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Communities and the Media Around the Globe

Edited by

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MeCCSA Postgraduate Network 2018 Conference Special Issue: Communities and the Media Around the Globe

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Guest Editor

On 5th and 6th July 2018, MeCCSA's Postgraduate Network held their annual conference at Canterbury Christ Church University. The event was organised by Nicholas Furze, Aurora Patera and Emma Kaylee Graves, all of whom have contributed to the creation of this special issue. The papers presented in this special issue are each based upon presentations given by attendees of this conference. With the inclusive theme of media, community and culture, the conference saw a wide variety of scholarship from contributors based in the UK and beyond. As a result, the four papers that make up this issue vary greatly, but are all related in that they each consider communities' relationships to the media around the globe.

The concept of community has been defined in many different ways over the years, from being thought of as created by physical or virtual boundaries (e.g. Barth 1969) to being imagined or symbolic (e.g. Anderson 1983; Cohen 1985; Wegner 2002). However, Gerard Delanty argues that the one thing which 'unites these very diverse conceptions of community, it is the idea that community concerns belonging and sharing' (2018, 5). Indeed, this is a theme that can be found in each of the contributions in this issue in some form or another.

Studies of communities have not just been confined to the social sciences, but have expanded to other disciplines; including the arts and humanities. Considering media studies in particular, researchers have analysed the effect of media on communities (such as the study of Porter et al. [2012] on the effect of mobile phones on young people in Africa), how communities interact with media (such as Lovejoy and Saxton's [2012] examination of *Twitter* use by US non-profit organisations) or how communities interact *through* media forms (such as Gray's [2013] ethnography of women playing online games). Significantly, all four papers in this issue contribute to one or more of these areas, whether that be in the online or offline context in Greece, China, the UK or elsewhere.

Opening this special issue, Fatma Matin Khan explores women's relationship to technology in India. Khan adopts an intersectional approach to the study of ICTs, analysing 'the way structures of class, caste, gender, religion and sexuality […] intersect and form a mutually influencing relationship with technology' (7). Inspired by a phenomenological and postcolonial feminist perspective, Khan's paper is the result of 13 interviews with women in New Delhi on the topic of ICTs. Khan's analysis considers both the positive and negative effects technology appears to have on these women (and women more generally). Her findings showed that, amongst other things, the participants viewed ICTs as both a hindrance (for example, because employers could contact them at all hours) and enabling (such as allowing them access to information).

Still concerned with women and communities, but in a very different context, Lula Mecinska's article focuses on a community performing breastfeeding activism (or 'lactivism') on social media. Mecinska's paper is based on six years of ethnographic research in which she participated in and observed the community's interaction on- and offline. The study looks at breastfeeding support groups on *Facebook*, based in the UK and Poland, as well as international groups. In particular, Mecinska considers how the concepts of embodiment and presence within virtual environments (in this case, the *Facebook* groups) are relevant for the participants, such as in feeling part of the online community while not being physically present with the other members. Moreover, Mecinska documents several examples of support and activities carried out by these groups. As well as being a platform to share knowledge and provide support for breastfeeding parents, Mecinska highlights the way these groups can facilitate activism in both online (*Facebook* and other destinations) and offline settings. She presents various examples of this, including moves against companies such as *Nestlé* and *Dove*, as well as Claridge's Hotel in London.

Lara Herring's paper is similar to Mecinska's in that it considers online social media communities. However, its overall focus is very different. Herring's contribution offers interesting insight into the effect of Chinese social media sites on China's film market. She focuses on two Chinese social media sites: *Weibo* and *Douban*. Herring argues that such sites 'play significant roles in the shaping of the domestic film industry in China' (51). Her analysis is split into three sections. The first considers the use of these sites to promote transparency within the film industry. Herring uses the example of the Fan Bingbang scandal that occurred in 2018 in which the contracts of an actress were leaked on social media, exposing an excessive overpayment for a role. The second part examines the use of social media as a space for open film criticism, away from the 'propagandist' mainstream Chinese media. Lastly, Herring discusses the watchdog role users of social media can take in order to, for example, uncover

box office irregularities. Importantly, Herring's article considers each of these points in relation to the media censorship that exists in China.

