

**Media Anthropology Network
European Association of Social Anthropologists (EASA)
E-Seminar Series**

**Joint e-seminar with
AAA's Digital Anthropology Group (DANG)
and
Committee for the Anthropology of Science, Technology and Computing
(CASTAC)**

<http://www.media-anthropology.net/index.php/e-seminars>

**E-Seminar 57
Facebook as a research field and a research platform**

**Opening statements by
Philipp Budka, University of Vienna
Jordan Kraemer, Wesleyan University
Martin Slama, Austrian Academy of Science
Sydney Yeager, Southern Methodist University**

22nd of June – 13th of July 2016

Dear All,

The 57th E-Seminar of the Media Anthropology Network is now Open!

As this seminar has been organised following a different structure, and we do not have a Discussant, I would like to start off the discussion with a question.

In the last years we have seen the emergence of significant research in anthropology and beyond that directly or indirectly engages with Facebook as an ethnographic field. As the different authors of the opening statements have shown, it has been almost impossible for participant observers to ignore how everyday interactions were intrinsically interconnected with social media exchanges.

Although we have seen the emergence of fantastic research in the field, one question has remained relatively underinvestigated and I would encourage the authors of the opening statements to comment on this. This is a question about the political economy of Facebook.

In the last 10 years I have carried out ethnographic research amongst activists. As argued elsewhere (Barassi, 2015), one of the main findings of my research has to do with the tensions activists face as they try to come to terms with the corporate nature of social media technologies, and especially Facebook. Not only activists are aware of the fact that social media technologies exploit personal data for corporate purposes, but they also perceive social media platforms as 'privately owned spaces' that are structured in a particular way that guarantees the 'standardization of profiles' and the commodification of human relationships.

Hence, as I argue in the forthcoming Routledge Companion to Digital Ethnography (edited by Hjorth et al.) I believe that in the understanding of Facebook as Field, ethnographers are faced by a theoretical and methodological conundrum.

On the one hand they are rightly aware of the fact that their method is essential in order to avoid techno-centric and deterministic perspectives and shed light on the multiple human possibilities of social media use. On the other hand, they need to come to terms with the fact that technological structures matter. It seems to me that as not engaging with the question of structure/design and its interconnection with the broader political economy of capitalism on Facebook, would be a bit like engaging in an ethnography of a Shopping Mall without reflecting on commodity exchange, privatisation, corporate logic, etc

During my research I personally relied on the concept of digital capitalism as an analytical and methodological tool to explore the corporatization of Facebook as an economic, cultural and political tension that shape this digital environment. In contrast to Schiller (2000) and other political economy scholars in communication research, however I did not believe that we can 'map the structures of digital capitalism' or that we could essentialise these. However, I was convince that the concept would enable me to explore the ethnographic tensions that arise in the

encounter of cultures between activists and the corporate logic of Facebook. In my book (Barassi, 2015 *Activism on the Web: Everyday Struggles Against Digital Capitalism*), I focus on three different ethnographic tensions that emerge in this encounter of cultures: networked individualism as a cultural phenomena, digital surveillance as a predominant discourse and practice, and immediacy as a temporality of digital capitalism.

Personally I am interested in hearing from others on whether they had to come to terms with similar tensions on the field or whether they were confronted with entirely different ones. Hence I would like to ask the authors of the opening statements to discuss the ways in which they understood and engaged with broader questions on the corporate nature of Facebook.

The discussion is now open to all so feel free to jump in or ask your own questions.

Very best wishes,

Veronica

Jordan Kraemer jkraemer@wesleyan.edu

June 23rd 2016

Thank you Veronica for getting us started!

This is a hugely important problem and vexes me frequently. As I develop new research on technology design and the “sharing” economy, it’s something that structures my inquiry more explicitly. But in my fieldwork so far, I have followed this tension through the way my research participants navigate it. When I’ve asked people about privacy, for example, they respond that they are very concerned about it and about how their data is being used, and they take some steps to limit what data Facebook shares. But the role that social media like Facebook play in their lives makes it difficult for many to reconcile concerns about Facebook as a private, corporate entity, mining data and selling advertising, and as a central media technology enmeshed in daily living.

On one hand, it seems to me that research on social media needs to ask different kinds of questions to get at the tensions Veronica has identified. In my own work, I’m increasingly attentive to questions of interface and interaction design, such as how “user experience” is carefully cultivated through aesthetic choices and possibilities for navigating an interface—and social relations. Most media technologies are still designed implicitly for certain kinds of users, and typically reflect (and instantiate) culturally specific assumptions about sociality, mobility, personhood, and so forth (this is a key theme of my forthcoming book).

On the other hand, I wonder what differentiates Facebook, as a corporately owned and controlled media platform, from other contexts in/under late capitalism. A point danah boyd often makes, for example, is that US teens report flocking to social media because they have lost access to other kinds of public spaces. When I think about other digital and media platforms in the US, most are private—television networks, print media, Google. In Germany, where I conducted my

fieldwork, there's the dual public/private system in print and broadcast media, but not online. Even popular social spaces like cafés or bars are private, for-profit businesses. I agree that the corporate nature of Facebook matters, but I would look more specifically at the way Facebook extracts value from its users. This raises broadly the question of how social media and other "Web 2.0" technologies depend on, and profit from, unpaid labor, under the rubric of "user-generated content."

I'd love to hear more about digital capitalism, and what it illuminates about these issues on Facebook—both for understanding social media practices on Facebook, and reflecting critically on using Facebook as a platform for research. One issue I've run into, for example, is how to get permission to publish screenshots from Facebook, since Facebook strictly controls its intellectual property, and academic presses are often wary of (or at least unfamiliar with) wading into that territory.

Jordan

Martin Slama Martin.Slama@oeaw.ac.at

June 24th 2016

Thanks to Veronica also from my side for this intervention right at the beginning, and Jordan for her inspiring response!

I like the comparison between Facebook and shopping malls. So if one decides to do a study about shopping malls or Facebook, i.e. if these are the objects of one's investigation, then it is indeed hard to imagine not to seriously consider the political economy of which these businesses are part of. As we know, they are expected to make profit; Facebook is listed on the stock exchange, as corporations that run shopping malls might be as well, etc. At the same time, they encounter a similar problem: bringing people to visit a shopping mall does not mean that these visitors will automatically buy goods that are available in the shops. Similarly, people that are on Facebook will not automatically buy goods or services that appear on their timeline, although these advertisements are based on a close monitoring of their user behaviour (how affective are these advertisements actually?).

So if one studies particular users or groups of users, instead of business entities like Facebook or shopping malls, questions concerning the political economy might become less relevant. And this brings me back to my research about Indonesian middle class Muslims who are frequent visitors of shopping malls and busy users of social media, including Facebook. Yet in both environments, malls and Facebook, shopping seems to be the least important activity for them. Indonesians like to meet colleagues, friends, relatives etc. in shopping malls. They do consume there, i.e. food and drinks in cafés and restaurants, whereas purchasing goods is a much less common activity (although shopping malls were invented for making people do exactly that). In a similar vein, they do not regard Facebook as a site for shopping, but first of all as a site for exhibiting their (religious) lifestyle. This does not mean that they do not use Facebook for economic activities. For example, women are trading Islamic clothing on Facebook and Islamic charities are using Facebook as a platform where they present their programmes and what they have already

achieved and ask users for donations. But when it comes to these economic activities the agency of users seems to outshine the agency of Facebook by far.

Let me also clarify that the people with whom I work in Indonesia are not political activists. Among them, concerns about privacy issues virtually do not exist (in stark contrast to both Veronica's and Jordan's research). With regard to Facebook, they want to have seen what they post by as many people as possible. The bigger the crowd, the more likes etc., the better. What is important for them is the possibility of having personal exchanges that apps like WhatsApp provide (that the company and God knows who else can read this does not bother them). And they use these apps very pragmatically. When an Islamic preacher had technical problems with WhatsApp he simply changed to Telegram, and his followers did so as well.

Of course, one could still argue that regardless of the attitude of one's interlocutors towards political economy and privacy issues Facebook remains a huge corporation with control over an incredibly big amount of data and one nevertheless has to critically reflect this in one's research. Well yes, I think one has to be aware of it and in some instances the topic might become a primary research concern. On the other side, one should also keep one's eyes open for ways of using Facebook (and other social networking sites) that do not support (or perhaps even resist) the strategies through which Facebook tries to make a profit, such as research about people going regularly to shopping malls has to take account of their practices of not shopping.

