Communication in Post- and Neo-Authoritarian Societies Working Group

Abstracts of papers accepted for presentation in the Online Conference Papers of the
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1   These are the abstracts of the papers submitted to the IAMCR section or working group named above for presentation in the Online Conference Papers component of the 2021 annual conference.

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A New Model of International Communication:A Case of China and Russia

Authors

Prof. Lerong Jia - Communication University of China

Ms. Miao Tang - Communication University of China

Abstract

Since the beginning of the 21st century, relations between China and Russia have grown ever closer, currently, China-Russia relations have been upgraded to comprehensive strategic partnership. In this context, with the strategical and well-planned leadership of the two heads of state, the humanities exchanges between China and Russia have flourished, as well as bilateral media cooperation and communication have been enhanced, including TV programs cooperation, channel landing, conducting large-scale joint interview activities, establishing an exchange mechanism of media talents, and co-founding new media, such as Sino-Russia Focus, an application of news information about China and Russia .

The practice of media cooperation between the two countries provides new perspectives for international communication. In comparison with conventional international communication models, we can find that China-Russia media cooperation is initiated by the two governments and aimed at enhancing mutual friendship. According to the data obtained by the investigative agencies in China and Russia, the appreciation of each other between the two countries is increasing.

China-Russia media cooperation practice actually provides a new model for international communication. Although China and Russia have not officially proclaimed to create new international communication order features, but it can be discovered in their media cooperation. The special characteristic of China-Russia media cooperation is that the role of "state" is particularly important - the cooperation is initiated by the two governments and serves their political interests，meanwhile the industrial aspects are undervalued. This means that the practice represents a model based on state power, mainly between state-owned media companies, with a purpose to enhance bilateral ties.

Currently, China Media Group(CMG) is cooperating with the Shanghai Cooperation Organization(SCO) to build the SCO media's news sharing and exchanging platform, which is still in the preparation period and has not been put into practice. At the same time, it is also committed to strengthening media cooperation with countries along the China's Belt and Road Initiative(BRI). In this case, we think that the China-Russia international communication model has the possibility of promotion in above projects.

Currently, China Media Group(CMG) is cooperating with the Shanghai Cooperation Organization(SCO) to build the Shanghai Cooperation Television Station. At the same time, it is also committed to strengthening media cooperation with countries along the China's Belt and Road Initiative(BRI). In this case, we think that the China-Russia international communication model has the possibility of promotion in above projects.

Submission ID

282

Mapping of fragmented journalism culture in Russia

Authors

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Abstract

For over half a century, the theories of journalism have generally developed to understand why journalism in different countries is shaped in certain ways, whether similarities can be found in professionalism around the world, and how the development of journalism is linked to political, and specifically democratic, development. We can briefly describe this process as a movement from the four theories of the press to three global media systems and then to four journalism cultures. However, we can already see the shortcomings of any universal classification, which cannot explain the complex processes of media systems or journalism cultures hybridization, as well as national specificities. There is still an active movement against the Westernization of research as a normative democratic framework; its focus is defined through hybridity, heterogeneity, and fragmentation categories. Given these general trends in media studies, we analyzed the special case of investigating such a complex and multidimensional object as journalism culture and highlighted key approaches that have thus far emerged.

The paper introduces mixed methodology for studying discursive journalism cultures in transitive political regimes on the case of Russian journalism in the recent 5 years. Journalism cultures approach is based on T. Hanitzsch and C. Mellado theoretical frameworks and research projects, methodology corresponds with discursive institutionalism paradigm and actor-network theory. Analysis of professional discourse develops ideas about fragmentation, hybridity, and liquidity of journalism culture. Author's approach combines classical studies of professional roles and standards with discourse analysis. Empirical research is based on surveys (2016-2017 and 2018-2019), in-depth expert interviews (2016 – 2020) and text analysis of published interviews (2016-2020), which totally involved more than 300 journalists in more than 40 regions in Russia.

To overcome the complexity of the perception of the results obtained through the study and establish connections between them, we used the spatial understanding of the discourse, within which we could draw visual mental maps. The spatial approach also allows for an indication of direction, i. e. vector of the discourse relative to its subjects, to see the dynamics of resolving controversies or, conversely, widening gaps in the discourse about journalism culture. As a result, discourse was visualized with maps.

