value in promoting global consultative democracy. However, if examining digital hashtag activism in post-authoritarian countries from a "transnational perspective", diverse forms of aggregation and differentiation of digital user identity in a wide range of countries and regions will be perceived, thus adding a different contextualized cognitive experience of global social media campaigns.

This paper takes *Milk Tea Alliance,* an online social campaign on Twitter, as the research object. *#MilkTea Alliance* was one of the main Twitter hashtags used for online social gatherings in Hong Kong, Thailand, and Myanmar from April 2020 to July 2021. By applying python, a total of 8,760 items were collected from Twitter users with the hashtag *#MilkTea Alliance* on four random days each month between April 2020 and April 2021 as research samples. Researchers then explored their connections and users' identity construction mode under the digital tag *#MilkTea Alliance* in East Asia and Southeast Asia, by means of co-occurrence network and content analysis.

It is found that *#MilkTea Alliance* was embedded with the political issues of different countries with a "logic of connectivity", along with the room for diversified identification. In Hong Kong, the "# Milk Tea Alliance", in combination of the subculture topic with the discourse featuring "China threat", formed the alliance of an anti-China identity recognized by young people in Hong Kong, Taiwan, Thailand, among other places. In Thailand, participants conducted demonstrations by sending messages and pictures online, with discourse going beyond collective feelings of nationalism to underscore liberal ideology including freedom and democracy. In Myanmar, a lack of overall recognition of the identity at nationalistic level left people with no better choice but to build a defensive identity for their protests and actions by combining local symbols with political values. In this process, the transnational digital hashtag activism has transformed from the

recognition of a region-based subcultural identity to political identity to region-based defensive identity, finally giving rise to a "hybrid connective action" formed by discourse junction.

The findings of this paper confirm the existence of coordination and the differentiation of political identity in transnational digital hashtag activism campaign between post-authoritarian countries. The global digital platform, together with the mobile digital culture following its birth not only created the feasibility of gatherings at any time by participants, but also opened the possibility of identity differentiation. The hashtag, *#MilkTea Alliance* first emerged from the recognition of a transnational identity based on consumer culture of Generation Z but receded to the recognition of defensive identity characterized by localized political discourse in Thailand and Myanmar. It highlighted the strength of campaigners in promoting their identity on a global and local scale against the backdrop of the digital age. In addition, the evolution of the hashtag framework shown in *#MilkTea Alliance* enables us to reflect on the justice of digital hashtag activism from the perspective of post-authoritarian countries. The identification of digital hashtag activism in post-authoritarian countries almost all falls into the category of what Manuel Castells calls "defensive identification", with no progressive value at the level of democratic deliberation. The unstable instant connections created by digital hashtags make the collective and private emotional space visible to all, but fail to be incorporated into the discourse and institutional track to solve substantive problems because of their capriciousness. This paper holds the view that a reasonable destination for social campaigns fundamentally depends on the ability of the state to institutionalize social conflicts in general. Only when social conflicts are fully institutionalized in the construction of media platforms and the viewpoints of all sides in society are brought into the orbit of institutionalized operation, can the functioning of society be guaranteed.

Living in disrupted media world: patterns of media usage in post-war environment in Russia

Authors

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Abstract

After the 24th of February the Russian media landscape was confronted with considered as dramatic changes. Major changes are related with activities and decisions of Russian authorities adjusting the public sphere in Russia toward the state of the "military times":

- Russian authorities blocked an access to high number of alternative and opposition news outlets.

- Some of them has been closed as organizations (like TV Rain and Echo Moskvy) and finally either expulsed from country or incited to re-organize themselves as YouTube channels or Telegram channels.

- Russian authorities recognized Meta extremist organization and consequently Facebook and Instagram have been recognized as prohibited organization and the access to them also has been blocked.

- Roskomnadzor (Russian Internet watchdog) blocked also an access to some foreign media outlets (like BBC or DW).

Such changes can see as pushing the parallel institutionalized public sphere (Kiriya, 2012) toward non-institutionalized. But in addition to such promoted state policies a numerous changes can be observed due to sanctions and personal decisions of foreign companies:

- YouTube as Facebook, Instagram etc. ceased the monetization on the territory of Russian Federation which means shrinking the financial possibilities of alternative media in Russia.

- International payments services (Visa, Mastercard, Paypal) suspended services of Russian cards on foreign territories as well as foreign cards in Russia. It disrupted ability of Russians to pay foreign platforms as well as to pay foreign based services (such as Google, Zoom, Apple etc.).