Philipp Budka ph.budka@philbu.net

June 26th 2016

Dear All,

Thank you Veronica for your comment and question which I think is extremely important.

As you can tell from my brief and a bit polemic opening statement, I positioned Facebook not only as the world's most used and therefore most dominant social networking platform, but also as a multi-billion dollar company, naturally following and shaping capitalist and neoliberal developments and processes. Through my ethnographic fieldwork with the indigenous internet service provider, network and organization KO-KNET, I learned that it is absolutely necessary to take a good look at the organization/institution behind a specific internet service to get a deeper understanding of its meaning, organization, history, design, (infra)structure, etc. So I absolutely agree with you here Veronica that ethnographers of Facebook have to consider and engage "with the question of structure/design and its interconnection with the broader political economy of capitalism on Facebook".

This is of course not easy with such a big company which has always been very incommunicative and vague when it comes to technical, technological, organizational or legal details; see for instance the work by Max Schrems and the "Europe versus Facebook" initiative which nevertheless was successful in some respect (<http://www.europe-vs-facebook.org/EN/Objectives/objectives.html>). And I agree with Martin that not every Facebook-related study has to or is able to take the political economy of such platforms/companies into

(close) consideration. David Hakken (1999), for instance, proposed several "key issues" in the ethnographic study of "cyberspace", internet, or ICTs. From basic characteristics of digital entities and their (social) relations to the political economic structures which, what he called, "cyberspace entities" produce and reproduce and by which they are constrained.

The engagement with political economy becomes particularly important if you are working on/with contrasting models and ways of providing internet infrastructure and services, dealing with users/consumers, developing business models, etc. Ownership and control, for instance, are two of the most important aspects in the work of indigenous organizations such as KO-KNET - not only in the field of internet infrastructure and access. And these are two aspects that I find almost completely missing in the cooperate logic of companies like Facebook. So to answer Veronica's question: even though my research didn't center around Facebook, but instead on an online environment provided by an indigenous organization to indigenous people of a specific region, I had to consider tensions between different and also competing economic and political world views, not only in the field of internet platforms.

All the best,

Philipp

Reference

Hakken, D. 1999. *Cyborgs@Cyberspace: An ethnographer looks to the future*. New York: Routledge.

Ella Taylor-Smith E.Taylor-Smith@napier.ac.uk

June 27th 2016

Hi all,

enjoying this discussion and the chance to read about your research.

I also studied how activists and community groups used Facebook (and other online and offline spaces).

I found that Facebook groups were well-used (by my groups and their wider communities) to support their work.

One of the reasons for this was that, because the groups were **free** no one in the community or group had to pay for them and the groups felt a stronger ownership.

This contrasts to websites or blogs which were primarily maintained by one person (owner) -especially to websites that had been designed (and paid for).

For me this shared ownership reflected Andrea Cornwall's concept of created spaces for participation in democracy.

Cornwall used the term **created spaces** to describe initiatives (contexts for participation) which are created and managed by citizens. Created spaces support grassroots or bottom-up

participation; citizens control the topics, activities, and communication.

Whereas *invited* spaces are top-down participation initiatives - organised by authorities or institutions. Citizens are invited to take part, but the spaces are “framed by those who create them, and infused with power relations and cultures of interaction carried into them from other spaces”.

[35] Cornwall, A. and Coelho, V. S. P. 2007. Spaces for change? The politics of citizen participation in new democratic arenas. London: Zed. (quote on p11).

The created spaces also reflect Gerry Hassan's *fuzzy, messy spaces*, where people come together out of interest, talking as individuals, in everyday terms.

Hassan contrasts these with *unspaces* - the awkward formal spaces of democracy, where people wear name badges and express opinions aligned to their institutional mandates.

Both Cornwall's invited spaces and Hassan's unspaces exclude certain people, behaviour, and opinions.

Hassan, G. 2014. Independence of the Scottish mind elite narratives, public spaces and the making of a modern nation. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.

Hope this is a helpful interjection

-Ella

Philipp Budka ph.budka@philbu.net

June 28th 2016

Thanks Ella. I think that there are different forms of ownership people can develop in respect to digital platforms and services. And Facebook indeed allows people to easily create, share and participate - under specific terms and conditions as well as technical and legal restrictions, e.g. surrendering rights to and control of data and content or issues of surveillance. When it comes to the design, the structure, the organization, the economy of a commercial platform like Facebook, I don't see many ways to create a sense of ownership and/or control there. Many people, it seems, are fine with that. Or this is just not important in their everyday social media use. Others are eagerly looking for social media alternatives, see e.g. the unlike us network/initiative (<http://networkcultures.org/unlikeus/about/>) or the social media alternatives project by Robert Gehl (http://www.socialmediaalternatives.org/?page_id=2; Gehl, 2015).

Best,

Philipp

Reference

Gehl, Robert W. (2015). The Case for Alternative Social Media. Social Media + Society.
doi:10.1177/2056305115604338

Nina Grønlykke Mollerup ninagmollerup@gmail.com

June 28th 2016

Dear all,

Thank you for an interesting e-seminar so far; it's great to be able to have a joint seminar with DANG and CASTAC.

I would like to open up a new topic in the discussion, namely how Facebook can be relevant when we are spending time with people. In my research with information activists and journalists in Egypt, I found Facebook and other platforms extremely important for my ability to engage with people in the field. I find it extremely interesting how we study with (not on) media and how this can influence our presence in the field, at times affording us what I like to refer to as a thicker presence.

For example, I accompanied a journalist to a demonstration outside a military complex where a military trial was taking place. During the demonstration, I had my phone in my hand almost the entire time, checking tweets and other social media updates from journalists who had been allowed inside the courtroom. The insights I got this way targeted my discussion with the journalist and eventually made her try to get inside, something she had not expected to be possible. This, of course, gave me new, important insights.

I would be very interested in also hearing how others have thought about the way they use Facebook when spending time with people.

Cheers,
Nina

Ella Taylor-Smith E.Taylor-Smith@napier.ac.uk

June 29th 2016

Hi Philipp

Although I included references to theory in my post, it was based on active research. People I worked with genuinely felt ownership of their Facebook groups - e.g. calling it "The Community Facebook Group"

Although that might not fit with our politics, we have to respect that as their experience.

-Ella

Michael Munnik MunnikM@cardiff.ac.uk

June 29th 2016

Dear all,

Thanks for this stimulating topic and also for the wide range of participation across networks - it's a great idea.

I wanted to pick up on what Nina was mentioning about Facebook interaction during fieldwork and also comments from Sydney Yeager at the end of his original statement. Nina was speaking to the relation of "online activity and offline activity" - and those must be put in quotation marks because, as she shows, the act of "being online" is one that the offline person does in the midst of their daily life. So Facebook-alone is not enough in an ethnographic context. Meanwhile, Sydney notes that Facebook-alone is not enough in the mix of other media applied to a certain phenomenon but that "all relevant media and platforms should be considered".

I found this to be the case in my research on relations between journalists and sources in Glasgow. I observed one third-sector group trying to enhance its media profile and conduct media relations for its various activities, and the staff broke down for me their use of social media alongside more antiquated ideas such as picking up the phone. Facebook, via the organisation's page, was perceived as a way of speaking to "their own": those who liked the page tended to be associated as volunteers or clients, perhaps as related organisations in the city. They could broadcast messages in a way that received support via likes and shares. But when they wanted to deliberately reach other groups not already in their circle, and this typically included journalists, they started to think of Twitter as a more active way of doing that. This was how they would push press releases or pipe up in the midst of a wider news story which they saw as somehow relevant to their work. Both these media were useful, in different ways, though neither had the effect they hoped for and neither was, following Phillip Budka's notes about ownership, really in their control. Their blog they had absolute control over and preferred that as a communication tool, but then they would use Facebook and Twitter to spread this message to particular "in" and "out" audiences.