We used the following variables as grounds for mapping: the salience of certain categories in public and non-public discourses, intersection of professional group components (age, experience, region, education, political position, and self-restriction) in comparison of Western and post-Soviet values, the position of professionalism components (ethics, autonomy, mission, and sources of values) on the "clarity —uncertainty" axis, intersection of institutional logics in public, state, professional, and academic discourses about journalism, as well as other variables laid out in the third chapter. The final map was a vector diagram of cultural hybridity, which showed the main driving forces and their directions.

Submission ID

482

Conform or confront: how journalists respond to rising authoritarianism

Authors

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Abstract

It has been a long time that the established world order is facing a critical political threat: the decline of the democratic system that has held sway for several decades. During this period, several countries shifted from a democratic system to an authoritarian system, or some authoritarian leader again consolidated the power and became more autocratic (Curato, 2017; Puddington & Roylance, 2016; Lendvai-Bainton & Szelewa, 2020; Yilmaz & Turner, 2019; De Jonquières, 2017). This inevitable trend has a strong effect on how journalists behave. On the one hand, some journalists may give up and conform with the authoritarian ideology, becoming a willing participant: they regard their principal role as defending the status quo and consider themselves as important agents of ensuring stability in the country (Schimpfössl & Tablokov, 2014). On the other hand, some journalists follow the western tradition of understanding censorship: analyzing journalism from the perspective of normative ethics, comprehending censorship as top-down repression, and as the natural opposite of free speech (Schimpfössl et al. 2020). But most of the journalists are staying in the middle part, carefully negotiate with the increasing censorship. Thus, different journalists' perceptions of professionalism towards the authoritarian ideology will result in different actions taken by journalists to suit the system. Previous studies have already summarized three significant ways that authoritarian governments around the world usually use to censor and suppress journalists: business pressures, threats or attacks, and legal measures (Coşkun, 2020; Lei, 2019; Slavtcheva-Petkova, 2019). However, there is no study that provides an overall idea on understanding how journalists deal with them. This literature review would present illustrations of three common tactics that an authoritarian regime usually uses to suppress journalists and utilize Scott's arguments (1985) on power and resistance, which is the weapons of weak, to explain how journalists in Eastern Europe, Southeast Asia, Africa, etc. respond to those tactics in order to demonstrate their understanding of journalist's professionalism. At the same time, will be helpful for scholars to understand journalism practice in other areas like Hong Kong, which are having political changes.

Fragile Friendship? An Analysis of Media Actors' Network in Sino-Russian Journalistic Collaboration during the Pandemic COVID-19

Authors

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Abstract

China and Russia stand together for a long time and their relationship is considered as the priority one for each other. In June, 2019, the diplomatic relation between the two countries was upgraded to a comprehensive strategic partnership of coordination for a new era[1]. This relationship can also be seen in journalism. In May, 2015, as a measure to enhance the bilateral strategic partnership, the leaders announced that the year 2016-2017 as The Year of Sino-Russian Media Exchange. In fact, China-Russia media cooperation has been normalized in recent years[2].

However, since the outbreak of COVID-19 in China, lots of disharmonious voices and disinformation have spread in two countries. Russia's fear and discrimination against the Chinese have evoked great anger in China, and many speculate that Sino-Russian strategic relationship is actually only a symbolic representation. Meanwhile, the two leaders help each other in medical assistance and resistance to pressure from the "West Media Hegemony". The state media of two sides did a lot to clear up the misunderstanding. Overall, the Russian's impression of China is still negative.

Is the friendship fragile? Or the journalistic collaboration between two countries failed? Public perception derives from media content, and Shoemaker & Reese[3] (2014) believes that the media content is influenced by factors from various levels, including individual level: State professional journalist, independent journalist, free-lancer and even average citizen can participate in journalistic practice and public discussion, especially in digital era, when media actors are more divers and equal than previously.

The paper chooses controversial topics of online media in China and Russia in the early period after COVID-19 outbreak, and takes an incident-centered case study to identify all the media actors involved and depicts the network of media actors (individuals) in the journalistic collaboration between China and Russia and in the public sphere in which the collaboration operates. The focus is on exploring how and why media actors interact with each other from the comparative and intercultural perspective. Meanwhile, Whether the collaboration is influenced by the digital media environment is also checked.