- Some software foreign companies decided to leave Russia and suspended the acceptance of Russian payments for the support and renewal of cloud services (Microsoft, Canva, Adobe etc.) which disrupted ability to create professional media content.

As a result, the everyday life of quasi-all Russians has been affected. Finally, we are confronted with very interesting phenomenon: media policy in times of war due to huge mediatization of everyday life (Hepp, 2019), affects very large number of domains. Such domains we are describing in terms of practices. By media practices we mean everyday activities and routines of media consumption (Steele, Brown, 1995) and are basing our research on observations mixed with interviews.

We may see that observed changes are affecting not only the access to information and self-expression, it's also entertaining practices, cultural practices, transport and e-commerce practices, interpersonal communication practices etc. As a result, we propose the term "disrupted media world". In such a world people are using tactics in order to circumvent repressive strategies of State policy and corporations (De Certeau, 1984). In a situation of very contradictory policies finally such practices serve to avoid any kind of regulations and subvert them. As a result, it could be regarded as emblematic case of neo-authoritarian regimes in times of war.

Key Words
media practices, war, Russia, Ukraine, blockages, disruption, circumvention, mediatization, censorship

Adaptation to Authoritarianism: A Case Study on Nonprofit Journalism in China

Authors

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Abstract

While mainstream journalism in democratic contexts are struggling with business model collapse and fail to fully produce public service journalism, a group of nonprofit newsrooms were established in the past decade to fill the gap. Operated in nonprofit way, these news media aim at providing public service and their news reporting has promoted public understandings on various social issues in democratic life. However, scholarship on nonprofit journalism under authoritarianism is still limited. How can nonprofit news media survive with limited press freedom and, at the same time, keep their public service commitment? To answer this question is not only empirically significant to help nonprofit news practitioners to enhance their public service role under authoritarianism but also theoretically meaningful to facilitate a nuanced understanding on journalism in authoritarian contexts.

This research, as one part of my PhD project, takes the largest authoritarian country, China, as a focus and conducts a comparative news analysis on three news media - China Dialogue (nonprofit journalism), Beijing News (commercial journalism) and People Daily (party journalism) - to explore how nonprofit journalism can promote environmental accountability in China. The latter two are chosen since they represent the mainstream journalism in China. Through framing analysis and critical discourse analysis, this study finds that, firstly, China Dialogue can provide more plural views and news topics about China's environmental issues than the other two news media. This includes giving voices to marginalizing social groups such as environmental NGOs, paying more attention to neglecting environmental issues, and emphasizing the controversy around China's environmental performance. It is found that while covering international issues such as climate change, China Dialogue has the space to challenge China's responsible image built by its propaganda apparatus, which is uncommon for today's domestic environmental discussions in China given its stringent media environment and rampant patriotic nationalism sentiment. Secondly, I find that constructive journalism is adopted by China Dialogue as a way to mitigate its adversarial attitude towards the authority and, despite its critical news reporting on China's environmental issues, the media hardly touches on China's political problems. These two strategies are key for China Dialogue to survive under Xi's governance with intolerance of critical voices from outside and bottom. Ultimately, this study argues that, regardless of its apolitical news reporting, China Dialogue, as a nonprofit newsroom that successfully survive in today's China, has positively contributed to China's green public sphere and this public service role cannot be replaced by Chinese mainstream journalism.

Key Words

Reform or Hidden Revolution? Tech Business and Politic Economy in Contemporary China

Authors

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Abstract

In 1971, Dallas Smythe arrived in China, where he was aware of the conflict between two concurrent but incompatible modes of conceiving technology in China. Under Mao's leadership, China developed a distinctive voluntarist conception of technology, considering the revolutionary class (the proletariat) as the most potent productive force while politicizing the function of technology per se. The liberals, on the other side (i.e., the later reformists), regarded technology as apolitical and in itself constitutes the driving force of so-called 'development'.

To conclude, in post-socialist contemporary China, the meaning of science and technology is very different from that of the Mao era: in the distant revolutionary era, science and technology were weapons in the hands of the militant working class. For example, one always sees the image of the "hammer in the hand of the worker" in the revolutionary era, which makes people easily associate an image of rude workers trying to violently hammer or smash something. This was also the most common cultural symbol of communism. However, contemporary China generally continues to perpetuate Deng Xiaoping's de-radicalizing discourse on technology, and continues to characterize technology in government documents and media propaganda as a neutral, objective, first productive force that drives social development.