Related to this - it didn't come up in my fieldwork, but it's something I've reflected on as a user and I think is relevant in this particular case - is the question of Page versus Profile. The commercialisation and the restricted spreading that Facebook imposes on Pages may mean that groups using this as a communication tool find they are not communicating as they would want. So the use of the personal Profile may be a way of getting around this restriction and trying to communicate to a wider audience (without having to pay to promote the post). But is there then some identification confusion between Kelly Green the Profile and the Irish Cultural Association of which Kelly Green is a volunteer or employee? Would Kelly Green wish to be so directly attached to certain messages - perhaps political ones, perhaps fundraising ones - and what are the compromises in a social sense for Kelly as an individual also negotiating personal relationships on the site? I don't know if any work has been done in this area, but it might be fruitful to explore.

Thanks for the continuing conversation,

Michael

An excellent discussion about current research on/through Facebook. I find myself torn between those contributors to this conversation who have stressed the political economy of Facebook ("Facebook Design" is also how you build addiction into the product, how you manipulate people to farm their data.", Aral Balkan @aral tweet, 5 April 2016) and those who follow their research participants' Facebook practices wherever these may lead them, often away from such political considerations.

I'm reminded here of the contrast between Boellstorff's (2008) and Malaby's (2011) respective ethnographic studies of Second Life - the former centred on in-world sociality, the latter on the company behind such sociality, Linden Lab.

I have always argued that these are two equally valid, independent approaches, but now I'm wondering whether we can study Facebook without integrating into the analysis notions such as digital capitalism (mentioned by Veronica), venture capitalism, or digital oligopolies. We may have some wiggle room as users on the Facebook data farm, but it's still a farm in which we double up as the animals and the farmers.

Philipp's activist stance is important, in my view, i.e. how do we draw from our Facebook research to help build alternative, non-obscene-profit platforms?

Finally, what do major transnational shocks such as Brexit tell us about Facebook, and vice versa? My anecdotal evidence is that in such situations Facebook threads become ad-hoc 'media workshops' in which people are trying to figure out WTFJH (what the f**k just happened). This is a manner of widely distributed social cognition, or 'cognition in the wild' (Hutchins 1995) process that may seem chaotic, but has familiar processual patterns to it (there was a joke doing the rounds about the 7 stages of Brexit grief that captures this idea: <http://bit.ly/28TcrXr>).

John

References

Boellstorff, T. (2008). **Coming of age in Second Life: An anthropologist explores the virtually human**. Princeton University Press.

Hutchins, E. (1995). **Cognition in the Wild**. MIT press.

Malaby, T. M. (2011). **Making virtual worlds: Linden lab and second life**. Cornell University Press.

Dear all,

Thanks for great intros and discussions. I've read with great interest as I'm currently conducting a study on a Facebook group with a particular religio-political focus in Norway. I agree with many of the points made about the political economy - though I find this difficult to integrate into my own study. So many interesting points have been raised - not least with regards to pragmatism and religious usage of social media. With regards to my current study issues that have been raised in this discussion concerning conceptions of 'community', bottom up civic engagement, and Facebook page vs personal profile resonate well. The specific issue I'd like to raise is what appears to me to be the strong advocacy of -only- studying Facebook in one particular way, namely as part of everyday practices and studying it as a part of Polymedia practices. In my view this approach is very useful for studying activists or journalist practices, but less valuable if one seeks to understand the inner dynamics of an online group - such as the case in my current study. (I will supplement with interviews but I'll not follow participants across contexts and types of media). Let me add that I'm no stranger to studying media practices by shadowing practitioners - my point is simply that which method and what you study really depends on what it is you want to find out. Rather than consider studying a singular online space or interface as old-fashioned or passé I think we'd benefit more from a more nuanced methodological discussion of what we stand to gain or lose from the various approaches we select. Personally I believe we learn the most from piecing together findings from different ways of studying social media.

I look forward to following this discussion further.

Best regards,
Mona

Philipp Budka ph.budka@philbu.net

July 1st 2016

Dear All,

I would like follow up on Nina's comment which also opens the discussion to the issue of Facebook as (ethnographic) research platform. Facebook as space, place or environment to engage with research partners and/or to collect and document fieldwork data, conducting group discussions, presenting and disseminating results and/or fieldwork data, etc.

Similar to Nina's research experience, Facebook for me has been another level of online interaction, another online environment to spend time with people. A place where I had to follow people (cf. Marcus 1998) to stay in touch in the course of ethnographic fieldwork. But I don't have any experience with utilizing Facebook as dedicated research platform. I would thus be very interested to learn more about people's experience with using Facebook in this specific way. Maybe Martin can tell us a bit more about his project and "Facebook as its major public outreach platform".

Thanks and all the best,

Philipp

Reference

Marcus, George (1998). *Ethnography through thick and thin*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Özlem Savas ozlems@bilkent.edu.tr

July 1st 2016

Dear all,

Many thanks for this e-seminar on Facebook research. I have been carrying out an ethnographic research on Facebook in Turkey for six months. My particular focus is on lifestyle practices in Facebook that I regard as part of our contemporary engagement with the self-reflexive question of “how to live?”

When I consider Facebook as a research platform (in my case, as a ‘dedicated research platform,’ to follow up Philipp’s last comment), I can not help thinking about its particularities as a space that shape the research questions, as well as methodological and ethical concerns. Surely, Facebook offers a huge repertoire of everyday practices that can inform almost all research topics. Yet, based on my research experience so far, I avoid regarding Facebook as any medium by which a research on lifestyle practices could be carried out. Rather, I think of Facebook as a particular space that shape the ways we live and the ways we understand and express our lives, not only through its affordances as a communication technology, but also through its norms about existing, living and sharing in Facebook, that have been globally and/or locally created by individual users, as well as markets. My intention is not to single out Facebook and to disregard its mutual presence with other media and other social contexts, but rather to pay attention to its specificities and agency.

To give an example from my research, one of the most celebrated aspects of a ‘good life’ that I ‘follow’ in Facebook is taking pleasure in life, which is expressed by posting photos of everyday activities by labeling them as ‘tea pleasure,’ ‘snow pleasure,’ ‘work pleasure,’ and so on. Surely, this ideal of pleasure, which seems to be normatively adapted by diverse individuals and social groups, was neither originated from Facebook nor is expressed only through Facebook. But, Facebook accommodates a specific set of ideas about what is a pleasurable life and norms about how and when to take pleasure. To quote one of the participants, “what we understand as pleasure in Facebook is different from what we see as pleasure in TV or in Instagram.”

I am looking forward to follow this discussion and to hear about others' comments on specificity of Facebook as a social space and a research platform.

Many thanks and best wishes,

Delighted to see this ongoing debate about Facebook. I feel a bit guilty making an intervention which I guess anyone who knows my work would have guessed that I would make, but I can't help reiterating the points given that this is so close to what myself and my colleagues do. The problem is simply that this discussion by its nature can tend to construct a given object 'Facebook' which increasingly relegates issues of cultural difference to the background. As you start to discuss what it's like to share Facebook with informants as part of ethnography, or its impact on activists, then the effect is to de-contextualize Facebook as a consistent thing that can be discussed in that vein.

By contrast through *Why We Post*, but even earlier in **Tales from Facebook**, I have tried to suggest problems with this approach. The amazing thing about Facebook is that it is entirely different from site to site. So sharing with informants in one place is like a more private encounter, while in another it is all about performing the group to a wider group, in Trinidad it's more like gossiping. Similarly, it is fine to consider the corporate aspect of the site if that is what one is studying, but easy to let this slip into a kind of corporate determinism which is just another form of technical determinism that in order to operate needs to refuse the evidence that Facebook is actually an aggregate of genres of content most of which are equally at home on entirely different platforms. One way of thinking about this is replace the term Facebook with the term 'conversations'. This is after a new area in which we both converse and observe conversations. But we would be very wary of having general discussions about what the presence of 'conversation' does to the fieldwork experience or the impact of the degree to which someone might record the conversation, other than in highly contextualised discussion with respect to particular populations. From now on we will probably almost always be engaging with Facebook as part of fieldwork, whatever are topic, in the same way that fieldwork would always involve being involved in 'conversations', but to go further we would start to specific the genres of conversation that pertain to the point we are making. So hopefully soon it will be more at the level of 'what have you found to be the impact of Hindu memes shared by middle class males in South India, or why do we find that people perform modesty on Facebook in this place but on WhatsApp in that place. I think this is what Ozlem is advocating in the most recent post. The specifics of 'pleasure' in Turkish postings on Facebook brings us back to the norms of anthropological discussion.

