

Rebekah Larsen, PhD

Postdoctoral Associate (Comparative Media Studies) and Lecturer, Massachusetts Institute of Technology
Postdoctoral Fellow (Journalism and New Media), Oslo Metropolitan University
20 Ames Street, Cambridge MA 02142
ralarsen@mit.edu

Relevant Links

Personal Site: rebekahlarsen.me

Google Scholar: <https://scholar.google.com/citations?user=8NBx6CMAAAAJ&hl=en>

ORCID: [0000-0002-0884-6217](https://orcid.org/0000-0002-0884-6217)

I am an early career media sociologist with a PhD from Cambridge University. My work engages with concepts of alternative news ecosystems, rurality, platformization, (mis)information, networked publics, sociotechnical aspects of knowledge creation, and (digital) inequality. My methods are mixed with a qualitative bent; my work is also aimed at reflexive critique of digital media research methods. Through 2023, I am a postdoctoral associate and lecturer in MIT's Comparative Media Studies Department. I also hold a postdoctoral fellowship at Oslo Metropolitan University (2021 – 2023). My two current research streams focus on a) journalistic approaches to misinformation around technologies, partnerships, and practices; and b) a case study mapping of the Utah media ecosystem in terms of actors, networks, technologies, and cultural influences.

Education

<i>Degree</i>	<i>Institution</i>	<i>Date Granted</i>
B.A.	University of Pennsylvania Science, Technology, and Society Anthropology Minor <i>Summa cum laude</i>	2012
M.Phil	University of Cambridge Judge Business School Technology Policy	2015
Ph.D.	University of Cambridge Sociology Department Advisor: Dr. Ella McPherson Dissertation: " <i>Exploring Definitional Power in the Digital Age: A Case Study of Right to be Forgotten Framing</i> "	Approved March 2021; conferred Sept. 2022

Academic Appointments and Affiliations

2021 - 2023 *Postdoctoral Fellow, Oslo Metropolitan University (New Media and Journalism).*
Collaborator on an international team analyzing journalist and platform approaches to

electoral misinformation. This project includes assessment of journalistic practices and partnerships through interviews, observations, and analysis of technologies.

- 2022 - 2023 **Postdoctoral Associate and Lecturer, MIT (Comparative Media Studies)**. I am redesigning and teaching an MIT communication intensive course, CMS 100 - *Introduction to Media Studies*, for Spring 2023. Research entails mapping the Utah media environment via online and broadcast data sources, based on fieldwork in 2022.
- 2021 - 2023 **Research Associate, Cambridge University (Centre for Governance + Human Rights)**. Via the OsloMet project and Cambridge resources through this affiliation, I am currently conducting a technography, or ethnographic assessment, of the values embedded in verification tools used by fact-checkers. Through 2020, I was also a founding member and researcher for the academic startup, the Whistle.
- 2017 **Visiting Scholar, MIT (Center for Civic Media)**. While conducting PhD fieldwork in the USA, I also contributed qualitative insight into the development of an open-source platform, MediaCloud, for studying media ecosystems in terms of texts, visuals, sources, and their connections.

Research and Scholarship

Publications – peer-reviewed articles, chapters, and papers

Belair-Gagnon, Valérie, **Larsen, R. L.** Graves, O. Westlund. (Forthcoming.) “Knowledge Work in Platform-Fact Checking Partnerships.” *International Journal of Communication*.

Westlund, Oscar, **Larsen, R.**, L. Graves, L. Kavtaradze. (2022) “Technologies and fact-checking: a sociotechnical mapping and assessment”. Chapter in *Disinformation Studies: Perspectives in an emerging research field*. LabCom Books.

Larsen, R. (2022) “‘Information Pressures’ and the Facebook Files: Navigating questions around leaked platform data”. *Digital Journalism*. DOI: 10.1080/21670811.2022.2087099

Larsen, R. (2020) “Mapping *Right to be Forgotten* frames: Reflexivity and empirical payoffs at the intersection of network discourse and mixed network methods” 22 (7). *New Media & Society*.

J. Powles, **Larsen R.** (2015) “Academic Commentary: Google Spain”. *Cambridge Code*. Available at: <http://www.cambridge-code.org/googlespain>

Larsen, R. (2015) “The Digital Information Verification Field: Current Actors, Practices and Trends”. Report containing *findings from field research with The Whistle Project at the University of Cambridge*. *This report contains an overview of new and emerging technologies around online information verification; it also contains analysis of certain practices discovered via fieldwork*. Available online at <http://thewhistle.org/>.

