Research is an integral part of faculty and student activities at Boston University. Researchers at COM use the most advanced theory and methods to examine communication phenomena. Addressing both theoretical and applied problems through a range of quantitative and qualitative perspectives, faculty and students engage in the most cutting-edge developments in communication research that provide an extraordinarily fertile ground for innovation and science.

The Communication Research Center (CRC) was established in 1959 and reorganized in 1994. The CRC pioneered the use of television as a research tool, conducting systematic analyses on the effects of television on children and measuring political opinions and voting intentions. This early beginning led the CRC to develop a specialty in survey research methodology. The CRC recently updated a number of research tools such as the iMotions biometric research platform which allows faculty and students to examine physiological responses to media (e.g., websites, ads, television programs, and video games). Other recent additions include a virtual reality system which aids faculty and students to investigate issues related to psychological presence, empathy, and immersive storytelling.

Today, the CRC has 33 research fellows who specialize in topics including: media effects, emerging media, political communication, health communication, public relations, big data analytics, virtual reality, film and television studies, media and adolescents, international communication, and communication law. Several research faculty also serve as editors of competitive peer-reviewed journals.

In 2009, the CRC established the Communication Research Colloquium Series consisting of monthly research presentations that highlight current and original research of faculty in COM. This forum provides an intellectual exchange of ideas and perspectives, features scholarship in several methodological traditions, and fosters discussions among faculty and students about a variety of research topics in the field of communication.

In 2011, the Dr. Melvin L. DeFleur Distinguished Lecture Series was established. Each year two distinguished scholars from outside of the university are invited to share their outstanding scholarship, expertise, and experience with the BU community. In recognition of the pioneering and inspirational contributions of Dr. Melvin L. DeFleur to the field of mass communication research and his service as a venerable and inexhaustible member of the CRC, the faculty members named this series in his honor.
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We had a very productive semester of onsite data collection in the CRC. For Spring 2018, 22 studies were conducted, recruiting participants from 24 different COM courses to participate in 820 study sessions.

In addition, we had two major updates in the CRC this semester. First, we would like to thank Jake Kassen, COM’s Technical Operations Manager, for installing our new video recording system in B01A: Viewing Room. This unit can digitally record video and audio in two current spaces: B01B: Multipurpose Research Room and B02B: Naturalistic Research Area. We are deeply appreciative of his time and effort in not only setting up this customized recording system, but also his continued support in assisting faculty and students with successfully using it. Second, we extend our gratitude to Gary Santos, COM’s Facilities Manager, for helping us install updated furniture, specifically new flexible tables and chairs, in B04E: Collaborative Research Area.

We are incredibly fortunate for our graduate student staff. We would like to thank our CRC Lab Managers, Jackie Rocheleau (M.S. student in Science Journalism), Bochao Sun (M.A. student in Emerging Media Studies), and Wenyu Zeng (M.A. student in Emerging Media Studies) for upkeeping the center and overseeing technology and facility reservations. In addition, we are grateful to our Events/Publicity Coordinator, Zoe Tan (M.A. student in Emerging Media Studies) for her help in promoting the news and accomplishments of the CRC research fellows and our lecture series. Moreover, we truly appreciate the continued efforts of our SONA Administrator, Minkuan Chen (M.A. student in Emerging Media Studies) who has managed the SONA system for our college since January of last year. Finally, we thank Mike Pan (M.A. student in Emerging Media Studies) for his work in gathering news and creating this spring’s newsletter. We have been very lucky to have all of these graduate students onboard and are grateful for all their assistance in managing, coordinating, and promoting various research efforts and events this semester.

We hope everyone has a fantastic summer and look forward to all the exciting research in store in the next academic year!
Furniture Upgrade in B04E: Collaborative Research Area

We installed new furniture in B04E: Collaborative Research Area which include 6 flexible tables and 16 rolling chairs. This update provides flexibility in group meeting arrangements and seating for faculty and students.

New Video Recording System

We installed a new digital video recording system in B01A: Viewing Room. This unit can record video and audio in B01B: Multipurpose Research Room and B02B: Naturalistic Research Area. Recordings can be saved directly onto USB keys from the unit.
Google Faculty Research Award ($88,301)

Co-PI, Providing Real-time Content with Balanced Political Views (PI: Margrit Betke; Co-PI: Prakash Ishwar).