I agree with Danny Miller, in his response to Ozlem Savas, that there is a danger of corporate or technological determinism when speaking of Facebook as a single object of study. But there's also the opposite risk of over-emphasising the extreme cultural diversity of Facebook. Surely there are some common Facebook traits or family resemblances across different geographical sites, it can't all be infinite diversity? Can we agree on finite diversity?

There are two problems, I think, with saying that Facebook is 'entirely different' from one place to another (but I'm speculating here). First, there are likely to be recognisable similarities in Facebook practices between two culturally similar countries, especially among similar socioeconomic or occupational groups, e.g. teachers in the UK and Ireland, or in Malaysia and Brunei. Second, there are numerous transnational interactions on Facebook 'contact zones' in which people somehow manage to 'share' bits of their lives, news, etc, with others - with lots of misunderstandings and attempts at translation as well, of course, when operating across linguistic and (sub)cultural borders.

John

Morris, CJ C.J.Morris@lse.ac.uk

July 1st 2016

Hey John,

Your comments brought Nick Couldry's work on social media as practice to mind, particularly the first few chapters in *Media, Society, World*, which I'd imagine you've read. The general bundles of practices (using a Schatzki term) that Couldry brings up can be seen in many areas of the world - for instance 'keeping up with the news' - but they may not be practiced in a universal manner, for instance difference in apps, ecosystems and the avenues people use to keep up with the news, for instance social news through friends vs social media accounts of traditional media, which is used may perhaps depend on how much trust is put in local news organizations, BBC or Xinhua.

So, while they are different in a sense, they are just different forms of the practice of 'keeping up with the news'. I think this allows us to see similarities in social media practice without ignoring the huge range of diversity that Danny and his colleagues have witnessed. My own research is looking at how social media are used to help people continue migration, so mediated intimacy can be part of the broader practice of migration, extending it into other fields. I've seen people mediating their intimacy in a variety of different ways on social media platforms, but many of these mediations helped to sustain their time 'away' as a migrant, by socializing with familiar people far away and unknown in the new area.

-Carwyn Morris
LSE, Geography and Environment

Mark Allen Peterson petersm2@miamioh.edu

July 1st 2016

This debate is as old as discussions of globalization in general.

For example:

Thomas Friedman flies around and eats at a McDonald's in Hong Kong, and one in Paris and one

in New Dehli and one in Cairo and says, "They are all the same. Under neoliberalism, the world is flat." George Ritzer is less thrilled by that notion, but he sees the same thing--a creeping Weberian structure of efficiency, predictability, bureaucracy and similarity/mimesis.

In rush the ethnographers, Watson et al (1997) but also me (2011) and others, saying "but a McDonald's isn't a McDonald's ins't a McDonald's..."

In Cairo, McDonald's is an upscale restaurant serving American/global cuisine that caters to the upper and upper middle class cosmopolitan crowd, or middle class families on a spree. It delivers, and it caters. Eating there validates upper class peoples' cosmopolitan credentials. The people who work there can't afford to eat there--they go out for local "fast food"--koshary or tamayah (falafil) at one-third the price.

But in most of the US, McDonald's is a lower class restaurant that serves tasty, cheap food for the masses. Eating there can actually hurt cultural capital in many social fields: Middle and upper middle class people who eat at McDonald's often feel compelled to explain their decision--"My kids like it," "I was in a hurry," "I'm on a grad student budget." It has drive-thru windows. Most of the people who work there can only afford to eat there, or at similar restaurants.

Cairo's McDonald's and the McDonald's in Hamilton, OH, USA are utterly different places and experiences.

Yet--at some level Ritzer is right. At any McDonald's anywhere the workers are at some level components in a Fordist machine for food delivery. Cooking is automated; cash registers operate by menu items, not numbers and automatically re-order supplies; menus are fixed and, with minor local variations (except India where there are major variations), remarkably similar from place to place.

How do we deal with the tension between the structural sameness and the very different ways people adapt their practices of McDonald's going to local cultural conditions?

Back to Facebook:

This seems to me to be the same tension John is asking about with regard to Facebook.

Egyptian revolutionaries using the chat sites function in one of the earlier versions of Facebook lost them when Facebook was revised. US rules about who "owns" images structures Flickr's global policies so that Egyptian revolutionaries uploading images seized from state security and used to "out" undercover security forces who infiltrate protests to extract and torture protesters, find their images removed .

The ethnographic revelation that a Facebook page isn't a Facebook page isn't a Facebook page is very, very important in the face of all the technological determinists out there (both those who see such technologies as empowering and those who see them as part of a system of

surveillance).

But as anthropologists, we need to also look at the tension between structure and cultural agency.

And we have as yet few clear tools for doing so.

Mark

Özlem Savas ozlems@bilkent.edu.tr

July 1st 2016

Thank you for this insightful discussion. I think the way we account for and deal with the difference and diversity in Facebook is crucial at this issue. Rather than presuming a group which possess a priori 'culture' that is supposed to be fundamentally different, a focus on practices and on localities they produce might help avoiding imprisoning people in their assumed places and cultures. This largely discussed ethnographic approach becomes even more prominent in a space like Facebook, where almost everybody who has Internet access participate and compose their own locales (mostly plural), sometimes stuck in them and sometimes engage in other locales. Production of locality in Facebook even more powerfully shows us that locality is shaped and transformed through social attachments and relations that are not necessarily dictated by the geography, which we already knew about the world that has always been connected before Facebook connected people. I believe that ethnographic research in and around Facebook might powerfully contribute to our understanding of locality, particularity, difference and contact in anthropological discussion.

All the best,

Ozlem

Jamie Coates jamie.coates@gmail.com

July 2nd 2016

Dear all,

I'm sorry to come into the debate late to the game, but I felt that a few points were worth raising.

Although I think we need to be wary of technological determinism, I also feel that this approach isn't as bad as it seems in a variety ways. I prefer the term affordances, which Danny used in the why we post course.

However, the reason I think technology is very important to these debates, is because there are actually a lot of places that do not have easy access to Facebook, and use alternative services that do not have the same affordances as Facebook. China is an important, and useful, case study when we start to think about whether or not facebook's technological qualities are actually as ubiquitous as we may think.

I think Facebook's success really comes down to its ability to accommodate diversity through the technological affordances its service provides. But that was also an explicit part of its design, and constant redesign, as it became more popular globally. And so, we can now see how culturally varied Facebook spaces can be, albeit within formats that Facebook allows. Facebook allows a range of content formats that have deep and varied enough histories/manifestations that they can vary across cultures. Facebook allows people to post digital photos and text for example. Digital photos and text are two mediums that are so varied and complex that that would have enough affordances for most people around the world to find it convivial somehow. Just as we all have conversations, we all have images, and to varying degrees text.

And yet, when Facebook appears to take on a life of its own it also reveals that its technological capacities do to some extent define the limits of what it can do. Whether an algorithm that draws up photos from your past revealing something that you didn't even think was on Facebook anymore, or the patterns of choices that you make being collected to advertise to you in a specific way. Facebook is engineered in ways that have many affordances and many limits (this is without us even mentioning the political economy of it all)

But if we go back to the comparison with China, and the case of WeChat for example, there are many things Facebook cannot do. If I want to buy some food in a night market in Beijing today, I can use wechat to transfer the money to the vendor. I can also login to WeChat using a voice-based code. WeChat is increasingly becoming something akin to Facebook, twitter and paypal rolled into one.

At the same time, very few of my interlocutors would ever think of using Facebook, because their networks don't use it (showing 'scalable sociality' to be a major force here) and its technologically blocked (making it annoying to try and use it). But also because they don't like the design of the platform, they think its clunky and it can't do things that they have already become accustomed to. This suggests to me that all of us who are accustomed to Facebook, have become disciplined to expecting the affordances it has designed into its platform to the extent that the role of the engineers behind it have become invisible to many of us.

In a nutshell, I think that we need to think beyond single platforms (as Danny has often suggested) to reveal just how important platforms can be. Not everywhere has Facebook...