Larsen, R., Brochot, G., Lewis, D., Eisma, F.L., Brunini, J. (2015) “Personal Data Stores”. European Commission – DG Connect. *Report commissioned by the European Commission on personal data tools to*

evaluate feasibility and potential areas of policy assistance. Available at <https://ec.europa.eu/digital-agenda/en/news/study-personal-data-stores-conducted-cambridge-university-judge-business-school>.

Larsen, R. (2012). "The Political Nature of TCP/IP". Momentum. *Published senior thesis in the University of Pennsylvania undergraduate journal, exploring socio-technical development of key Internet infrastructure.* Available at <https://repository.upenn.edu/momentum/vol1/iss1/20/>.

Works in Progress

- **Larsen, R.,** Bélair-Gagnon, V. (Expected 2023). "Misinformation, Political Campaigning, and Platforms". Chapter in *The Routledge Handbook of Political Campaigning*.
- L. Graves, **Larsen, R.,** Bélair-Gagnon, V. (Expected 2023). "From public reason to public health: Professional boundaries and normative implications of the global "debunking turn" in fact-checking". *Digital Journalism*. Under peer review (revisions).
- **Larsen, R.** "Rural Rightwing Talk Radio in Utah: Sociotechnical Practices, Identifications, and Politics". An article in progress based on fieldwork (interviewing, newsroom ethnography, and analysis of political filings and broadcasts) at four rural, locally-owned, conservative Utah stations.
- **Larsen, R.** "Mapping the Utah Media Ecosystem" – an article laying out the main actors, networks, and influences of this unique media ecosystem, with special attention influences such as the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints as a key player and global disseminator of digital media.
- Manuscript based on doctoral research around framing of a controversial data protection and privacy concept – *currently submitting proposals to publishers.*
- A peer-reviewed article sharing results from a critical 'technography' (ethnography of technology, including review of technical aspects as well as user experiences and the tool's development) of a widely used fact-checking digital verification platform. *Abstract submitted to ICA 2023.*

Presentations

Academic Conferences

Bélair-Gagnon, V., **Larsen R.,** Graves, L. (23/06/2022). "There is Cap: Platforms and Fact-Checkers Cross Sector Partnerships". Global Fact 9, Oslo Metropolitan University.

Graves, L., Bélair-Gagnon, V., **Larsen, R.** (29/05/2022). "What Are Fact-Checkers for? The Divide Between 'Fact-Checking' and 'Debunking' in a Growing Transnational Field". *Negotiating Boundaries of Journalism and Journalistic Practices*. International Communication Association, Paris 2022.

Larsen, R. (25/09/2021). "Approaching a Pressured Press in Context: Differing Journalistic Responses to Media Controversy." Future of Journalism. Cardiff University.

Larsen, R. (09/02/2021). "Data into Theory: Visibility in Media Research and Culture Studies". Data into Theory Seminar Series. Online at <https://www.sociology.cam.ac.uk/data-theory>.

Larsen, R. (08/01/2019). "Networked Discussions about the Network: A Case Study of Public Discussion around the Right to be Forgotten". Presented at Understanding the Social in the Digital Age, Norwich Uni.

Larsen, R. (29/06/2018). "Media Manipulation, Visibility, and Rights: Public Discussion Around the Right to Be Forgotten". Presented at Media Manipulation Conference, University of Cambridge.

Larsen, R. (22/05/2018). "Data Colonialism and Data Protection Reform: Transnational Advocacy

Networks in Latin America”. Presented at Data Justice Conference, Cardiff University.

Larsen, R. (16/03/2018). “Media Cloud: A Platform for Exploring Dynamic Media Ecosystems”. Technology Demonstration at the Post Truth Conference, University of Cambridge.

Oman, S., **Larsen, R.** Tchilingirian, J. (16/02/2018). “Researching Think Tanks with Digital Methods and Data Sprints”. Digital Methods Winter School (UVA) and Bath University’s *On Think Tanks* conference.

Larsen, R. (28 October 2017). “Mapping Dynamic Media Ecosystems: A Case Study of the Right to Be Forgotten”. Presented at Dubrovnik Media Days: Digital Intermediaries and Media Pluralism.