This study found that after the news of China-Russia journalistic collaboration released, various responses can be discovered from different media actors: resistance or recoding for political, cultural or other reasons. What's more, disinformation and misunderstanding indeed exist between two countries. Besides, political figures and representatives from social organizations also find their ways to moderate the public opinion and sometimes even replace the role of journalistic institutions.

The paper examines the performance of existing China-Russia journalistic collaboration and relations between the two countries form perspective of media actors. The finding will make a theoretical/practical contribution to cross-border journalistic collaboration.

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https://www.chinadaily.com.cn/a/201910/03/WS5d94ffeca310cf3e3556ea27.html

[2] The fruitful results of the China-Russian year of media exchanges have promoted friendly exchanges between the two countries and peoples, CRI Online.
http://news.ifeng.com/a/20180126/55493255_0.shtml

[3] Shoemaker & Reese (2014): Mediating the Message in the 21st Century: A Media Sociology Perspective. New York: Routledge. 204-237.

Submission ID

913

Covid-19 "infodemic" in post-soviet media landscape: toward diversity of post-soviet media systems

Authors

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Abstract

This paper is devoted to "infodemic", so called mass-communication crisis during the pandemic of Covid-19 (WHO, 2020), in post-soviet media landscape. This mass-communication crisis related with new complexity of information sphere related with mass-self communication shows us the great diversity of measures and media strategies on post-soviet media landscape. Such diversity according to our basic hypothesis is related with differences in media systems inside post-soviet world. In some countries of post-soviet space the pandemic was quite seriously apprehended and caused strict measures of social distancing while media played the role of making people calm. In such countries we can see higher trust in media and democratic institutions and, as a result, quite modest dynamics in number of cases. In some other post-soviet countries, including Russia, we may see the pandemic became a trigger for new populist policies, fake news struggle and different strategies of public "othering" and fragmenting the public sphere. As we actually know from different research from other countries, the populism has been a common response on Covid crisis which considerably affected the share of supporters not respecting the social distancing measures (Mariani et al, 2020; Alcott et al., 2020; Widmann, 2020).

In our work we will rely on comparative data on political trust, media institutions development and on COVID statistics from different post-soviet countries. We will demonstrate few different clusters of countries and differentiating them.

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- Widmann, T. (2020). Fear, Hope, and COVID-19: Strategic Emotional Rhetoric in Political Communication and its Impact on the Mass Public. SSRN Preprint, URL: https://ssrn.com/abstract=3679484 or http://dx.doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.3679484

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Submission ID

1125

Film co-productions and the politics of soft power

Authors

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Abstract

Many countries have made efforts to promote soft power and the related research argue that promoting a nation's soft power on the global stage brings significant economic and strategic advantages. This research explores the role of film co-production in the global competition for soft power. In the context of the Sino-international co-production, existing research on film co-production has mainly focused on either US-China arrangements or China's Pan-Asian partners. With China has developed as the world's largest film market in 2020, film co-production under the 2014 UK-China Treaty still remains under-researched.

This study explores the intertwining relationships between the politics of soft power and the UK-China film co-production since the signing of the treaty in 2014. Through the policy analysis, interviews with policy makers, industry practitioners, case studies including the first UK-China co-production film *Earth, One Amazing Day* (2017, dir Richard Dale, Lixin Fan and Peter Webber) and *Special Couple* (2019, dir. Huang Lei) and an analysis of the latest co-production statistics, this timely research traces the contours of a complex practice that is of increasing significance in the global media industries.

It specifically investigates films made under the UK-China Film Co-production Treaty 2014 to analyse three issues: what are the approaches to and critical thinking behind the practice of soft power from the UK and China? How do practitioners view their roles under the conditions of the Treaty? How do film co-productions jointly promote soft power for nations with distinctive political, economic and cultural systems such as the UK and China?

The combination of interviews, data analysis, case studies and the juxtaposition of industry and scholarly voices, provides a unique perspective on China-UK co-production that is timely, original, information-rich, complex, and stimulating, making this paper a valuable contribution on the study of developments of local, regional and cross-border media activities.

Submission ID

1297

Discovering the Complexity of Chinese Netizens Who Bypass the Great Firewall Amid Rise of Nationalism

Authors

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Abstract

The Great Firewall of China (GFW), initiated by the Chinese government, blocks China-based netizens from accessing a range of foreign websites and services; however, some Chinese netizens manage to bypass the firewall using various technical tools. Previously, common perceptions of this group of netizens who frequently crossed the firewall were that they hold critical views of China's Internet censorship and were open-minded to worldviews and information from other parts of the world. However, the emergence and development of Chinese nationalism groups on overseas Internet forums, such as Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram, challenge these perceptions, suggesting that the rise of nationalism and activism in China has complicated Chinese netizens' firewall transgression behaviors.