Best
Jamie

Sahana Udupa Udupa@mmg.mpg.de

July 2nd 2016

John Postill's argument on global contact zones, I believe, are very important in understanding Facebook and other social media forms. Just as we have tempered 'relativism' with 'restrained relativism' (Herzfeld 2016), diversity and variation should be a matter of empirical and analytical exercise. Globalization literature helps here, and allows us to conceptualize mediated spaces as embodying multiple registers of globality and locality (Appadurai; Ong). That Facebook comes

with a certain technological architecture and business model shared on a global scale should give us a cause for pause in presuming infinite diversity, and so do the global contact zones that infuse the cultures of Facebook use with common sense etiquette, pleasures, norms and expectations attached to the platform.

More important, diversity argument cannot lead us to assumptions of ‘a priori culture’ (Ozlem in this thread). This has serious implications when we expand the discussions on social media beyond the western world. The challenge is to bring to scrutiny particular histories (including colonial histories) and the current moment of global connections that together define the media landscape and the contours of its political possibilities. In a rush to strike a balance between the perspectives of global technology and local practice, one cannot ignore the pattern of relations between publics and media that have emerged in societies and the larger historical context underpinning them. Why Hindu memes are posted by middle class males in South India – to take up Miller’s question – is to point to particular histories of middle class political activism and religious nationalism, as much as it is about platforms (single or connected). In my study on social media and politics (India and diaspora), I have found that the most useful approach is to explore online use in relation to historically defined political cultures and the latest phase of globalization manifest as market inflected social media technologies.

Mark Allen Peterson petersm2@miamioh.edu

July 2nd 2016

Thank you, Sahana; very well put.

Sydney Yeager sydneyyeager@gmail.com

July 3rd 2016

Thank all of you for such a stimulating discussion.

In response to Ozlem, Miller, Peterson and to the question of Globalization vs Localization, I would like to offer some early insights from my observations of cultural variation within the cultural issue memorialization of the dead on Facebook, which is my topic of study. There is cultural variation even within the US; both regionally and based on socioeconomic and ethnic groups. Yet, the memorialization of dead friends and family is a phenomenon that I have been able to confirm occurring on Facebook in cultural contexts as diverse as the US and Afghanistan. While I have only begun a preliminary assessment of the phenomenon in Afghanistan, there are already significant differences which relate to the local cultural contexts and social expectations relating to death and mourning. In both contexts, Facebook allows for a particular type of communication. Variations in the specifics of what is shared in that context and the impact offers fruitful ground for ethnographic investigation.

Specifically, in response to Jamie Coates, I would have to say I agree that we should carefully consider technology available and commonly used in the specific cultural contexts we study. We should not ignore other platforms or cultural regions solely in preference for Facebook and similar Big Name platforms.

All My Best,

Sydney Yeager

Sydney Yeager sydneyyeager@gmail.com

July 3rd 2016

Thank all of you for your thought provoking responses.

Nina suggested we consider “how Facebook can be relevant when we are spending time with people.” I completely agree with you. Facebook can be crucial in basic communication with informants and expert contacts alike. While we cannot take it for granted that *all* of our research participants will be comfortable using Facebook, we do indeed need to be ready and willing to communicate via Facebook when those people who use it regularly. It should be a basic principle of ethnography. That we communicate with people in language and social spaces with which *they* are comfortable. In many cases, anthropologists can greatly benefit from communicating through a less formal platform. As with all communication, *how* we say it is just as important as *what* we say. As anthropologists, we should be sensitive to our audiences’ associations with particular modes of communication. This will likely vary according to cultural context. But just as meeting for coffee sends very different social signals from meeting in an office; an email and a Facebook message lend themselves to differing degrees of formality. Being open to communicating on Facebook can be very important to the process of building rapport. Nina, I think you are dead on. The degree of synergy you brought to your interviews by bringing in your social media observations is ideal. It is the type of relevance and sensitive questioning anthropologists should strive for.

Sydney Yeager

Sydney Yeager sydneyyeager@gmail.com

July 3rd 2016

Michael Munnik thank you for sharing your experience and insights.

You provide an excellent case which truly embodies the intentionality behind media and platform choice. Drawing on both your comments and Nina’s, I think we as anthropologists have something to learn from this intentionality. In-person communication has long been the golden medium for anthropological observations and communications. To maintain our relevance, anthropologists need to consider the full range of communication and information sharing related to the particular issue or topic or group we are studying.

I think your question of when to make use of a Page versus Profile (and I will add private messenger communications as well) is an important issue for consideration. This is something I have had to negotiate and re-negotiate throughout my project. My university’s Internal Review Board (IRB) which assess the ethics of all human related research, recommended that I create a separate “Professional” Facebook account. At that point in time, I had had my personal Facebook account for a little over ten years. I was very hesitant about the prospect, but they insisted. The “Professional Account,” which was intended to help me recruit research participants and conduct research related observations, proved problematic on multiple scales. The biggest

drawback is that it was not very successful as a recruitment tool. The IRB wanted to keep my personal contacts separate from my research participants. This meant starting from scratch with no real friends, which had the unintended consequence of making the account look fake. Almost immediately, I received over a 100 friend requests from my personal contacts. I also received more than a dozen messages from friends and family who were confused and upset thinking that I had unfriended them. Other than friend requests from my own personal network, I received approximately 60 friend requests from men, primarily from South Asia and Africa, who talked a lot about friendship and God in their initial messages but had intentions other than research. Perhaps, an unforeseen consequence of the relationship constraints of Facebook, which did not allow my 2nd account to be linked to my husband's account. Who to add to this "Professional" account became a major issue. Another problem is that the larger your Facebook network the more content you can access and the reverse is true as well.

I eventually abandoned this "Professional" profile. I currently only use it only to communicate announcements and updates about my project. I have recently switched to setting up a Page as my primary tool for recruitment and sharing announcements about the on-going research. This allowed me to still use the power of my personal profile as well as my professional one. I have not crossed the line to "paying" to have the posts boosted, but it is always an option.

The issue of identity confusion which may occur when the lines between individual and organization are blur is intriguing. I do not know of anyone studying it yet. This may have many parallels in the larger business and professional worlds.

Sydney Yeager

Sydney Yeager sydneyyeager@gmail.com

July 3rd 2016

Veronica Barassi, thank you for your intriguing opening question. I am afraid I am responding to the posts of this e-seminar in reverse order as I attempt to catch up.

I'd like to respond to the political economy of Facebook and specifically the conundrum she brings forward in association with "The corporate nature of social media technologies, and especially Facebook."

Media has a long history of being intertwined with and controlled by political and economic forces. From the first written words, political and economic power brokers have strived to control the power of the knowledge contained within those words. Literacy and access have been the factors limiting willing minds from gaining information and knowledge since the time of the most ancient clay tablets and scrolls. The technological revolution associated with the Internet and digital technologies has greatly expanded the amount of information widely available, but literacy and access are still limiting factors which can be directly connected to socioeconomic factors.

The Internet has produced a new attitude toward information sharing, collaboration, and even

crowdfunding but it has not risen entirely above the corporate model. If time was the currency of the industrial revolution, then data (information) is the currency of the digital revolution. Even if a person is not on Facebook, their data is being collected somewhere by somebody. At least on social media sites, users have a degree of control over what information they put out there about themselves.

My primary response to the conundrum is to be aware of it, to be willing to critique the political-economic problems relevant to my topic, and to design and share informational posts regarding issues, such as ownership and privacy settings, which assist my research participants and larger network in making educated decisions.

All My Best,

Sydney Yeager

Daniel Miller d.miller@ucl.ac.uk

July 3rd 2016

I hope its ok if I also respond to recent comments.

On Sept 1st the Why We Post project has two more books out of the eleven coming out. Social Media in Industrial China by Xinyuan Wang and Social Media in Rural China by Tom McDonald. These are very apropos Jamie's recent comment. If we really want to know what Facebook is, especially the implications of its political economy then it is hugely helpful to remember that the world's largest population doesn't have Facebook and yet as these books document, this is a population that is just as concerned with social media. In many respects QQ does a good deal more than Facebook, for example, in terms of news coverage and entertainment and as Jamie notes WeChat is equally extensive. One of the reasons for publishing these together is that in all sorts of ways, so far from being the same, the 'Chinese' social media turns out to be entirely different in the two case studies. For example, in one it is seen as the enemy of education while in the other it may be an alternative to formal education in helping people learn about the world.

