Comparative Media Study in the Digital Age (29-30 June 2019, Beijing)

An international conference co-organized by Peking University, P. R. China, and the University of Copenhagen, Denmark

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Programme v15

June 29, 2019 (Day 1)

09:00 – 09:15 Arrival and coffee

09:15 – 09:30 Welcome

Professor Jing Wu, School of Journalism and Communication, Peking University
Associate Professor Jun Liu, University of Copenhagen, Denmark
Theme 1: Comparative Media Studies: Theories and Histories

9:30-10:15

[Keynote] “Comparing Media Systems” and the Media Age: Some proposals

Paolo Mancini, Professor, Università di Perugia, Italy

Abstract: One of the most frequent criticisms advanced against our book “Comparing Media Systems” (Cambridge University Press, 2004) regards our underestimation of the new media and their influence on the overall media system. In this paper I will try to outline how our schema for comparative research can be adapted to the digital age and which of the variables that have been proposed in the book have to be taken in consideration when looking at the new media and the way in which they interact with the legacy ones. Starting from already existing suggestions at this regard I propose that the partisan nature of the legacy media may affect new media as well together with the concentration level of the overall media system.

10:15-10:30 Q&A

10:30-10:45 Break

10:45-11:45 (20 mins each presentation and 20 mins Q&A; Moderator: Weishan Miao, Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, P.R. China)

[Research presentation] Regulating Digital Communication – An infrastructural perspective on media system analysis

Signe Sophus Lai & Sofie Flensburg, University of Copenhagen, Denmark

Abstract: Media systems have been extensively restructured since the emergence of the internet which increasingly supplements and replaces the use of former media infrastructures, distribution services, aggregators and content. This paper presents a methodological framework for mapping digital media systems and thereby analyzing how and why regulatory structures differ across national contexts. Following the current ‘turn to infrastructure’ in media studies (Sandvig 2013; Musiani et al. 2016; Plantin and Punathambekar 2019), we analyze media systems as technological, economic and political structures that enable and constrain mediated communication in a society. As opposed to common media system analyses that relies on the
framework developed by Hallin and Mancini (2004) and studies differences between news media systems and the conditions for practicing journalism in different parts of the world (e.g. Brüggemann et al., 2014), we take individual media users as our theoretical point of departure and ask how their communicative capabilities are regulated. In order to exemplify how the framework can be applied, we describe the methodological steps in an analysis of the Danish media system. In conclusion, we discuss the overall findings that the method uncovers as well as its implications for future comparative research projects.

[Research presentation] Interest Grouping or Stratification: An analysis and discussion on development trend of youth group in internet era

Xiaoping Wu, PhD student, Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, P. R. China

Abstract: This research studies the new characteristics of youth group gathering in internet, and boils down to the developing trend of interest grouping among current youth group in internet era. Then it analyzes the depending conditions of interest grouping and its reverse influences on the internet and real society, and finally discusses its future development approach. Interest grouping may be a new development trend in the current internet era, but still it lacks adequate empirical research as theoretical support, compared to stratification, and may not be strong enough in prediction of youth behavior, therefore, more follow-up research is needed to pay attention to this feature.

12:00-13:30 Lunch and break
Theme 2: A Change of Lens: Comparative from a Chinese perspective

13:30-14:15

[Keynote] Is Internet Different in China? Or is it?
Yong Hu, Professor, Peking University, P. R. China

Abstract: 829 million people use the Internet in China, and they use it for pretty much the same reasons as people everywhere else: to connect with friends, catch up on news, watch videos, and go shopping. Yet we all know Chinese users have certain restrictions when accessing the Internet. This makes a Chinese intranet, where people have a very different pattern of information flow and cultural consumption. On this Chinese internet, netizens are creating a new political subjectivity, broadening the scope of citizenship to bring full political rights, and help themselves realize enjoyment of citizenship. In the 21st century, Chinese "netizens" are perhaps playing the role of that of Western "citizens" in the beginning of modernity, implying a kind of political agency marked by his or her membership in a political community.