Alexandros Daniilidis provides the last research paper in this special issue. He considers spaces of social representation in the Kypseli Municipal Market in Athens, Greece. Daniilidis details the evolution (and, as his title suggests, urbanisation) of the market from the start of the twentieth century to the present. After detailing the history of urbanisation in Kypseli and the market itself, Daniilidis discusses some findings from his empirical research, which included interviews carried out in the market. In this analysis, the author pays particular attention to the impact of the marketplace on refugees, migrants and lower-class citizens, such as allowing them to integrate into the community. He further suggests that the market provides these people with the opportunity to challenge the social representations of themselves produced by the media. Lastly, Daniilidis concludes his enquiry with a consideration of whether and how Kypseli market can be considered a social movement.

In addition to these papers, this issue includes an interview with Professor Nico Carpentier carried out by Aurora Patera. In this interview, Carpentier discusses his idea of the discursive material knot that he focused on during his keynote speech at the MeCCSA Postgraduate Network conference. Additionally, Nicholas Furze presents a review of a special issue of the *Internet Research* journal, 'The Dark Side of Social Media'. Overall, this issue provides varied and valuable insight into media, communities and culture across the world through research papers, an interview and a review of a journal special issue.

Acknowledgements

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Access and Beyond: An Intersectional Approach to Women's Everyday Experiences with Information and Communication Technologies

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ABSTRACT

Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) are seen as the pathway not just to (economic) development, but key to ensuring good governance and removing social inequality. At the heart of this narrative is the assumption that technology is neutral and an a priori source for good which can be used for the inclusion of marginalised communities. Through in-depth interviews with working class women in New Delhi, India, my paper seeks to understand how an intersectional social location affects women's experiences with ICTs, and argues that they are mired in complex ways with structures of caste, gender, class and education. The study builds on feminist insights that technology must be seen as a set of practices, deeply implicated in power relations. Thus, young women's usage of mobile phones is shaped by upper-caste norms of femininity. For other women, ICTs become a nuisance which allow employers more access to them. This paper underscores the importance of a more bottom-up understanding of the ways in which technology and society shape each other, and reflects on implications for policymaking and future scholarship.

Introduction

In December 2016, introducing a government application for digital transactions, the Prime Minister of India, Narendra Modi, underlined the importance of Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) for the future of India:

> Technology is the biggest strength of the dalits, the oppressed, the exploited and those deprived. It is a myth that it is a treasure for the rich and educated. No, it

> is the treasure for the poor. It is going to empower the poor, the small business traders, the farmers in far and very far off villages, the tribal living in the forest.[1]

This 'magical thinking' in relation to ICTs (Eubanks 2013) has been called into question by civil rights activists and researchers. While the ICT boom in India made it the poster-child for ICT4D (ICTs for Development) rhetoric (Sarkar 2016), this has not seemed to benefit everyone. Though the average income has increased, the gap between the rich and the poor has widened (Open Society Foundation Report 2012). Atrocities against minority groups such as Dalits, Muslims and Adivasis have increased (Teltumbde 2010). While the World Bank applauds India's AADHAR program as the largest of its kind, and famously, India is said to have more mobile phone users than toilets; civil rights activists claim that digitisation of services is resulting in further exclusion of the most marginalised in Indian society.[2]

Nowhere does the contradictions of the ICT imaginary seem more apparent than in India. India is the largest exporter of ICT services in the developing world, and also the home of the largest offline population in the world.[3] Figures like the second largest market of users abound, and yet, 59.2% of India's population lives on less than 2 dollars a day (ADB 2015, cited in Banaji 2017, 47). As apparent in the speech by Modi, ICTs are seen as the tools which can bridge the gap between the advantaged and the disadvantaged in society (Gurstein 2003). The rhetoric of the information and knowledge society is increasingly being called into question, and yet, continues to hold power over the imaginations of policy-makers, politicians, tech-gurus, and citizens all over the world (Mansell 2012). In such a scenario, efforts to bridge the digital divide are seen as a priority by the government, international agencies and NGOs, and corporate institutions alike.