With respect to Sahana and John I guess it would be helpful if we think about the nature of diversity itself. In a book called Worlds Apart published in 1995 I argued that we need to consider both 'a priori' and 'a posteriori' diversity. The first is exactly what Sahana is talking about the regional history and political economy that created the habitus of that local population over a historic period and it makes no sense to day any kind of anthropology on any topic without acknowledging this source of cultural relativism. But a topic like Facebook also speaks to 'a posteriori' diversity, when a new object comes into view, which may be a technology such as Facebook but can also be something like 'human rights' or 'education' that often has pretensions to universalism with forces that sustain this such as technology, capitalism or ideology. But as these become widespread they often become appropriated locally and create new regional differences that are as much a product of what they allow people to do as anything that existed before. So *Tales from Facebook *was an attempt to address both forms of diversity

as contributing to what Facebook quickly became as a Trinidadian form of sociality. On a final note Elisabetta Costa's book on Social Media in South East Turkey is important in respect to Sydney's issue of 'other' profiles, as the construction of fake, alternative and multiple accounts is hugely important in a context of continual violence and accusation as in her site of Mardin.

Danny

Erkan Saka sakaerka@gmail.com

July 3rd 2016

I have been late to contribute and some valuable arguments are already uttered.

Here are my brief contributions then.

1- Unlike Twitter, it is harder to quantify Facebook data. I have a growing problem with the "quantitative turn", there are so many Twitter data based research that misses many of the possible ethnographic contextualization and insight. Facebook research is a challenge but more open to productive results in this sense.

2- Once, Second Life has reached a level of world in itself, and there have been so many studies about and no need to mention Boellstorff's work. I believe, Facebook as a medium has gone beyond Second Life in reaching a wider audience with much more easiness. It is a world in itself. However, despite the seduction of studying in a holistic sense, its design as Pages, personal accounts, groups and as Jamie particularly mentioned, algorithms for timelines and its permanent work on re-design does not give the researcher to hold on a closed system. Not all information is accessible, as there are many privacy settings, and besides as a profit-oriented medium and it may not be all free: Lately, Page owners are having difficulty to have organic reach without boosting their posts with advertising as Facebook tweaked algorithms for more advertising. In such a context, I imagine a multi-sited research within Facebook itself that might have ties to "outside" in following subjects, things, ideas might be productive.

Anna Ramella anna.ramella@gmail.com

July 4th 2016

Dear all,

Thank you very much for this e-seminar that raises a number of very relevant issues in the study of/on Facebook and other Social Media platforms.

I would like to particularly contribute to the discussion on personal vs. professional profiles and the relation between online and offline practices that have been raised by Michael Munnik and Sydney Yeager in particular, but also to the shaping/shaped natures of technologies that have been commented on earlier.

In my research on the mobility of musicians and their social media use, the question of whether to use a personal or professional profile has come up not only for myself, but especially for the

participants of my research. While I am running a Facebook Page and a professional Twitter account (both under the working title of my research, mostly so that participants can identify it as research-related), I am also using my private Facebook account as well as text messaging to communicate with the research participants, - mainly because this is the regular practice of the field. When I want to use a post of theirs for research that I have acquired through my personal profile, I ask them for permission. However, what I want to address is not my own use of personal and professional profiles, but rather theirs as this is a big issue for professional musicians (and their use of it has also informed my use of it). Nowadays most marketing in the music industry is being done through a range of social media platforms (Facebook, Instagram and Twitter being the biggest ones), including the emergence of platforms, functions and apps particularly for the music scene (Bandsintown, Songkick and other tracking apps have now implemented a tool with which artists can reach their audience, I will come to this later). Musicians are urged if not pressured to do marketing through their social media profiles by their managements, who usually prefer to have the musicians post themselves and on their private profiles for the sake of “authenticity”. Apart from the fact that this has huge implications for what it means to be a musician nowadays (apart from making music, they are expected to be good photographers, funny entertainers and very sociable responders - as Facebook pages now count the time someone takes to respond to requests), it also challenges issues of intimacy, privacy etc. when it comes to using a social media profile to do marketing for one’s music. Managers usually have regulated the Social Media of their bands by filtering the messages, e.g. correcting spelling mistakes and hinting at best practices, and by reminding the bands to post content during tour. Actually some are thinking of developing workshop formats to teach musicians how to gain “Social Following”. Some bands have told me that they leave for tour already prepared with a set of video footage and photos in order to be able to meet the expectations of their labels. Musicians are made accountable for what and how often they post, and those who are less into Social Media have clear disadvantages in the business - one manager told me that bands with less than 30.000 likes on Facebook would not likely get a record deal with him.

To the distinction of personal and professional profiles:

Musicians in bands tend to use a band profile for band related posts, and a personal profile for other communication (although these spheres cross and cannot be looked at separately). However, this distinction seems more relevant for solo musicians in juggling private and professional communications. One solo musician with a following of 57k on Instagram for example told me that he did not see the distinction of “public” and “private” as relevant, as there was a third category which he defined as “social self”, explaining that while he was “being himself” when posting on Social Media, it was always with an awareness of his audience. He described this as between private and public, as it was neither the Self his intimate friends knew, nor a marketed figure: It was a “curated version of himself”. Him and other solo musicians have stated that they use Social Media solely for the communication of music related marketing, and not at all for keeping up with private contacts. These communications had moved completely to other media like text messaging, FaceTime or Skype. However, their friends would still follow them on Social Media, which was seen as a potential snowballing device, but also as a collective communications platforms of their whereabouts and the sharing of tour photos (saving them

from having to send them individually).

With regards to the arguments raised on relating online and offline activities, I think this is a very important point to make. Related to what I have stated earlier about the distinction of profiles, the conflicts that may arise from crossing platforms can more likely be observed in an offline sphere. For example, on a tour I accompanied through the US, the sound tech of a band took a photo that showed the singer sleeping in the van, wearing a sleeping mask and cuddling with a plush toy. He posted this photo on his private Instagram account, but tagging the band's account (not the singer's private account). This led to a major conflict between the sound tech and the singer, who was upset about being shown in a very vulnerable situation, and a call from the management stating that this would not favor the public image of the band. I think that these types of conflicts would have been hard to observe if I had done my fieldwork solely in media environments, and they also show how online actions shape offline relationships and vice versa.

To the issue of how technologies are shaping and shaped: One main sector of the music festival SXSW in Austin, Texas, that I attended during my fieldwork, is a music conference which brings together music professionals from all kinds of levels. The panels on Social Media and Marketing for example usually consisted of a range of label managers, musicians, marketing managers and app developers discussing how Social Media could be used for music marketing, especially tour marketing. There were also representatives of Facebook and other companies to discuss particularly how to develop new functions to make these platforms more profitable for both, Facebook and the music industry (like they have in the past, including tour dates and merch online stores on Facebook pages). A main issue that was raised was that Facebook was seen as a platform that no longer serves for tour marketing since the abundance of posts almost made it impossible to appear on a fan's news feed at the right time. A statistic that was quoted broadly (but whose origin could not be explained) states that 40% of ticket sales are being lost due to fans not knowing that their favorite band is in town. This statistic was the starting point for many considerations of how to implement new tools and strategies into existing Social Media sites, but also how to develop new apps to circumvent this problem. The app Bandsintown, for example, where one can track one's favorite artists and receive a notification via email when the band comes to town, has just released an app called „Tour Manager“, which allows bands (and their managements) to address fans directly with all the posts that would usually be made on Facebook: photo posts, videos, links, merch sales etc. Facebook responded to this by introducing strategies of how to avoid being lost in fans' news feeds, like creating events for a whole tour instead of singular concerts in order to secure a repetitive appearance on news feeds and thereby raising the chance to be seen by the fans, plus attracting new fans by showing how many of their contacts seemingly like this band. They also addressed that most importantly, artists must respond to the messages they receive from their fans as the “personal” contact and, as I have mentioned in the beginning, “authenticity” of a “real human being” was seen to be the uttermost tool of marketing (and which artists can now be held accountable for through the time indication of how fast they answer messages on Facebook, in the left box on the main page). This of course opens a whole new chapter on a changing image of the “rock star”, whose fame once used to be tied to the myth he/she was able to create, and now is more tied to the ability of being a sociable, girl/boy-next-door, fast responding and down to earth human being, which I can not attend to in

this post. This example shows, I think, that technologies may be set out for specific practices by the company that owns them, but are also being shaped by a complex system of practices and interest groups that include not only the users and the developers, but also a range of intermediate figures and economic decisions/negotiations.