14:15-14:30 Q&A

14:30-15:15

[Keynote] Rethinking Chinese audience research from a comparative lens: From mass media to new media era
Baohua Zhou, Professor, Fudan University, P. R. China

Abstract: The trajectory and evolution of audience research in China could be understood from a comparative lens. First, the starting of Chinese audience research in early 1980s was actually an academic normalization endeavor following the Western (especially American) theories and approaches, by applying empirical methods (e.g., survey) and testing Western theories in Chinese context. In this line of study, scholars only compare the results without considering the possible fundamental differences between different social political-economic backgrounds as well as cultural differences. Second, the theoretical development of audience research in China is then driven by using Western theories but considering the possible differences and proposing theoretical hypotheses in advance rather than simply testing with ad-hoc explanations. We argue a third step needs to be taken, which proposes theoretical questions from local empirical
observations and then making comparative dialogues with theories, concepts, and empirical facts from other societies to develop theories collectively. We also emphasize the internal comparison should be seriously taken besides comparing China as a whole and homogenous entity with other societies.

15:15-15:30 Q&A

15:30-15:45 Break

15:45-17:15 (20 mins each presentation and 30 mins Q&A; Moderator: Mei Zhang, Professor, Fujian Normal University)

Pengfei Liu, Senior Researcher, The Public Opinion and Data Institute of People.cn, P. R. China
Abstract: In the age of the Internet, most people communicate and contact with various kinds of media through computers and smartphones. The Internet turns into a mirror of our world. As Internet users gain information, news, and viewpoints via more diversified media than before, they incline to set various labels or agenda to others or countries, which would lead netizens into positive feedback such as interests\supporting as well as stereotype\prejudice simultaneously. In our new book, our team researched the images of Chinese netizens, which revealed their impression of more than 10 countries through popular topics, celebrity, politics, economics, culture, lifestyle, and cities. Under internet circumstances and special laws, we consider that people from different countries should communicate inclusively and rationally with more truth and entire stories with positive energy to reach a deeper and more mature understanding.

[Research Presentation] Evolution and Impact on Chinese Consumers in a Mobile First Eco-system
Bhasker Jaiswal, Managing Partner - Marketing Sciences, OMD China
Abstract: Unlike the developed world, most Chinese internet users started their digital experience on mobile instead of PC. At the moment, mobile penetration among internet users in China has reached 99%, while in US this number is only 82%. This key difference has created
many layers of impacts on the Chinese digital environment and Chinese consumers. Our research will discuss the impact of Mobile First on E-commerce, payment, video, data, and consumer’s attitudes towards mobile advertising. While comparing the Chinese digital eco system with that of US, we can gain a deeper understanding of Chinese netizens and digital media environment.

Huixia Zhai, Associate Research Fellow, Academy of Contemporary China and World Studies
Abstract: Asian countries’ historical experience and cultural heritage of governance is well-recognized among the respondents. 85.5% of the respondents agree that the silk road spirit has great cultural strength. In the meanwhile, 75.9% of the respondents think that the Belt and Road Initiative could be conceptualized as global public good with bright prospects for their home country. Moreover, 83.7% of the respondents wish that the silk road renaissance for cultural exchange is coming. Nearly nine out of 10 Asian voters think that the interactions and mutual learning among Asian civilizations is a long-term task. In particular, regarding the variables that to further promote civilizations dialogue among Asian countries, governmental interactions, media cooperation, and tourist policy negotiations are identified by the respondents as the most significance agent, the key agenda, and the most popular pattern.

17:20 Thanks – end of conference day
June 30 2019 (Day 2)

08:00 – 08:30 Arrival and coffee

Theme 3: Comparative Research: Methodologies and Reflections

8:30-9:15
[Keynote] Comparative Research and the Complexity of Media Systems
Dan Hallin, Professor, University of California, San Diego, the U.S.

Abstract: Over the last couple of decades, comparative research on media systems has expanded greatly. In this presentation I reflect on some of the methodological issues that arise in the comparative study of media systems, and the way these are related to our understanding of what a "system" is. Media systems are complex entities. They are heterogeneous, including multiple components or subsystems that may operate according to different logics. They are also dynamic, shifting from one state to another depending on the context and conjuncture, evolving over time and sometimes changing in response to external forces or internal dynamics. They may also have fuzzy and shifting boundaries. All of these characteristics of systems present challenges for researchers, that require methodological pluralism and patience in drawing conclusions as the process of research goes forward. I will explore in particular the advantages and disadvantages of larger-N quantitative research and of small-N case study methods.