Given the new changes mentioned above, how the rise of nationalism in China impacts Chinese netizens' firewall bypass activities becomes an intriguing question. On the one hand, nationalism might foster an environment in which citizens have little demand for information outside of China. In this scenario, firewall bypassing activities will decline given the possibility that Chinese people would simply lose interest in the Internet world beyond the GFW. On the other hand, the growing radical nationalistic sentiment in China will drive Chinese citizens to be more hostile and offensive towards foreign people and communities. As a result, it is reasonable to expect that Chinese netizens, especially those who have strong nationalistic tendencies, will increasingly go global to defend China and the Chinese system against critics.

We argue that both directions exist. A typology is developed in this study based on the interaction matrix of nationalism and political engagement, which classifies Chinese netizens into four groups of people: *active nationalists* (Little Pinks and the Voluntary Fifty-cent Army), *active non-nationalists* ("gongzhi"), *silent nationalists*, and *disengaged non-nationalists*.

Based upon a secondary analysis of the 2017 Chinese Internet User Survey data, this study finds that nationalism is a significant negative predictor of firewall bypass frequency among Chinese netizens, whereas political engagement serves as a positive predictor of firewall bypass frequency. In addition, political engagement moderates the effect of nationalism on firewall bypass frequency. The negative relationship between nationalism and firewall bypass frequency only holds for people who are disengaged in politics. For those who have high levels of political engagement, nationalism becomes a positive predictor of their firewall bypass frequency.

In addition, results suggest that the barrier of the GFW works most effectively on silent nationalists. This group of netizens, who show strong nationalistic tendencies but low political engagement levels, are least likely to be firewall crossers. Both active nationalists and active non-nationalists are more likely to bypass the firewall than average netizens, but these two groups of netizens differ significantly in their socio-political characteristics such as party affiliation, political ideology, political trust, society satisfaction, and state media use frequency.

This study reveals that the population of Chinese firewall crossers is more complex than previously thought. The complexity, to some extent, indicates an alarming rise in political divides within Chinese society as a result of growing nationalism.

Mobilizing patriotic collective action online: A story of the "Fangirl Expedition" in China

Authors

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Abstract

Many studies have investigated how people in grief mobilized collective action in an authoritarian setting. However, it is not clear how fan groups, who have mainly mobilized activities of endorsing their idols, could successfully mobilize a patriotic protest against the political rivals of their authoritarian state. To explore this, we have investigated the case of "Fangirl Expedition", an online patriotic movement which was organized by Chinese female fan groups to denounce the Hong Kong protesters against the local authorities and the Chinese party state. We conducted interviews with 13 fan group organizers who had actively participated in the movement and did two months of participatory observation in 2019 on the Sina Weibo's Super Topics, a platform with which the Fangirl Groups used effectively to mobilize and organize their actions. Our findings suggest that the successful mobilization by the Fangirls not only rely on the common emotions which stimulate participants, but also on the unique organizational structure of the fan groups. The findings also indicate that there is a confluence of subculture and mainstream culture which is conducive to the country's public opinion guidance and political mobilization. However, there are also risks and problems caused by the entertainmentization of political information.

Media freedom in fragile, post-conflict states: a case study of Sudan

Authors

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Abstract

Through a case study of media reform in Sudan, this study responds to Voltmer's (2013) call to 'de-Westernise' research on media freedom by recognising the political, social and cultural contexts of specific states. In the context of fragile states, the study highlights the need to update concepts of media freedom for the digital environment and for the role media play in post-conflict transitional justice processes.

As societies transition from authoritarian regimes, media freedom is an important measure of whether newfound freedoms will be consolidated into lasting change. While media systems are shaped by economic, political, technological, and cultural factors (McQuail 2005), transitioning states struggle with fragile political institutions, weak cultures of professional journalism, and low levels of media literacy. These long-standing issues are complicated by digital media trends, which facilitate new types of media practice and new spaces for public debate. At the same time, digital media are associated new strategies for media control. Across Africa, traditional forms of media control (e.g. financial and regulatory pressures, harassment of journalists) are accompanied by new practices including internet shutdowns, social media taxes, and "fake news" laws. Meanwhile, Afrobarometer data indicate that public support for media freedom is declining; this sentiment is partly attributed to the prevalence of partisan media that fail to represent the public interest (Conroy-Krutz 2020).