I have not yet fully analyzed the material I have just shared, but it came to my mind when reading the earlier posts. I hope this is of interest to some of you - apologies for a very spontaneous post!

All the best,
Anna Lisa

Michael Goldsmith mikegold@waikato.ac.nz

July 4th 2016

Hello all.

It's been a while since I posted on this site but the richness and clarity of this discussion about Facebook and other social media have been exemplary. I've just read Anna Lisa Ramella's fascinating posting on musicians and their personal and professional lives in social media. It finally clarified for me one of the reasons why I (as one of the world's most reluctant and least competent users) find these media so unappealing. It's because the whole technology has become an instrument not just of surveillance but of audit. I'm reminded of the ways in which academics now not only have to do their job but also have to demonstrate their success in doing so, usually by means of some dubious metrics.

Mike Goldsmith

Michael Munnik MunnikM@cardiff.ac.uk

July 4th 2016

Dear all,

I wanted to thank Mike Goldsmith for his concise contribution with the effective phrase "an instrument not just of surveillance but of audit." The group I was observing during my fieldwork definitely had that numeric evaluative focus to their discussion about what was "working" on the various social media platforms.

And Anna Lisa, thanks for your dense description of your recent work. You mentioned that your analysis is still in progress - I look forward to seeing the results, and that does address my wonder about Profile/Page distinctions. Studying a solo operator - an entrepreneur, perhaps, and in this case a solo musician, someone personally invested in the success of the business-entity-that-is-also-the-human - is a chance to observe those pressures at work. I'm glad your participant saw no distinction between the selves, though I wonder how honest you think that really is. Or is that the Kool-Aid he must drink to carry on doing what he wants to be doing in the current market and media conditions in which he finds/has placed himself? A study of such types,

perhaps pitched with a social-psychological element under the banner of "coping" would be interesting. Were there contrasting narratives that stood out for you from other participants?

I also take and value Sydney Yeager's reference to the difficult distinction between Researcher Self and Personal Self in conducting fieldwork - a distinction imposed by the IRB and with the anticipated result of draining this new profile of all the advantages which "ordinary" users of Facebook have accrued over time: networks, relationships, and a presence that demonstrates a history and an understanding of how the place works. I think we judge and are judged by the activity we present on these profiles, so that people can assess our competence and the "kind" of social media user we are (cynical, earnest, jokey, politically angry, etc) and creating a new profile just evaporates that. So, your account can be helpful for other researchers when review boards ask or insist on such a tactic.

Best regards,

Michael

Anna Ramella anna.ramella@gmail.com

July 4th 2016

Dear all,

Thank you Michael for your valuable comments and questions.

I think using the lens of entrepreneurship is quite interesting because although most musicians have a whole team behind them (managers, producers, promoters etc.), what you call the "business-entity-that-is-also-the-human" here could also be called a "business-entity-that-is-also-the-artist" - when apart from creating, performing and reproducing one's art, one has to constantly market it for a range of audiences. There is an interesting Ted talk on this topic by Andreas Bischof that I just recently learned of: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nkVg_d2gi-I <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nkVg_d2gi-I>

In the particular case mentioned, the musician told me very specifically that he wanted his fans to see him as a human being and not as an artist, but that he was at the same time aware of the positive effect his engagement would have for marketing his music. So the intention was to align personal necessities with economic success, which is an advantage to those who post on a daily basis anyways. There were of course musicians (mostly an older age group) who stated that they did not want to partake in this Social Media marketing endeavor due to a kind of skepticism and awareness towards Social Media and commercialization in general.

Shaun Moores talks about media practices as "finding our way about" and I wonder whether this "inhabitant knowledge" (Ingold, also quoted by Moores) of Social Media can also be applied to how our daily media practices shape and intersect with the media uses we are made accountable for.

Another issue is the coping perspective you have suggested: In my observations I could see that the avoidance of doubts also helped to keep the system running that was needed to actually do a tour (often many months with no off-days and many kilometers to drive each day). One musician told me in an interview that she found it easier to reproduce a positive image of touring on Social Media than to complain about a precarious lifestyle, which would not be understood by her fans and friends who generally envied her for being a “rock star” - maybe to understand Social Media as a “place to perform Musician-ness” (in reference to Miller/Slater 2000:7: “[...] the internet as a place to perform Trini-ness”)?

I guess generally I find it difficult to speak about honesty or realness in this respect and would rather try to understand these accounts as part of a complex system where many roles come into play - towards others and towards oneself. These of course do not stop before the anthropologist - I think your intervention about this is very important and I cannot yet say how to respond to it. One of my approaches has been participant observation on tour (also during months) where I could feel the need to represent one’s mobility in front of oneself in a certain way in order to cope with it, but also a rhythmic organization of one’s practices - there was definitely not much space to reflect on the lifestyle one was leading and it proved easier to just go with it (I’ve just worked through this experience in a chapter that is soon to be published: <http://xcol.org/xcol-book/ramella/> <<http://xcol.org/xcol-book/ramella/>>).

I do want to look further into the notion of “social self” that might provide an interesting perspective for breaking up the dichotomy of private/public - a perspective that did not seem to play such a big role for most of my interlocutors (in other words, they made me feel quite outdated when making this distinction).

I did struggle with this in the field though when for example I received follow-up emails thanking me for attending a concert by someone who had formerly told me this was their marketing strategy - however, I wonder, does this necessarily exclude the option that she really was happy I came to her show?

All the best,
Anna

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Kerstin B Andersson tinni.andersson@telia.com

July 5th 2016

Dear all,

Due to lack of time, I will not be able to give any extensive comments on the very interesting

topics that have been brought up in this seminar. However, I thought that I should let you know that I have appreciated this new form of e-seminar and the joint participation from different networks. I have followed and enjoyed this discussion very much and I also recognise much of the topics brought up from my research on digital diasporas.

One point that I find fascinating is to see that here we have a "new" ethnographic fieldsite; Facebook. however much of the topics brought up resonates with classical anthropological discussions. E.g. methodological questions in the field context, where for example Danny's statement on conversation with informants illustrates basic issues as insider-outsider perspectives in the field. The old relativism discussion in anthropology (starting early 20th century) is brought in by e.g. Mark, Danny and John. Classical media topics as techno-determinism are taken up and so on. So maybe this "new" fieldsite is not so very new!

Kerstin

Philipp Budka ph.budka@philbu.net

July 5th 2016

Dear All,

This really is an interesting and inspiring discussion - thank you all.

Concerning research ethics on/with/of Facebook, I came across three sources/texts I would like to share:

* "The ethics of research on Facebook" by the AAA Committee on Ethics:

<http://ethics.americananthro.org/the-ethics-of-research-on-facebook/>

"Facebook poses an interesting dilemma ... because of the multi-tiered "friend" structure and multiple possibilities for security settings. There is legitimately no expectation of privacy on Facebook, yet, in practice, many users forget that."

* "Ethics of User Experience Research: What Anthropology Can Tell Us about Facebook's Controversial Study" by Jordan Kraemer:

<http://blog.castac.org/2014/07/ethics-of-user-experience-research-what-anthropology-can-tell-us-about-facebooks-controversial-study/>

"The question remains how to conduct user research ethically as new kinds of data are becoming available, often at a massive scale. When technology companies create products that more and more of us use daily as part of our routine social and professional lives, we—as users and researchers—can and should demand that new forms of research take these ethical obligations seriously."

* "Ethics" by the Association of Internet Researchers:

<http://aoir.org/ethics/>

and specifically "2012: Ethical decision-making and Internet research 2.0: Recommendations from the AoIR ethics working committee":

<http://aoir.org/reports/ethics2.pdf>

"This document provides a basic overview of internet research considerations. It advocates a process approach to ethics, which emphasizes the importance of addressing and resolving ethical issues as they arise in each stage of the project. We also advocate a casuistic, or case based approach, which attends to the specific needs of each case. Rather than prescribing a set of approved practices, we have deliberately chosen to suggest a characteristic range of questions that should be asked by internet researchers as well as those responsible for oversight of such research."