The goal of the project is to develop methods for news aggregators to ensure they present balanced real-time content representing diverse political perspectives to their users – not just left- and/or right-leaning content, but content that samples the full political landscape in the U.S. Dr. Lei Guo will be working with Dr. Margrit Betke from Computer Science and Dr. Prakash Ishwar from Electrical and Computer Engineering and students from different departments at BU including Kate Mays, a Ph.D. student of Emerging Media Studies.

ICA Top Faculty Paper Award


Intermedia agenda-setting theory has been widely used to explain news dynamics in western democracies. The extent to which the effect takes place in authoritarian regimes remains a question. This study focuses on the online media ecology in contemporary China, a media environment that mixes the forces of government surveillance, market competition, and the push for independent news reporting. Specifically, the study examined how different types of online news influenced each other in covering the Two Sessions, China's biggest annual political event. In order to obtain a holistic view of Chinese online news, computational methods such as unsupervised and supervised machine learning were employed to analyze 33,875 articles from 291 online news sources in March 2017. Results showed that privately-owned, commercial news sites emerged as the agenda setter in China's online media landscape, indicating that non-official discourse may find its way to expand in the country's online public sphere.
Data-driven and algorithmic systems increasingly underpin many decision-making systems, shaping where law enforcement are stationed and what news you are shown on social media. The design of these systems is inscribed with organizational and cultural values. Often, these systems depend on the behavior of everyday people, who may not act as expected. Meanwhile, adversarial actors also seek to manipulate the data upon which these systems are built for personal, political, and economic reasons. In this talk, danah boyd unpacked some of the unique cultural challenges presented by “big data” and machine learning, raising critical questions about fairness and accountability. She described how those who are manipulating media for lulz are discovering the attack surfaces of new technical systems and how their exploits may undermine many aspects of society that we hold dear. Above all, she argued that we need to develop more sophisticated ways of thinking about technology before jumping to hype and fear.
Has the Time Come to Revise § 230 of the Communications Decency Act?

FEBRUARY 2018

In the 22 years since it was passed, § 230 of the Communications Decency Act, which gives providers of interactive computer services broad immunity from liability for content posted by third parties, has had a profound effect on the Internet. The Electronic Frontier Foundation calls it, “the most important law protecting Internet speech.” Others, however, argue it encourages and enables extremely harmful speech including defamation, invasion of privacy, sex trafficking, revenge porn, online bullying, doxing, and death threats, leaving victims with little or no recourse. This has led to numerous efforts to reduce the immunity provided by § 230. Given the changes in the Internet since it was passed, is it time to revise § 230?

Toxic News: Media Coverage of Pediatric Environmental Health & How Moms Respond

MARCH 2018

Now more than ever, the medical and scientific communities are concerned with how exposure to toxic chemicals in the environment – including pesticides and bisphenol A – impact the health of our children. Dr. Mello has been studying how the media presents these health risks to the public and how new and expectant moms, in particular, react. In this talk, she discussed how the media prioritizes certain risks over others, how it frames responsibility for protecting children from harm, and how those editorial choices impact mothers’ attitudinal and behavioral responses.


CALL FOR PAPERS:  
PODCASTING, THE POPULAR,  
AND THE PUBLIC SPHERE

Deadline: September 1, 2018

Podcasting is a paradoxical medium. Its form and content are encoded with markers of the both the popular and the elite. On the one hand, it is a medium deeply embedded in the everyday practices of everyday people. We listen on the train, at the gym, or even on the job. It is frequently produced by avocational enthusiasts far removed from the elite spheres of media production culture. It is popular both in the sense that millions enjoy it and in its ability to so effectively blend into common activities. Yet at the same time podcasting often takes on the contours of elite discourse. The diversity of podcast offerings can yield highly specialized content requiring listeners to possess considerable expertise in esoteric subject matter. Political podcasts, in the hopes of differentiating themselves from more mainstream offerings, tend towards a wonkish focus that can be alienating and intentionally exclusionary to large groups of potentially interested listeners. Gunn and Brummett (2004) argue that the project of popular communication should be to foreclose the study of “elite culture” and privilege instead “the objects of everyday life.” In podcasting we find elements of the everyday and the elite interacting constantly and with considerable success. This special issue of Popular Communication will consider the ways in which the podcasting medium negotiates and benefits from these tendencies towards simultaneous inclusivity and exclusivity.