This study synthesizes existing research on the relationship between (1) science and technology and (2) political and economic institutional reform in China. As a result, we argue that on the one hand, the established literature extensively adopts a Deng Xiaoping-style approach to analyze the technology and reform process in contemporary China. This part has extensively analyzed empirically the relationship between China's technology development and economic processes, such as the coupling of state institutional regulatory policies and technology commercialization, and the mutual advancement of digital platform construction and national cultural diplomacy strategies. On the other hand, this study also pays attention to another important part of the current studies of Chinese politics of technology, which is mostly located in the field of political economy and critical studies, and advocates an ideological analysis and a more radical approach to the relationship between science and politics in authoritarian China. This division is keenly aware of the revolutionary mythological narrative hidden within China's supposedly objective technological process, a narrative that pervades technology companies, local and central governments, and the media as a whole. Beyond that, these studies point out that it's not just on a cultural level, but is permeating the overall technological process - the use of QR codes, facial recognition and artificial intelligence, the construction of digital platforms, etc.

This study aims to integrate the above two types of research, namely the extensive empirical findings and the critical analysis process, in order to propose a new theoretical framework - a revolutionary Maoist analysis posture towards technological and national development in contemporary China, to continue Dallas Smythe's focus on technology China. Also, we would like to compare the China situation with the popular contemporary Western studies of the spirit of Silicon Valley and capitalist development.

Key Words

Technology commercialization, technological post-authoritarianism, contemporary Chinese reform, ideological analysis

Lest we forget': History as a legitimation tool in Zimbabwean presidential campaign rhetoric

Authors

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Abstract

Zimbabwe's presidential political rhetoric since independence in 1980 has largely remained entangled in the discourse of colonial memory. The qualitative study on which this paper is based interrogates *continuities and changes* of colonial memory rhetoric by two Zimbabwean leaders, President Emmerson Mnangagwa and his predecessor, Robert Mugabe. This paper investigates the role of colonial memory in political rhetoric in contemporary Zimbabwean politics in a context where socio –economic inequalities and political polarisation is reported as excessive. The paper aims at broadening our knowledge on how African political parties remain entangled in the past in their endeavour to influence public opinion and sustain their political hegemony in face of dissent. More so, the paper is focused on investigating challenges faced by the media in shaping and influencing presidential rhetoric beyond their normative role. The study summons Maurice Halbwach's (1950, 1952) politics of memory theory to locate the appropriation of mediated rhetoric - how it sustains or counters colonial memory in Zimbabwe African National Union Patriotic Front (ZANU PF) politics. A corpus of selected broadcast electoral campaign speeches by the two leaders is subjected to qualitative content analysis (Schreirer 2012) to extract data from the speeches. This paper presents an analysis of these speeches from a Critical Discourse Analytic (CDA) perspective to understand how colonial memory, at a discursive level, aids our understanding of power contestation in African politics among the global community of nations. Crucially, the paper appropriates cultural studies to explore the operationalisation of political communication in an African context to demonstrate how collective memory discourse is a site of power contestation, inequalities, violence, marginalisation and political polarisation. The paper concludes that media are manipulated to influence politics of memory in a selective manner to suit the status quo. Colonial memory is significant to articulate power contestation in Zimbabwean body politic. In such a context, social inequalities exist without being given much needed attention for a just and equal society. Its key contribution is not only an illustration of the significance of cultural cognitive and developmental debates to examine our cultural capacity, "to live a thousand kinds of life" (Geertz 1973) but also an attempt to reshape the specific kind of political communication research approaches appropriate for the local people.