Major Research Projects and Grants

2021 - 2023 Source Criticism and Mediated Disinformation (Collaborator)

Funding: Norwegian Research Council (9.5M NOK/\$1M)

- Main project aim: the advancement of journalists’ ability to critically scrutinize sources and information in a digital age, using global empirical research.
- Personal research aim: interviewing journalists and other media commentators throughout the state of Utah about their work and upcoming midterm elections; also using digital and network methods to track regional stories + relationships.

2015 - 2021 Definitional Power and Right to Be Forgotten Framings (Doctoral Research Project)

Funding: Cambridge International Scholarship (£122,000/\$140,000)

- Explored influences—cultural, social, political, and economic—on news production, knowledge creation, and visibility online, using a data privacy controversy as a case study. I designed an innovative mixed methods project that prioritized less visible voices in the ‘networked public sphere’.
- This project was recognized by the Association of Internet Researchers in the 2021 Dissertation Award scheme; I am developing a resultant book proposal.

2016 - 2020 The Whistle Project (Collaborator)

Funding: ESRC Acceleration Grant, EU Horizon 2020 ‘Chain-React’ Project

- Founding member of an academic startup building a digital platform for reporting human rights violations. Project aims also included academic and public-facing publications and reports
- Current iteration of The Whistle being used in multiple UK universities for reporting on sexual violence and harms.

2015 - 2016 ICTs and the Right to Life (Collaborator)

Centre for Governance and Human Rights, Cambridge University

- Part of a student team collecting and assessing examples of information technologies used for human rights reporting.
- Contributed to report for United Nations Human Rights Council on *ICTs and the Right to Life* via the Centre for Governance and Human Rights (CGHR).

2014 - 2015 Study of Personal Data Stores, European Commission (Collaborator)

Judge Business School Consulting Project

- Designed and conducted a research project on data protection tools and potential users. Engaged in primary data collection and analysis, interviewing companies, NGOs, and academics involved in data management and privacy.
- Presented findings in a market report to EU policymakers, leading to conferences, funding allocation, and roundtables at the European Commission.

**2011 - 2012 *The Political Nature of TCP/IP (Undergraduate Research Project)*
Senior Thesis, STS Department, University of Pennsylvania**

- Interviewed key industry figures regarding Internet development and conducted significant secondary research on internet history.
- Published thesis on technical/political development of Internet architecture in the UPenn undergraduate research journal.

Conference, Workshop and Seminar Organization

Co-organized academic track of *Global Fact 9 (2022)*, an international conference with thousands of attending journalists, platform representatives, and researchers. Personally drafted and disseminated call for abstracts; reviewed and selected presenters; and moderated panels.

Convened the Cambridge Technology and New Media Research Cluster (2018 – 2019). I brought together a diverse range of international academics and practitioners each term, selecting them based on conference presentations and recent publications. Discussion and presentation subjects included surveillance capitalism, critical analysis of artificial intelligence, and social media and body positivity.

Doctoral Research Convenor, Centre for Governance and Human Rights (2017 - 2018). I organized and moderated a UK-based graduate conference (2018), and arranged monthly research presentations and discussions across diverse Cambridge departments around technology and human rights.

Founded and edited the undergraduate journal *Momentum* in the STS department, as an Advisory Committee member and student representative.

Peer Reviewer

- *New Media and Society*
- *Digital Journalism*
- *Journal of Human Rights Practice*
- *International Journal of Politics, Culture and Society*
- *International Journal of Press/Politics*

Membership in Professional Organizations

- Association for Internet Researchers (AoIR)
- International Communication Association (ICA)
- Phi Beta Kappa (national honor society)

Methods Training

- Expertise with collaborative media research tools: Atlas.ti, MediaCloud, Microsoft Office and Google Drive, markup languages (HTML and XML), object-oriented programming (java and python), SNA (social network analysis).

- Digital methods training certificates from the University of Amsterdam's Digital Methods Institute (2018) and Boston University Department of Emerging Media Studies (2017).
- Cambridge Social Science Research Methods Courses (SSRMC) in Qualitative Coding, Survey Analysis, Statistics, Interviewing, and Social Network Analysis.

Teaching and Training

MIT, Comparative Media Studies Department

- CMS 100, Introduction to Media (3/3/6) – Spring 2023. Redesigning syllabus and teaching + grading this gateway course to the CMS department.
- Training: Kaufman Teaching Certificate program (2023).