To do so, articles in this issue will analyze elements of podcasting’s brief but vibrant history, interrogating the medium’s popular possibilities, revolutionary promises and moment-defining media texts. Arriving in the midst of increasing global political turbulence and offering a relatively inexpensive form of mass expression, podcasting significantly expanded a public sphere once dominated by opinion journalism, talk radio, and public affairs television. In this sense, it offered a popularization of public sphere elements long dominated by elite discourse. Perhaps most alluringly, podcasting has offered a mode of discursive media aimed at younger, pop culture-savvy listeners invested in both on-demand programs and political consciousness. But this newfound freedom and flexibility does not necessarily mean that the paradigms established by older media have been abolished or evenmeaningfully disrupted. It took little time, for example, for large corporations and other elite institutions to dominate mainstream podcast rankings, the most influential of which is hosted by the global megalith Apple. Furthermore, the logics of narrowcasting have driven numerous independent producers towards increasingly specific content, fracturing the public and perhaps obscuring some of the popular potential of the medium. Podcasting thus offers new opportunities for expression, but nonetheless replicates certain historically established patterns of media concentration and limitation. Specific research questions of interest to this special issue include but are not by any means limited to:

• How has the growth of podcasting both expanded and contracted the discursive possibilities for popular political media across the world?
• How do the histories of radio, regulation, and network distribution help to contextualize the popular dynamics of political podcasting?
• How do algorithms, rating systems, and other data structures impact the work of producers attempting to gain audiences for their political podcasts?
• How do podcasts fit into or defy traditions of progressive media?
• How do podcasts circulate globally and mediate debates over globalization, immigration, diaspora and other international concerns?
• How do podcasts embrace the blending of information and entertainment found elsewhere global political media?

The deadline for submissions is September 1, 2018.
Papers should be no longer than 7,000 words (all inclusive)
Papers should be submitted using ScholarOne at http://www.tandfonline.com/toc/hppc20/current
Full instructions for authors, including APA 6th Edition style guidelines, can be found at the same page.

Correspondence and questions about this call for papers can be directed to Matt Sienkiewicz (matt.sienkiewicz@bc.edu) and Deborah Jaramillo (dlj@bu.edu).
#SCREENTIMEBU2018

#ScreentimeBU is an annual academic conference in June put on by the graduate students from the Division of Emerging Media Studies at Boston University.

The #ScreentimeBU conference aims to provide an opportunity for researchers in the field of digital media and communication to exchange their attitudes, stances, and opinions on the heated issues haunting today’s media landscape. By showcasing their insightful research, the scholars at the conference can inform people of the latest research accomplishments, communicate with colleagues on critical topics, as well as hint at future research directions in the communication fields.

This year, as another year identified by the thriving new media platforms and technologies along with doubts and scandals around online privacy, urges us as communication researchers to delve into the underlying mechanism of digital media, big data and how they have been influencing the real world. Following this, we are thrilled to introduce our theme of this year: #NoFilter: Unmasking Digital Engagement and Real World Influence.

For more information, please visit: sites.bu.edu/demsconference


Recent (cont.)


Groshek, J. (2017, December). The revolution will be streaming: How user agency, algorithms, and mobility are transforming media and reshaping media effects. Featured speaker, University of Minnesota.


Groshek, J. Featured speaker on Story in the Public Square, Rhode Island Public Radio, March 17, 2018. https://www.youtube.com/watch?time_continue=1&v=AlR_1b6KAfo


**2017-2018**


Bochao Sun  
**CRC Lab Manager**  
Bochao is a M.A. student in Emerging Media Studies. Research interests include data analysis and visualization, interactive and user experience, and commercial use of virtual reality.

Wenyu Zeng  
**CRC Lab Manager**  
Wenyu is a M.A. student in Emerging Media Studies. Research interests include UGC content, streaming video, entertaining content and social effects of emerging communication.

Minkuan Chen  
**COM SONA System Administrator**  
Minkuan is a M.A. student in Emerging Media Studies. Research interests include intercultural communication and social networks, inspirational and civic media, psychological and social effects of emerging communication technologies.

Jackie Rocheleau  
**CRC Lab Manager**  
Jackie is a M.S. student in Science Journalism. Research interests include neuroscience, psychology, and health, particularly in the contexts of journalism and communicating the science of these disciplines to the public.

Zoe Tan  
**Event/Publicity Coordinator**  
Zoe is a M.A. student in Emerging Media Studies.

Mike Pan  
**CRC Newsletter Editor**  
Mike is a M.A. student in Emerging Media Studies. Research interests include data analysis and visualization, interactive and user experience and web and graphic design.