Key Words

Colonial memory, political rhetoric, politics of memory, Zimbabwe

IDEOLOGICAL USE OF IMAGES AND UR-FASCISM IN BRAZIL

Authors

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Abstract

The main objective of the article is to discuss how political forces in Brazil sought, for the last years, through the ideological use of images, provoke the irruption of contents from the imaginary (DURAND, 1996) and cause identification of part of the population with ur-fascism (ECO, 2018), facilitating its eruption in collective behavior and feeding back this movement. According to Umberto Eco (2018), ur-fascism, which can also be called eternal fascism, is the set of values connected with this form of thinking that is latently part of human psych and that, opportunely, when it finds political and social correspondence and identification, can manifest itself collectively. The author uses the expression archetypes when referring to these factors, which brings us closer to the thinking of C.G. Jung (2018), who defines them as psychic imagery forces connected with the instincts that, when denied of their existence and creative expression, end up gaining strength in the unconscious until the moment they appear in individual and collective behavior, leading populations to true psychic epidemics, phenomenon that is also connected with the establishment of mass culture and behavior (MORIN, 2007). Pier Paolo Pasolini (2018) describes, in the 1960s, the existence of a disguised fascism, whose presence we cannot easily detect and which we can usually only see during the eruption of literal behaviors that tend to appear violently, causing irreversible damage. With these ideas as a background, our investigation is of a qualitative nature and analyzes images used in digital media by some politicians recognized as having clear inclinations to stablish far right-wing movements and a possible totalitarian government system in Brazil. Our hypothesis is that for at least the last five years, Brazilian social and political scenario clearly shows the functioning of this mechanism described by Eco, Jung and Morin, as well as confirms Pazzolini's idea that, if we do not act in a prophylactic way, we will realize too late that fascism has taken over the behavior of a large part of the population, opening the possibility for the establishment of totalitarian mechanisms, even if this is exercised in a disguised way, for example trough social media. Our findings show that the use of images that connect directly with ur-fascism values seems to be a well though strategy to manipulate the collective way of thinking and behavior with totalitarian purposes by some far right-wing politicians in Brazil. This phenomenon seems to inaugurate a new form of authoritarianism, dictated mainly through social media that, through their algorithmic functioning, imprison individuals within bubbles of thought, preventing them from coming into contact with otherness.

Key Words

Changing cities of Central Asia: Rethinking National Identity, Development, Decolonization in Tajikistan

Authors

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Abstract

Since 2015, Dushanbe has been experiencing one of the largest and fastest urban transformations in Central Asia. In a matter of a few years, Tajikistan's capital has become almost unrecognizable not only for returning visitors but also for its inhabitants. Established in the 1920s as the capital of the Tajik Soviet Socialist Republic, Dushanbe is increasingly losing its Soviet identity as Soviet architecture and spaces are being actively demolished both by the state and private developers for the construction of new commercial high-rises and monumental administrative buildings - a process that reflects a continuous effort to construct a national identity and a more contemporary globalized urban image, as well as demonstrates an increasing power of neoliberal capitalist logic behind Dushanbe's transforming urban landscape. This ongoing transformation has raised questions about national identity, social justice and material and symbolic power in Tajikistan. I argue that this urban transformation reflects an increasing need to rethink Central Asia cities' Soviet and Russian imperial histories and dependencies and, arguably, reflects the need to engage with decolonization in the region.

This paper tracks several significant milestones of Dushanbe's urban transformation. It utilizes semi-structured interviews conducted with Dushanbe's residents and decision-makers and conducts a critical discourse analysis of related state-produced media to identify competing narratives and discourses that exist around the changing urban landscape and how these discourses are produced and communicated in Tajikistan. The paper also explores political, economic, social and cultural factors that impact discourses around urban development in Dushanbe. In this paper, urban transformation is situated as a global (Harvey, 2008; Massey, 1999, Sassen, 2001), regional (Koch, 2018), and local process that affects people's life, identity, and memory (De Certeau, 1988; Tuan, 1977). This paper also situates the discussion in the emerging field of decolonial literature from the post-Soviet space (Tlostanova, 2015).

In 2022, countries of the former USSR are going through tectonic political, economic, social and cultural transformations due to Russia's invasion of Ukraine. Post-socialism, postcolonialism, sovereignty, power relations, identity and national borders resurfaced in academic discussions around the region. This paper argues that understanding urban space and the trajectory of its transformation serves as a crucial lens to study emerging changes in the region, especially processes such as decolonization and the emergence of new identities and new ways of living and belonging in Tajikistan, Central Asia and the post-Soviet space. This discussion contributes to a gap in the literature that explores the relationship between discourses around urban space, nationalism, neoliberalism, decolonization, and identity in the context of Central Asia.

