Digital media technologies in everyday life

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Published online: 06 Apr 2017.

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INTRODUCTION

Digital media technologies in everyday life

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We have, in the opening months of 2017, reports of technology industry workers in California boasting that they 'helped meme a president into office' (Harkinson, 2017). Digital media technologies shape our everyday lives, from unprecedented elections to quotidian rhythms of growing older to watching a favorite television show and discussing it with like-minded others via Twitter. Saskia Sassen writes:

> Critical are forms of knowledge that bring in the social, the cultural, the political into the digital as it instantiates in diverse settings. If we do not introduce these, admittedly messy, components we delegate the making of knowledge *about* these technologies to the engineers and software designers. (Sassen, 2016, preface) (emphasis in the original)

The 2017 CITAMS special issue of *Information, Communication & Society* brings together research that takes us a several steps further along the path to understanding the imbrication of digital technologies with the social, the cultural, and the political in a global context. We have selected four articles that foreground the theoretical and methodological innovation so characteristic of the Communication Information Technologies, and Media Sociology section of ASA. We are pleased that this year's special issue includes an article that represents the section's new focus on media sociology.

First, we begin the volume with Gabe Ignatow's and Laura Robinson's, 'Pierre Bourdieu: Theorizing the digital.' Their article provides a meta-analysis and theoretical framework for extending Bourdieu's concepts of field, capital, and habitus to the emerging field of digital sociology. Particularly relevant here is their discussion of digital cultural capital Internet memes generated as places like 4chan. As a form of cultural capital, these memes are unstable and generate collective identity by keeping shared culture at the center of discussion. Of course, the paper does much more theoretical work than this and charts the contributions of Bourdieu's work for digital sociology. However, Ignatow and Robinson caution the digital sociologists who would 'appropriate Bourdieu's ideas à la carte,' and should recognize that his concepts of 'field, capital, and habitus were developed together as part of an integrated relational approach to social research.'

A second article explores the ways older adults establish and maintain social support networks through the use of digital media technologies such as email, Facebook, and

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Skype. In 'Connected seniors: How older adults in East York exchange social support online and offline,' Anabel Quan-Haase, Guang Ying Mo and Barry Wellman offer an empirical study of 42 seniors (65 and older) in Canada. Younger seniors are more likely to be comfortable with utilizing digital media due to having been exposed to computers and the Internet in their work lives, which suggests that as people age, the ways that seniors use digital media technologies will continue to change with each cohort. Quan-Haase et al. are responding to a long-running debate about whether digital technologies isolate and alienate us from social connection, or provide a conduit for support. For the seniors in this study, the support they mobilize through a variety of digital technologies is 'real,' and not token, support.

The third and fourth articles both address Twitter, but in very different contexts. In 'I got all my sisters with me (on Black Twitter): Second screening of *How to Get Away with Murder* as a discourse on Black Womanhood,' Apryl Williams and Vanessa Gonlin examine the communal viewing of popular cultural products by Black audiences. They argue that such second screen viewing helps to foster online support networks, particularly for Black women who are frequently marginalized by mass media and (re)presented in negative ways. This co-viewing experience is dependent upon a shared knowledge of certain cultural practices, such as Black hair care. Williams and Gonlin point out the links between media that is designed to be consumed via the first screen and is then leveraged into a community-building tool via the second screen of Black Twitter. They use a Black feminist lens to suggest that Twitter enables a technocultural discourse on a shared cultural history of Black womanhood.

In an altogether different setting, the fourth article examines a dispute over air quality between the U.S. and Chinese governments. In 'A transnational networked public sphere of air pollution: Analysis of a Twitter network of PM2.5 from the risk society perspective,' Wenhong Chen, Fangjing Tu, and Pei Zheng draw on digital trace data, publicly accessible government documents, and journalistic reports for their analysis. They found that political and professional elites who are discussing PM2.5 were the most powerful producers of what constituted a 'risk' in terms of air pollution. These elites were followed closely by established media, which played an important key role. Laypersons, while peripheral, actively interacted with elite and established media. Chen, Tu, and Zheng document the blurring geographic boundary in this Twitter network as a way to make the broader argument about an emerging transnational public sphere, which remains separated by language. Their research offers a much-needed layered understanding of the contingent, paradoxical digital media impact for social change.

Finally, the 2017 CITAMS special issue of *Information, Communication & Society* is the work of many hands. We thank the authors who offered their work, the reviewers who did the invisible labor of reading and responding to these papers, and our section leadership and membership. We could not have put this special issue together without the extraordinary efforts of Brian Loader and Sarah Shrive-Morrison who have been patient and steadfast guides throughout this process.

Disclosure statement

Notes on contributor

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