In this context, this paper examines media reform in Sudan. Following the 2019 revolution against the regime of Omar al-Bashir, Sudan undertook a historic democratic transition. At the time of the revolution, Sudan was one of the most censored countries in the world, ranked 175 out of 180 countries in the World Press Freedom Index. The transitional government made substantial commitments to media freedom using UNESCO's Media Development Indicators as a "media reform roadmap". This roadmap identified five priority areas: legal and regulatory reform to ensure editorial independence and free expression; increased pluralism to diversify media ownership and content; the cultivation of media

as a platform for public debate; the advancement of education about media and skills training for media workers; and the modernization of media infrastructures.

This study draws on ten in-depth interviews with Sudanese policymakers, journalists working across different types of Sudanese media, and media-development practitioners. It examines how these stakeholders perceive media freedom and threats to media freedom, what actions seek to enhance recognition of media freedom by various stakeholders, the extent to which reform accommodates digital as well as traditional media, and the role of media in transitional justice processes. The findings contribute to a deeper understanding of the challenges of media reform in fragile states as well as contemporary challenges to media freedom in the African context.

Submission ID

1645

MEDIA OPENNESS TO INNOVATION IN CHALLENGING POLITICAL SYSTEMS

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Abstract

Following the political and economic liberalization of the past two decades, East African countries such as Kenya, Uganda and Tanzania have adopted a more liberalized approach towards the media industry. Nevertheless, there remain varying levels of government intervention in the sector in each country, and some elements of media capture.

Reporters Without Borders[1] observe that media practitioners in Uganda operate in an unfriendly environment characterised by acts of intimidation and threats almost daily. Criticisms of the government authorities by media practitioners or activists have resulted in media equipment confiscation, physical assaults and abductions. In Kenya, reports by different organisations indicate that

the relationship between the media and the government is often adversarial and that the government does not only exercise direct and indirect censorship, but also harasses and intimidates journalists on occasion. For Tanzania, the Media Institute of Southern Africa (MISA) report[2] shows that between September 2017 and June 2019, Tanzanian media and human rights organisations reported more than 40 cases of intimidation, harassment, suspensions, closure and fines of media, arrest and detention, abductions and disappearance of journalists in the country.

Despite such challenging political environments, the media industry in the region has continued to develop. Following the digital migration, media outlets both small, hyperlocal, and digital ones as well as larger conglomerates are more numerous than ever before. With the increased number of players in the media industry and the impact of global technology platforms, however, has come the reality of shrinking advertising and a hypercompetitive media market. To survive, media houses are pivoting into new business areas and finding new ways to connect with their audiences and users. To varying levels, they are exploring new business models and revenue sources.

Research has shown that change and innovation in news media organizations is frequently spurred by environmental uncertainty[3], and that even in authoritarian systems, media can develop viable sustainability mechanisms that look beyond finances[4]. The media innovation landscape in the above political context has not been studied in-depth to understand its drivers and constraints. This paper presents the findings from the Innovation for Media Viability Research study, a multinational research project that surveyed news media organizations across East Africa to understand their strategic approaches to adapting to the region's changing political and market conditions, including their innovation potential. Issues such as management openness to employees' and outsiders' suggestions as well as orientation to problem solving are explored. Initial findings on these aspects of the research will be presented, and conclusions drawn on what can be learnt about innovation in the media sector in less free political systems.

Submission ID

1829

Elite Continuity Post-Transition in Albania´s and Myanmar´s Media Contexts

Authors

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Abstract

After 1990 Albania transitioned from one of the most closed up countries worldwide to a democratic system after the fall of communism. With this transition Albania´s media developed from being a propaganda organ to a diverse but economically dependent and intransparent media market. After 2010 a comparable transition took place in Myanmar. Till then also post-colonial Myanmar was one of the most closed economic, political, social and media systems in the world, ruled by the military junta for nearly half a century. Just as long as Albania has been under communist authoritarian rule. Despite the return of Myanmar´s military to power on February 1, 2021 with a coup d'état we analyze Myanmar´s transition from military rule to a quasi-democratic government within the last ten years.