Key Words

Cities and identities, discourses, national identity, decolonization, neoliberalism, social justice

Battle of memories: Actualization of the past in Russian and Ukrainian memes in the context of the Russo-Ukrainian war

Authors

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Abstract

Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine has demonstrated a new dimension of social media use, with enormous amount of user-generated content impacting people's perception of the war (Chayka 2022). Many experts highlighted the central role of historic narratives, which have been used by the Russian state for justification of invasion (Zhurzhenko, 2022). Previous studies demonstrated the importance of memes as grassroot remembrance culture in the Post-Soviet context (Makhortykh, 2015; Makhortykh & Aguilar, 2020). Our study looks at the memes with historic references that circulate in Russia and Ukraine in the context of the ongoing war. We have collected 250 memes from both countries, using search engines Google and Yandex, specialized websites as well as social media (Facebook, VK, and Telegram). Qualitative content analysis was conducted by two coders fluent in Russian and Ukrainian languages. The results show a high level of instrumentalization of the past for political goals. The overwhelming majority of memes actualize memories of WWII, with comparisons of the rival side with actors from Nazi Germany. Whereas Russian memes mostly glorify the Soviet past, the Ukrainian narratives evolve within postcolonial discourse. The later often feature Cossacks in their traditional dresses juxtaposing their free spirit and the Soviet Union as a suppressive Empire. One of the key memes of 2022 was a portrait of an old Ukrainian woman with a Soviet flag, which was instrumentalized by the Russian propaganda as a symbol of the "true Ukraine" longing for Russia's protection. In the Ukrainian memosphere, the picture was recontextualized as a ghost of the past nobody wants to return to. This example illustrates highly emotional interpretative struggles about the shared past of Russia and Ukraine that evolve in the midst of the ongoing war. Our research demonstrates that, in the Russian case, the grassroots remembrance has been hijacked by the state, which controls the major online platforms in the country and facilitates pro-state meme-production, with narratives largely repeating official statements. We discuss the role of platforms as 'affect amplifiers' (Van Dijck, 2007) in spreading of mnemonic narratives as well as the role of memes in shaping of collective memories in the Post-Soviet context.

Key Words

Russia, Ukraine, war, memory studies, memes, digital memories, Post-Soviet context

A ***, not a war: development of sensitive word culture in social media as a form of everyday resistance during the Russian invasion of Ukraine

Authors

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Abstract

This research provides an exploration into how the repressive legislation and increasing content moderation regimes influence the political communication of VKontakte (VK) users during the Russian invasion of Ukraine. VK is the largest social media platform in Russia, it is a copycat of Facebook, its API is still publicly available (Makhortykh and Sydorova 2017; Gruzd & Tsyganova, 2015). Content moderation is an enforcement of governance by platforms (Poell, Nieborg & Duffy, 2021) but in authoritarian regimes especially, national laws and regulations determine the extent to which platforms are required to govern (ibid). While

China-based platforms are classified as media companies in the Chinese legal system. (Jia & Nieborg, 2021), Russia-based VK is not defined as such. However, the court practice allows to classify pages in VK as violating, for example, 'fake news' legislation during the war (e.g. Vagner, 2023).

Chinese platform moderation should not be seen as entities outside the state's political domain (Wang & Lobato, 2019). The Russian social media such as VK, needs to also be considered included in the state's political domain. Thus, when the remaining foreign platforms (e.g. YouTube, Telegram,TikTok and Twitch, at the time of writing this article) trigger questions concerning moderation of foreign platforms within authoritarian political context, VK represents a case of a domestic platform.

We conducted a longitudinal research on how VK users were adapting to restrictive censorship legislation related to the war. Drawing on the concepts of everyday resistance (Scott, 1986), we analyzed the "sensitive word culture" that has appeared in this Rusophone social network during the period of March 2022 - January 2023.

Research on Chinese social media has previously shown that users express political criticism through strategies such as allusion, irony and quoting rumors (e.g. Wu and Fitzgerald, 2021).

Using computational text analysis and network ethnography, we found that similar to China (Ye, Zhao, 2023), the sensitive word culture is becoming a part of Russia's social media political communication, influencing the development of word replacement, slang, and memes. We compared the data from 18 regional VK''s groups from Russian major cities on their usage of the word ''war' and its substitutes in March 2022 and further in January 2023. Our findings show decreased usage of war-related terms,and increased usage of evasive tactics: semantically related

but not direct terms, memes, and irony, thus showing subtle forms of anti-war resistance in everyday discourses.