University of Cambridge, Sociology Department

- SOC 003 – Modern Societies. Lectured, co-created syllabus, supervised, and graded.
- SOC 007 – Media, Culture, and Society. Supervised and graded.
- Training: Effective Undergraduate Supervision Course – workshop and student feedback.

Leadership and Service

- St. John's College - Mountaineering Society President and committee member, 2016 – 18
- Elected MPhil in Technology Policy student representative (2014 – 2015), representing 30 students at Judge Business School, University of Cambridge.
- Board member, Cambridge University Science & Policy Exchange (2014 – 2015). Round tabled with industry and academic experts (Google, EU, Cambridge Engineering).
- Internet Society (ISOC) Next Generation Leader (2012 – 2013). Produced group report regarding privacy online and international trade implications.
- Elected student representative to UPenn STS department. Launched undergraduate journal.

Honors and Awards

2022	Recognized by major scholarly organization, Association of Internet Researchers (AoIR), for outstanding doctoral dissertation in 2021 : “[A] very timely study on internet governance, user data processing and control. The study is particularly interesting as it looks at the right to be forgotten as an ‘activist’ tool for marginalized groups but also on the other hand how it serves as an exclusionary measure. The dissertation thus not only deals with many issues important in internet scholarship but has implications for policy debates along the North-South divide.”
2020	Awarded a Collier Travel Grant, MIT Outdoor Club, for inclusivity in sports. (USD 400)
2019	Annual fund grant for ‘Empowering Women’ program at St. John's College, Cambridge, for gender-inclusive weight training and facilities. (£1450/\$1640)
2019	Lundgren Fund - Research award for doctoral project (£675/\$764).

2018-2019	Grants from Cambridge Political Economy Society for doctoral research. (£4000/\$4520)
2018-2019	Grant from the Cambridge Trust for continuing doctoral research (£9000/\$10,180)
2017-2018	Sociology Department Fieldwork Fund award for doctoral research (£7990/\$9040)
2016	Parson's Fund travel grant for 'Dodecanese: Climbing and Community' (£400/\$565)
2015-2020	Cambridge International Scholarship. Received a full-ride, highly competitive PhD scholarship (three years) from the Cambridge Trust at Cambridge University based on significant academic potential and achievement. Scholarship covered overseas tuition, living stipend, and training costs. (Estimated £123,00/\$140,000)
2012	Society of the College Award (UPenn) for best interdisciplinary thesis.

Other Experience

Professional, NGO, Academic-Adjacent

2015 - 2020	Researcher and Market Analyst, The Whistle (Academic Startup). <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Launched an academic startup developing an online information verification reporting platform for human rights violations. Authored and presented findings to journalists, academics, and practitioners in workshops and seminars. Led market research efforts surveying media engaged in information verification. Developed protocol and coded media actors based on their practices, outputs, and funding. Conducted content analysis and interviewed journalists, activists, and startups involved in online information verification practices.
2020	Research Consultant, Global Disinformation Index (NGO) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> As part of an international team, analyzing 30 UK news domains in terms of content and operations; employing research expertise in journalism studies and specific media markets to assess journalistic practice and technologies. Assessing news domains in terms of 'risk of disinforming' using the GDI's rating criteria and index methodology; this risk assessment will be used to disrupt, defund, and down-rank disinformation.
2012 - 2014	Legal Assistant, Skarzynski Black (civil litigation law firm) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Effectively managed fifteen attorney caseloads as head paralegal and took on increasing levels of responsibility to typical new associate work at time of departure. Managed intern pool and coordinated file review material for clients. Conducted legal research; proofed and revised legal filings; prepared evidence and documents for discovery.
2012 - 2014	Voluntary Research Assistant and Coordinator, ACCESS (NGO) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Recruited, trained, and coordinated volunteer team of 20 for the international Silicon Valley Human Rights Conference, a professional multi-day event with over 700 attendees from 65 countries. Produced reports and collated research on cybersecurity and access issues for the head of Access and the policy team.

- 2008 - 2012 **Content Assistant, WXPB (NPR-affiliated radio station in Philadelphia)**
- Developed hands-on experience at a Top-25 Music site in web production and music festival operations.
 - Met tight deadlines with live blogging and content development, operating within a web team, and gaining exposure to backend site management.
- 2009 - 2010 **Digital Archivist, PennSound (non-profit poetry archive)**
- Digitized, edited, and uploaded poetry and the spoken word from various events and historical tapes.
 - Gained experience in basic web page creation, using databases, html, and CSS