Although the two contexts differ in their historical, political and cultural context, our analysis detects important common threads which can be conceptualized within Sparks (2008) framework of elite continuity and explains the formations of media cultures in both countries. We find for our analysis of the transformation processes of Albania´s and Myanmar's media system a similar pattern of elite continuity that Sparks (2008) examines in the comparison of China, Russia, and Poland. In our comparison we show how Sparks´ (2008) seven major components for the explanation of elite continuity (genuine revolution, shift to market economy, considerable continuity, political parallelism, social order, transformation of political power into economic power, degree of democratization) apply to the two media contexts in question.

With respect to the transformative dynamics of Myanmar´s media reform which lead to commercialization, in response to Hallin & Mancini's (2004) question of "whether commercialization has increased or decreased the flow of political information and discussion" (p. 279), we can illustrate a trend which is mainly influenced by crony ownership/financial structures, leading to nepotism and partisanship, where the increase of commercial interests decreases the democratic potential of the media to provide free and plural information to inform the voters. The same is true for Albania where old elites played an important role in managing and negotiating the transfer of power to the "new

elites" and affected Albania's transition process (Sparks, 2005, p. 111). The combination of commercialization and politization in Albania lead to what Splichal (2001) calls an Italianization of the media system.

Additionally, the transformation of the state-owned broadcasters MRTV in Myanmar and RTSH in Albania into public-service media preserves a strong intertwinement of the governments and old elites with the media sector and does not balance the government's monopolistic advantages. The ideological imprint of the media outlets as transformed public-service broadcasting "remains extremely vulnerable to state interference" as shown in analysis for other transitional contexts (Voltmer, 2012, p. 237).

Altogether, Albania´s and Myanmar´s media developments highlight "a high degree of elite continuity throughout the societies, demonstrating a shift from political to economic power" and serve "as an example of 'elite continuity', in which the former bureaucratic ruling class attempts to restructure itself as the owners of private capital." (Sparks, 2008, pp. 1, 18)

Submission ID

1909

Examining Post-Truth through the Barthesian conceptualisation of myth

Authors

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Abstract

The term post-truth initially appeared in the United States as a keyword of popular politics articulated through the discourse of 'post-truth politics' and 'post-truth society'. However, the term gained popularity after the 2016 election of President Donald Trump. Oxford Dictionaries define post-truth as "as relating to or denoting circumstances in which objective facts are less influential in shaping public opinion than appeals to emotion personal belief" (Mejia, Beckermann and Sullivan, 2018). The increased use of the term has gained scholarly attention over its meaning and value. This paper will examine post-truth through the lens of Roland Barthes' (1972) conceptualisation of myth.

Myth is a mode of signification triggered by a syntagmatic chain of discourse, bound by the form (material existence) and substance (associated relations) of a sign. Myths are interpellated into metalanguage systems, depending on the needs and values of a culture (Barthes, 1972). Myths are accentuated by the dominant social class and eventually function as common sense (Fiske, 1990: 89/176). Although post-truth has a cultural, informational and rhetorical orientation less central than earlier critical theories, this paper will demonstrate how myth provides a theoretical lens through which post-truth can be examined.

Stuart Hall's (1973) encoding/decoding model will supplement Barthes' reliance on the ruling class' dominant ideology. Hall wrote that not everyone in a shared space of subjectivity will interpret a message in the same way. He further argued that culture is a site of negotiation of consent and resistance. However, the relationship between language, ideology and 'the subject' cannot be ignored in understanding the form and substance of post-truth.

Keywords: post-truth; Myth; ideology; semiotics

Submission ID

2207

ICT development and diversification of media consumption: two keys to understanding the Cuban media system's emerging political plurality.

Authors

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Abstract

The relationships between the components of the media system that define the emerging political plurality in the Cuban media system during the presidency of Raúl Castro (2006-2018) are argued based on the links identified between the development of ICTs, and the diversification of consumption media.

The research uses a qualitative methodology based on the theoretical referents of media systems and journalistic cultures. The in-depth interview technique was applied to 21 experts in Political Science and Communication in Cuba. Besides, the qualitative content analysis allowed the analysis of political programs, laws, scientific publications, and dissertations.