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Key Words
Platform moderation, Russian invasion of Ukraine, Sensitive words, Everyday Resistance

Guarding Resource Bonus: Understanding the Organizational Boundaries of Media Convergence in China

Authors

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Abstract

Driven by the national strategy of "media convergence", an evident phenomenon of the convergence of legacy media and new media has emerged in China's media industry. "Boundary" has become an important concept and theoretical perspective to understand and interpret Chinese media convergence. The existing research mainly focus on the professional boundaries, but in fact, the organizational boundary is also facing the impact and change, which has become an issue worthy of attention and needs to be further explored.

Based on the in-depth interviews with legacy media managers and the analysis of materials gathered from the official website of the All-China Journalists Association (ACJA), this study introduces theoretical tools, organizational boundary and resource, to analyze the changes of organizational boundaries in media convergence of legacy media.

The findings indicate legacy media are showing a trend towards expansion into the field of new media at the internal, inter-organizational, and external organizational level. At the same time, legacy media are also showing great strength in defending their own boundaries, thus presenting a case of "convergence with boundaries" in their media convergence. And the reason for this convergence trend points to the resource cooperation and competition between media organizations and other organizations. At the internal organizational level, the existing media departments set up according to the "news beat" actually correspond to the administrative resources of each beat. The new media department is sharing the resources from traditional departments, which is resisted by these traditional departments, thus forming the internal organizational boundaries between the traditional and new departments. At the inter-organizational level, although platform media open information dissemination channel to legacy media, they impose restrictions on legacy media in terms of functions, user data, etc. legacy media, which has the advantages of information acquisition and policy inclination, is more inclined to realize their transformation through the self-built new media platform, which results in the inter-organizational boundaries. At the external level, legacy media embedded in the Chinese political system can provide business services to non-media organizations by virtue of its long-established credibility. However, they also avoid cooperation with organizations "outside the system" due to concerns about maintaining credibility and losing state-owned assets, thus forming the external organizational boundaries. In summary, it can be seen that "convergence with boundaries" is actually a manifestation of legacy media's guarding for political resource bonus, further revealing

the complex relationship between media convergence practices and politics in China. This research provides a unique sample for understanding media convergence worldwide.

Key Words

media convergence, organizational boundaries, political resources, and China

The Media and Social Inequality in Chile: The case of the Pension Reform

Authors

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Abstract

The social and economic inequality that has characterised Latin America since its colonisation continues to be one of the key problems in the region. Evidence suggests that the media plays a part in shaping the definitions of social inequality and how redistributive policies are implemented. Latin America has one of the most concentrated media systems in the world and a journalistic culture dominated by the top-down control of newsrooms (Becerra and Mastrini 2017; Hughes and Prado 2011). An extensive body of work contends that ownership concentration contributes to decreased news coverage diversity (McChesney 2015; Bagdikian 2004). For example, in the US, concentration is highly associated with a bias in news coverage on political and economic issues (Anderson and McLaren 2012; Corneo 2006), while in Europe, high concentration is correlated with lower popular support for redistributive policies (Neimanns 2021). Indeed, in Latin America, highly concentrated ownership patterns are associated with a narrowing in media coverage of issues related to social policy and inequality (Hughes and Prado 2011). For example, some research on Chile indicates a media bias in favour of the neoliberal approach to social policy (Bellei, Cabalin, and Orellana 2014). Research about the news coverage and their influence on individuals' interpretations of inequality or social policy has been widely studied in countries with advanced welfare states, showing that media have normalised neoliberal beliefs, ideas and values to the public (e.g. Berry 2015; Cammaerts 2018; The Glasgow Media Group 1976). However, these studies assume a model of the European welfare state as a primary data source, distant from Latin American countries' models, which have a weaker role in social provision. Strengthening the explanatory power of these theories requires research in less developed welfare states, such as Chile, which is one of the few Latin American countries classed as high-income by the World Bank, but at the same time, is one of the most unequal in the OECD and has markedly less redistributive welfare systems compared to Western Europe. In Chile, during the last decade, one of the most contentious political issues related to the problem of social inequality have been the demand for pension reform. To deepen the understanding of the media's role in shaping definitions of social inequality, this research analyses news production and the news framing of social inequality in the media coverage of the pension reform in Chile.