9:15-9:30 Q&A

9:30-10:30 (20 mins each presentation and 20 mins Q&A; Moderator: Guohua Zeng, Assistant Professor, Chinese Academy of Social Sciences [CASS], P.R. China)
[Research presentation] The Invisible Internet: Mapping of third-party services as a new resource for analyzing and comparing digital media systems
Rasmus Helles, Stine Lomborg & Signe Sophus Lai, University of Copenhagen, Denmark

Abstract: Cookies and scripts are key elements in the online tracking infrastructure, which today enable global internet businesses and national companies alike to perform a massive surveillance operation of global scope. This operation forms the backbone of an advertising system that is
destabilizing the economies of legacy media in many countries (Webster, 2015). Beyond the top companies in this new business (e.g. Google and Facebook), we know little about the landscape of online tracking and the forces that shape it. Using examples from an empirical study of the 28 EU countries, the US and China, our paper seeks to include the structure of the tracking infrastructure as a resource for re-drawing the map of media systems.

[Research presentations] Who’s Exceptional? Examining the communication patterns across China, Europe and the USA

Chris Su and Jacob Ørmen, University of Copenhagen, Denmark

Abstract: Since its foundation, scholars and pundits alike have portrayed the USA as exceptional in spirit and culture in opposition to the old world of Europe. With the economic rise of China, the talk of exceptionalism has travelled eastwards. This presentation investigates how exceptional – or common – the USA, Europe and China are seen through the communication patterns of ordinary people across a spectrum of life domains, including traditional and digital media use, social interactions with others, and social media engagement. Using data from a cross-national survey, the presentation maps out the differences and similarities in how people get information and communicate with others. Building on this mapping, the presentation asks to which extend the media users are converging in their communication patterns across different media systems.

10:30-10:45 Break

10:45-11:45 (20 mins each presentation and 20 mins Q&A; Moderator: Guohua Zeng, Assistant Professor, CASS, P.R. China)

[Research presentations] Internet governance: Grasping country differences within the global Internet infrastructure

Verena Brändle and Rasmus Helles, University of Copenhagen, Denmark

Abstract: Internet governance and regulation are widely considered a ‘moving target’ for researchers, given the multitude of public and private actors involved on different governance levels and at different layers of global Internet infrastructure and content. Comparative, cross-country analyses are exceedingly criticised for their disregard of the transforming role of the
state in relation to other governance actors. However, while the role of the state seems to become less dominant, national or regional differences in Internet infrastructure and in degrees of digitalisation remain visible. In order to address differences across national contexts in the shaping of Internet infrastructure and content, we discuss a comparative framework in the making that builds on indicators from technological, market-related and political forces involved in Internet governance. We present first, preliminary results of a quantitative mapping exercise of various countries and discuss them in relation to Internet governance as an interplay between and across national contexts and digital transformations on regional/international scales.

[Research presentations] How Did the 2016 US Presidential Election Affect the Generational Gap in Online News Use? Convergence or divergence in consumption during media events
Chris Chao Su, University of Copenhagen, Harsh Taneja, University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign, and Angela Wu Xiao, New York University

Abstract: This study revisits the contentious role of the 2016 US presidential election in shaping digital media use by contrasting usage networks of millennials and boomers, two groups with disparate preferences. Theoretically, we bring the literature on media events into selective exposure thesis, our study has advanced an analytical framework to approach increased divergence and intensified polarization in the election, with a focus on the consumption of political news, in the digital age through a sociological perspective. Empirically, we compare the generational gap in online news usage in a typical month (April-2015) and the month just before Elections (October-2016), by conducting relational analyses of shared usage for each cohort comprising all major news outlets. Our analyses reveal that during the election boomers moved toward a collection of digital-native outlets that produce and disseminate political disinformation – the fake fringe – as well as more toward the conservative partisan side of the news landscape. Investigating audience convergence during Donald Trump’s election, our analyses demonstrate that although the public tends to converge their attention in the event, the systematic divergence in consuming various narratives of the event forcefully steers to audience divergence compared to uneventful periods.