The instrumentalism of the media in Cuban politics is in crisis due to TIC development, digitization, and the Internet. Several factors shape the dynamics of a media system in a transition towards more complex forms of interaction, more direct socio-political participation practices, a more autonomous journalistic exercise, and a fragmented professional identity: the increase in Internet access and use, the diversification of the consumption of symbolic goods, the creation and development of informal distribution networks for audiovisual content (online/offline), and the multiplication of digital platforms and media with different editorial orientations, in coordination with multiple political and civil society actors within and out of the country.

A political will to develop ICT with a perspective of sovereignty and national security means a transition from a social concept of ICTs to another that focuses on the economic-commercial. The political sphere of existence of emerging media actors and political opposition media has been enabled while increased the competition for represents the public agenda and establishes user communities.

Despite the impetus of development in the telecommunications sector, the digit-cultural inequalities accentuate the subjective profile of poverty, social vulnerability, and marginalization. However, Internet access's physical and economic limitations made possible off/online innovations in informal circulation networks, which has led to more self-managed consumption and shaping practices. The above has also been favored by Cuban's accumulated dissatisfaction concerning the quality of the partisan-state media.

The current Cuban media system is more complex and plural - and therefore less homogeneous - than is usually pre-established. The trend towards its external diversity generates congruence and connects political polarization patterns and public service orientation, although it does not necessarily make quality journalism possible.

Submission ID

2310

Local (Self)-Governance and Media as Pillars of Democracy: The Case of Southern African Nations

Authors

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Abstract

Decentralization is frequently presented as an essential practice in terms of the democratic consolidation of a country. In that sense, decentralization is a crucial process for African countries with weak democratic systems in comparison to developed democracies in the West. Scholars from the field of political science and development studies usually argue that developed systems of local (self)-governance present a solid basis for democratic consolidation on a national level. Since it is a tier that is closest to citizens, it is hypothesized that based on a trust in the elected local council, it is possible to predict the trust in national democratic institutions, such as the national assembly and national electoral commission.

Even though local councils have existed in most countries on the African continent ever since colonial days, most of them were and still are perceived as a political threat to the national governments. Therefore, there is a trend of state authorities limiting their power. However, that is not necessarily the case in Southern Africa. Besides the rapid urbanization rates, the Southern African countries have better scores than the rest of African nations when it comes to the levels of media and press freedom. Considering those facts, it is to expect that citizens of these countries will have more access to the different media outlets and that they will consume more news than the average person in the rest of Africa will.

In the first part of the article, the direct effect of local governments and media's democratization potential, emphasizing the contextual situation in Southern Africa, on trust in national democratic institutions is considered. Furthermore, the moderation effects of news consumption are tested later. Regression analysis is performed in order to test the proposed hypotheses in the model. These assumptions are tested using the data collected from eleven countries from the Southern African region (Botswana, eSwatini, Lesotho, Madagascar, Malawi, Mauritius, Mozambique, Namibia, South Africa, Zambia, and Zimbabwe) by Afrobarometer, which provides high quality survey data.

Submission ID

2324

Account suspension as boundary clash: Censored experiences of China's digital platform users

Authors

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Abstract

Despite acknowledged as a hallmark of authoritarian regimes, state censorship has been relatively less understood from the perspective of everyday experiences of ordinary citizens. Furthermore, the role of the digital platform is often missed when the censorship phenomenon is studied in authoritarian societies. This research focuses on account suspension which is both a form of censorship and a moderation decision made by the digital platforms. Based on in-depth interviews with 27 participants whose WeChat accounts had been suspended for their speech related to the COVID-19 pandemic, this study investigated how did they make sense of account suspension and what were the impacts of account suspensions on their everyday life.

The findings indicate that account suspension was generally understood by the participants as the clash between their assumed boundary of the permissible speech and the boundary of state intolerance practiced by the platform company. Being uncertain about the exact boundary of the permissible speech, the participants relied on their past experiences of state tolerance to participate in the public discussion. However, their assumed boundary of the permissible may unexpectedly clash with the boundary practiced by the platform company, which was subjected to shifting considerations. The impacts of account suspension on the digital platform went beyond the violation of the right of free speech, including participants' sense of self-destruction, troublesome reconnection, and economic loss. These sanctions practiced by the platform company usually succeeded in discouraging users from participating in public discussion without the direct appearance of the authoritarian state. In contrast to the common narrative of bold subjects fighting for internet freedom, this study reveals the nuanced experiences of the censored subjects in the context of the authoritarian state and also shows that how

account suspension can be understood as the intersection between state censorship and platform moderation in the authoritarian setting.

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