The overarching question of this research is: **how are social inequality and redistributive policies defined and explained in the news coverage of Chile's pension reform?** The question is broken down into two dimensions: (i) the frames and representation of social inequality in the news coverage of the reform, and, (ii) the journalist practices in elaborating these news. The research strategy for the first dimension is a thematic analysis of the media coverage of four key events of the pension reform between 2013 and 2020. Also, network analysis to map definitions of social inequality and its connection with sources, interest groups and other institutions. The fieldwork for

the second dimension is in-depth interviews with media workers, especially journalists and editors, grouped by conventional and alternative media. It also included interviews with public relations agencies of private pension companies and pension reform activists.

Key Words
Social inequality, Media representation, media concentration, Latin America, Chile, pensions

Why Does China's Technological Authoritarianism Not Work? The Case of the A4/White Paper Revolution

Authors

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Abstract

Taking the A4/ white paper revolution as a case study, this paper seeks to understand the working of technological authoritarianism and its limits. Technological authoritarianism refers to the idea that with the use of technology, an authoritarian regime can effectively control the society and achieve order and stability. Contemporary China is usually taken as the most representative example, but the sudden eruption of the A4 revolution suggests the idea to be revisited. The A4 Revolution resulted from a fire in Urumqi, Xinjiang, the victims of which were said to have been unable to escape because of the government's excessively harsh lockdown measures during the COVID-19 pandemic. The incident sparked mass protests, with many people coming out to the streets holding blank sheets of paper. While the A4 Revolution seems to have lost its momentum, the fact that it emerged at a time when President Xi Jinping has placed the society under strict surveillance and just secured his third term indicates that there is still room for resistance, and this needs to be explained.

This paper suggests that Michel Foucault's idea of "governmentality" provides clues to better understand technological authoritarianism. Foucault maintained that throughout Western history there have been several ways in which government, understood as "the conduct of conduct," is thought about. While "raison d'etre" or reason of the state emphasizes law and policing, in neo-liberal governmentality power is exercised through the manipulation of people's desire, belief, values, and so on. The paper suggests that Chinese technological authoritarianism contains a neo-liberal element for the state to mobilize various enterprises, platforms and individuals to rule themselves and others. This requires giving the society limited freedom, which however gives space for social resistance.

Key Words

China, Technological Authoritarianism, Michel Foucault, Governmentality, A4 Revolution

Marketization of post-Communist TV Broadcasting: The Czech case in a comparative perspective

Authors

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Abstract

In 1990s, marketization of TV broadcasting has been a global trend. However, in the Central-Eastern Europe (CEE) it happened in a special context of transition from Communism to liberal democracy. Although the changes have been usually labeled simply as Westernization, this paper suggests that the complexity of the issue needs a deeper comparative analysis conducted within broader efforts to de-Westernize media studies.

The Western transitology narrative also adopted by some CEE media experts (Jakubowicz 1995) would assume a uniform path of abolishing the old model of tight party-state control of the media and replacing it by its market-driven alternative. However, evidence shows that in different CEE countries, the trajectory of TV broadcasting marketization has been different, depending on a particular mix of domestic and international influences.

This paper compares TV broadcasting marketization in the Czech Republic, one of the most successful cases of Westernization of the media landscape, with analogous developments in Western Europe and China in the 1990s, focusing on the struggle around privatization and deregulation of the broadcasting, on emergence and regulation of advertising, and on import of and protection against global/US media content.

The struggle over marketization of television broadcasting and especially the entry of foreign investors can be seen as a struggle between principles of political control on one hand and economic liberalization on the other hand. In the Czech Republic, marketization was seen as a way of preventing direct political control of the broadcasting by the state or by a party running that state. From this perspective, privatization of broadcasting, possibly to a foreign investor, would safeguard independence of the broadcasters from the politicians. However, the Chinese case illustrates that economic liberalization might not lead to political liberalization, which has been a central claim of those transitologist theories based on some kind of economic determinism. The Western European cases at the same time demonstrate that there has been no one "Western" model of broadcasting marketization for the CEE countries to follow, and that the European Union actually had a strong regulatory impact on the media markets of its member states, in contrast to the deregulation narrative in the East.

To illustrate the workings of specific factors within the post-Communist context, the paper pays special attention to TV Nova, a first nationwide private channel in the Czech Republic. It can be seen as a story showing that a powerful foreign investor can actually not only get rid of most of the inconvenient regulation, but also successfully sue the state when things do not go his or her way. However, it can also be seen as a story showing that even in a country most dedicated to

Westernization, foreign media investments are never fully safe from local forces putting their investments in jeopardy.