12:00-13:00 Lunch and break
Theme 4: Comparative Media Study across the Globe

13:00-13:45 [Keynote] Reconsidering the Media Processes and Effects Paradigm: Insights from global mobile communication research

Abstract: Mobile communication represents a fast-growing emerging field of new media research in the past decade. The evolution of this rising field is traced and trends in research are outlined. Analyzing 375 articles published in top journals between 2006 and 2019, the status and focus of mobile communication research worldwide were outlined and compared, from which differing focus and agenda of different regions emerge. Moreover, compared to the legacy media (essentially print or electronic forms of a message medium), the ubiquitous mobile media and always-on connectivity of smart phones lead to what Ihde (2009) called the “embodiment” relations between mobile media and users. The insights of global mobile communication research call for reconsidering the media processes and effects paradigm.
Ran Wei, Gonzales Brothers Professor of Journalism, University of South Carolina, US

13:45-14:00 Q&A

14:00-15:00 (20 mins each presentation and 20 mins Q&A; Moderator: Weishan Miao, Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, P.R. China)

[Research presentation] Mobile Connectivity in Emerging Economies
Lee Rainie, Pew Research Center, U.S.

Abstract: This presentation will cover survey findings in 11 emerging economies in four global regions about the adoption of mobile connectivity, social media and the internet and will explore how people use their phones, the way they think about the role of phones in their lives and the impact of mobile connectivity on their societies. It will highlight people’s concerns about fake news and misinformation, the problems that worry them about how new access to information might harm children and growing appreciation people have for the way digital connectivity helps education and the economy. The data come from face-to-face interviews with nationally-representative samples of adults in these countries.
[Research presentation] Being Social: Strong and weak ties in the age of social media
Jesper Pagh & Fiona Huijie Zeng, University of Copenhagen, Denmark

Abstract: In the latter half of 2017, we conducted a qualitative fieldwork in China and the US, following a shared approach that combines recurrent interviews with 24-hour media diaries in an iterative design which allows for comparability of media practices across culturally distinct contexts. The study takes the individual user as the unit of analysis in order to understand people’s communication practices and motives. As such, we study intermediality (Jensen, 2008) on the basis of the respondent and in close relation to actual communication purposes, networks, and contexts. Based on the data collected, we present a cross-national comparison of people in China and the US that focuses on how people stay in touch with their strong and weak ties (Granovetter, 1973; Haythornthwaite, 2002; Small, 2017). We do this with special attention to the role of the internet as one avenue of communication in their respective media repertoire (Hasebrink & Popp, 2006).

15:00-15:15 Break and coffee

15:15-16:15 Round-table discussion (moderators: Jing Wu [PKU] & Jun Liu [UCPH])

16:30 Thanks and the end of the conference

Professor Jing Wu, School of Journalism and Communication, Peking University
Associate Professor Jun Liu, University of Copenhagen, Denmark
Participants

Dr. Fernando Bermejo, the Berkman Center, Harvard University & Profesor Asociado, IE University, Spain
Dr. Verena K. Brändle, Postdoc, University of Copenhagen, Denmark
Professor Wei Bu, Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, P. R. China
Professor Daniel C. Hallin, University of California San Diego, USA
Dr. Rasmus Helles, Associate Professor, University of Copenhagen, Denmark
Professor Yong Hu, Peking University, P. R. China
Dr. Sascha Hölig, Hans-Bredow-Institut für Medienforschung, Germany
Mr. Bhasker Jaiswal, Managing Partner - Marketing Sciences, OMD China
Ms. Signe Sophus Lai, PhD student, University of Copenhagen, Denmark
Dr. Shuixing Lian, Associate Professor, Fujian Normal University, P.R. China
Professor Sun Sun Lim Head of Humanities, Arts and Social Sciences at the Singapore University of Technology and Design, Singapore
Dr. Jun Liu, Associate Professor, University of Copenhagen, Denmark
Mr. Pengfei Liu, Senior Researcher, The Public Opinion and Data Institute of People.cn, P. R. China
Dr. Xinchuan Liu, Assistant Professor, School of Journalism and Communication, Peking University
Professor Paolo Mancini, Università di Perugia, Italy
Dr. Weishan Miao, Assistant Professor, Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, P.R. China
Mr. Jesper Pagh, PhD student, University of Copenhagen, Denmark
Dr. Lee Rainie, the director of internet and technology research at Pew Research Center, USA
Dr. Chris Chao Su, postdoc, University of Copenhagen, Denmark
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