All the best,

Philipp

Annette Markham amarkham@gmail.com

July 5th 2016

Hi Anna,

Just as a quick note (and jumping into this conversation somewhat randomly, so apologies if i repeat something already mentioned), you might be very interested in Nancy Baym's work on musicians and their relationships with fans on social media. She's done interviews for a number of years with a range of different types of musicians and is now finishing a book on the topic (NYU Press). Her development of the concept of 'relational labor' is particularly interesting.

The points you raise about realness, authenticity, the complexity of online/offline and public/private, and the complex ecology within which the self plays out in social media are persistent and sticky issues for scholars studying digital culture. Scholars have been troubling these terms since the early-mid 1990s, and what I find most interesting is that everyday explanations of these complications can be quite different from theoretical explanations.

In any case, since the analytical topics you're addressing seem very much aligned with Baym's work, you might start a dialogue with her.

<http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/10714421.2015.996401?journalCode=gcrv20>

best,

Annette

Anna Ramella anna.ramella@gmail.com

July 6th 2016

Dear Anette,

Thank you very much for your remark, I have read Baym's article "Fans or friends" and find it very stimulating, as many of the musicians address similar issues as the one's I've worked with, like the changing image of a rock star (and that have also been expressed in journalistic interviews, like in The Guardian <https://www.theguardian.com/music/2015/jun/25/musicians-touring-psychological-dangers-willis-earl-beal-kate-nash> <<https://www.theguardian.com/music/2015/jun/25/musicians-touring-psychological-dangers-willis-earl-beal-kate-nash>>).

Apologies for not having mentioned her work in my initial comment, I very much look forward to her book!

All the best,
Anna

Veronica Barassi v.barassi@gold.ac.uk

July 7th 2016

Dear All,

We decided to extend the E-seminar for another week. The seminar will now close on Wednesday the 12th.

I am enjoying the discussions a lot, and looking forward to more comments and ideas.

Very Best Wishes

Veronica

Jordan Kraemer jkraemer@wesleyan.edu

July 8th 2016

Dear Philipp,

I'm chagrined I didn't know AAA had such a statement — especially since I've been writing and thinking about these questions for a while!

Their statement reflects, I think, the increasingly complicated ways Facebook, and other social media, are entangled in people's lives (including ours!). Whether or not you set out to study social media, these practices are part of many participants' worlds — just like broadcast, print media, and other technologies. But the persistence, and what danah boyd calls "spreadability," of social media raise new ethical questions, especially given the gap between the accessibility of social media content and its perceived or intended audience.

AAA makes some recommendations on how to position one's self clearly as a researcher online: "Thus, proposed research relying on Facebook content might prompt some human subject oversight committees (IRBs) to require that the researcher post an announcement of research

intent on her Facebook page. Ethical praxis means active avoidance of deception or betrayal in the research/subject relationship, as well as avoidance of the perception of deception or betrayal. If a researcher does not tell anyone that she is collecting data for analysis and dissemination, that may amount to covert research."

One point this doesn't address, however, is how users themselves limit the visibility of their posts (not to mention the likelihood of them seeing such a statement). It's worth noting when a person has set their posts to "public" visibility versus limiting them to their Facebook Friends, though that's still no guarantee of how visible they imagine their posts and comments to be. I wouldn't want to quote directly from a non-public figure without permission, or at least, without their awareness of and consent to participate in my research project more broadly. Yet it's tricky when an interesting conversation unfolds between someone who has consented and someone you don't know, especially because reaching out by email or other written communication becomes the only evidence linking them to your study. This may be a case where IRB guidelines don't adequately address online research ethics, because IRB (at least, in the US) typically allows for "passive observation" without consent as long as the researcher doesn't collect personally identifiable information and does not directly interact or participate.

One of the challenges of emerging social and mobile media, I think, is anticipating the scope of our research, as privacy settings and features are reconfigured, users change their imagined audiences, and online life becomes integrated into daily living in new ways (for example, as extended and multigenerational families use Facebook, often to the dismay of young people for whom it used to be a space for peers).

Jordan

Jordan Kraemer jkraemer@wesleyan.edu

July 8th 2016

Dear all,

I'm greatly enjoying this conversation — it's gratifying to engage in in-depth anthropological discussion of Facebook and social media.

I want to pick up some threads in the discussion, in particular, the trouble approaching Facebook as a singular thing, whose affordances and histories shape social practice, in contrast to its ontological multiplicity, as Danny Miller describes, as the platform constitutes something very different from context to context.

I find very helpful Ozlem Savas's call to analyze Facebook and Facebook practices in their specificity, as neither able to be extrapolated from the offline or actual world, yet not necessarily in isolation either. In my work, I've followed small circles of friends across sites and spaces, including Facebook but also SMS, Skype, Twitter, flatshares, cafés, parks, and elsewhere — yet these friend circles themselves shift and are constituted differently across different contexts.

Miller's characterization of Facebook as an aggregate of genres or conversations also guides my thinking, and provides a crucial reminder not to mistake "Facebook" as a single object. This is particularly interesting to me when you consider what comprises the Internet — it's not like a book circulating, or even multiple copies of the same print text, but instead, an unstable constellation of devices, components, wires, protocols, code, competences, corporate entities, users, and so forth, all historically sedimented and contingent. The "Facebook" any person encounters is temporarily brought into being, even if it has persistent elements. Yet Facebook's mutability or multiplicity cannot account for why it became so widely popular over and against other platforms—why haven't local or national sites become the norm in many instances? In Germany, for example, Studi.vz was open to all German university students, yet most of my interlocutors rejected it for Facebook. This was tied precisely to Facebook's position as the transnational, cosmopolitan, hip place to be (not unlike Berlin).

Part of what makes the Internet cohere as a communication platform are ongoing processes of standardization. As John Postill notes, isn't this diversity finite? He raises the issue of transnational contact zones, and this highlights for me a further issue with trying to locate Facebook. Facebook practices always take place somewhere, but at what level should we define any given context? What constitutes the local or the national? The answer comes partly from fieldwork itself — we must delimit our sites, of course, through the nature of ethnographic methods. But I hesitate to make declarations about German Facebook, and can only speak to Facebook practices in/through Berlin (and very specific corners of Berlin at that). This touches on the complex ways media are implicated in the production of place, which doesn't pre-exist media practices (as Savas notes as well, arguing that Facebook shows how "locality is shaped and transformed through social attachments and relations that are not necessarily dictated by the geography").

Mark Peterson points out that these tensions are not new and continue to characterize life under globalization. I agree, although I do think the stakes are different with technologies like Facebook, whose interface and affordances increasingly structure many kinds of everyday interactions. As Jamie Coates and Sahana Udupa point out, in different ways, platforms like Facebook, though not ontologically singular, condition the limits of the possible, of what can be done and imagined, according to specific and power-laden histories. These issues all point to further questions for research and analysis: what are the affordances of Facebook's design (which is continually changing) in specific contexts? This is especially important given how, as Erkan Saka notes, much of what goes on on/in Facebook remains inaccessible, raising further questions about how to conduct research on and through the site.

From my perspective, these debates are not something for us to resolve, but rather indicate new questions to formulate in the study of Facebook, and other social media. Facebook won't always be the dominant platform, or perhaps, like Google, it will dominate in its own domain but the social network utility will be replaced by something else. Anthropologists can't predict the future. What is clear is how Facebook, in all its iterations, forces us to reconsider the production of space and place, locality and globality, public and private, structure and agency, and so forth, in continually unfolding ways.

Jordan

Veronica Barassi v.barassi@gold.ac.uk

July 14th 2016

Dear All,

Apologies for the short delay, but I can now confirm that the seminar is now closed.

I would like to thank Philipp, Jordan, Martin and Sidney for organising this E-Seminar and for their opening statements. Also, I would like to thank you all so much for the contributions, comments and thoughts. It's been an exciting and thought-provoking seminar!

We will get in touch as soon as the transcripts are ready.

Very best Wishes.

Veronica