Key Words

Platform Official Rumor Rebuttals as a Government-oriented Corporate Public Relation Strategy

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Abstract

In China, Internet platform giants have been required to participate in government-led rumor governance due to their technical advantages. Previous studies mainly concentrated on China's media regulation regime concerning regulatory authorities and policymakers. However, limited attention was given to platforms' active response to such regime. Besides, compared to providing accounts for state media and government agencies, social media platforms' official rumor rebuttals directly display platforms' efforts in rumor governance that may contribute to a responsible corporate image and better public relations (PR). As He&Tian suggested (2008), the government is the most important stakeholder for Chinese firms, which indicates a government-oriented corporate PR strategy. Therefore, this study aims to examine how WeChat (one of the largest social media platform in China) have made platform rumor rebuttals as a government-oriented PR strategy to adjust to China's media regulation regime and socio-political environments during the past 9 years.

To be noticed, "platform rumor rebuttals" in this study means the rumor rebuttals directly posted by the social media platform instead of other rumor-debunking sources like state media or government agencies.

The corpus consists of all the 1123 articles posted on the only WeChat official rumor rebuttal account, Rumor Filter since its start in 2014 October. A mixed method combined with content analysis and Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) is conducted to figure out a systematic description of media sources, media discourse and topics about WeChat rumor rebuttals. The coding scheme is well-tuned based on Rumor Filter's self-introduction to topic features (2014), and Siochrú et al (2002) 's categorization of policy.

Regarding media sources, during the second period (2017-2019), there is a surge of Rumor Filter's forwarding articles from the collaborative rumor network from 87 to 514 because of the special platform content moderation campaign to refute rumors in WeChat groups and moments by the Cyberspace Administration of China (2017). During the third period (2020-2022), in response to the tightened social media censorship on rumors related to COVID-19, the proportion of articles quoted from state-owned rumor rebuttal platforms has soared to 31.35% ($\chi2=22.98$, $p<.001.$).

As for the topic, comparing the first period (2014-2016) with the third period (2020-2022), the theme on account of social news and domestic politics has significantly increased: $\chi2=12.091$, $p<.01$. Notably, there is a precipitous fall of the topic on corporate affairs ($\chi2=205.935$, $p<.000$).

Concerning WeChat's media discourse on the value of platform rumor governance, a scientifically rational and morally positive online environment has emerged: 53.15% of the articles (n=337) mentioned the pursuit of scientific truth as a major reason. The second most mentioned rationale for platform rumor governance (36.59%) was the elderly's social well-being. The third one was personal safety against online invasions like Internet fraud, which went from up to down during three periods: $\chi2=38.944$, $p<.001$. The last one was the platform's support for remaining a stable political and online environment, this rationale accounted for 26.50% (n=168) of the articles examined, with a significant increase ($\chi2=16.32$, $p<.001$) in the third period (2020-2022).

Key Words

Government-oriented corporate public relation strategy, rumor rebuttals, platform governance

Fact-checking in a Neo-Authoritarian media ecosystem: The position of the Lakmusz.hu fact-checking site in the Hungarian media system

Authors

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Abstract

The transformation of Hungarian media regulation after 2010 has led to a media environment in which, for a growing part of the audience, the traditional grips of credibility, reliability, and objectivity have been lost, replaced by politically manipulated narratives. Two separate media systems have emerged, organized along different logics, with different journalistic standards and mutual accusations of spreading fake news (Bajomi-Horváth 2022). The case of Hungary is thus an interesting example of the destabilization of common understanding of common public and political affairs due to extreme polarization.

In this polarized media space, it is very difficult to find a place for a fact-checking site, partly because independent financial resources are difficult to obtain. On the other hand, in such a polarized media environment, fact-checking sites also face a credibility problem, as part of the audience rejects this type of fact-checking without a second thought. The situation is further exacerbated by the fact that the Hungarian information media is flooded with government propaganda and disinformation, so a widely accepted fact-checking activity is desperately needed.

In our presentation, we would like to briefly describe the extremely polarized media ecosystem as well as the autocratic transition which led to it. This media landscape provides the perfect environment for the increasing threat of disinformation. Then, based on in-depth interviews with Hungarian journalists, and focus group discussions with potential consumers, we will approach the issue of the relationship between authenticity and disinformation, with a special focus on the possibilities for solutions using the case study of the first Hungarian fact-checking site, Lakmusz.hu.

Key Words

Neo-Authoritarian media ecosystem, disinformation, fact-checking, Hungary