However, ICTs are not just communicative resources, but as Wajcman (2007, 582) writes,

> Technologies embody and advance political interests and agendas and they are the product of social structure, culture, values, and politics as much as the result of objective scientific discovery.

Building on the work of Iris Marion Young, Virginia Eubanks (2013, 26) also criticizes the distributive logic of the digital divide rhetoric, and argues that it is oppression, and not equality, that must be at the centre of any analysis of technology and justice:

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[1] http://www.narendramodi.in/text-of-pms-speech-at-digidhan-mela-in-new-delhi-stalkatora-stadium-30-december-2016-533672 (translated by the author)

[2] For just one example, look at Scroll.in's coverage of the issues linked with making the biometric identity card (AADHAAR) mandatory for government schooling and other services. https://scroll.in/topic/38792/identity-project

[3] http://www.dw.com/en/world-bank-points-to-indias-digital-divide/a-19246910

> Seeing high tech equity only as broadly shared access to existing technological products ignores other social values, neglects decision-making processes, sees citizens only as consumers, and ignores the operation of institutions and social structures.

Eubanks argues that we need to ground the information revolution by recognising that it does not affect social groups in the same way. For example, the information revolution from the perspectives of women of colour in Eubanks' hometown of Troy showcases an increasing precarity and marginalisation not in spite of the digital revolution, but because of it. Thus, she argues that social location shapes people's experiences of technology and the digital world, and critiques the celebratory accounts of cyberfeminism.

Cyberfeminism celebrates the revolutionary potential of new technologies for a new gender order. This has included the celebration of the way activities like gender-swapping online encourages people to challenge traditional notions of gender and acquire a 'new sense of gender as a continuum' (Turkle 1995, 314) as well as the potential of new reproductive technologies to overcome the embodied basis of gender difference (Haraway 1984). Much feminist research has also focused on the systematic marginalisation of women from jobs and professions that are defined as technological (Cockburn 1983; Hacker 1989; Wajcman 1991). However, intersectional and third world feminist argue that these concerns largely reflect the concerns of middle-class white women in the West (Gajjala 2004; Eubanks 2013). For example, a tendency to focus on the number of women in the tech industry often looks at only the white-collar jobs, ignoring the large number of women occupied in blue-collar jobs in relation to technology, in the global North and the global South.

An intersectional approach to ICTs seeks to analyse the way structures of class, caste, gender, religion and sexuality etc. intersect and form a mutually influencing relationship with technology. For example, the edited anthology *The Intersectional Internet* applies an intersectional framework to 'trace the types of uneven power relations that exist in technological spaces' (Noble and Tynes 2016, 5). Similarly, Gajjala (2012) applies a postcolonial feminist lens to not only consider the relation of gender to privilege offline and online, but also how this relates to larger structures of political economy and power relations between the global North and global South. Intersectional lenses have also been applied to the study of media in India.

Instead of abstract, self-sustaining theories of justice where technology is always already empowering or disempowering, there is a need for 'normative reflection that is historically and socially contextualised' (Young 1990, 3). Thus, this study takes as its starting point that social forces and technology influence and shape each other, and that intersectional approaches to

social location can be used to understand the lived experiences of ICTs in the lives of marginalised women in India.

Methodology and Reflection

My initial inspiration for this study was to attempt to map out the complexity of the experience of digital exclusion in India. On deeper reflection, I realised that though I critiqued the distributive paradigm in my conceptual framework, I continued to function within it by making value judgements about who was not connected, and by my desire to map the barriers which hindered this connectivity. Inspired by the work of scholars such as Virginia Eubanks (2013) and Shakuntala Banaji (2017), I realised that it was important to acknowledge my presupposed assumptions (Groenwald 2004), and instead, be led by what the women I spoke to felt was important in their lives, and the value (or lack of) ICTs in them.

For this, qualitative methods such as interviews and ethnography seemed suitable practically and epistemologically. Since my aim was to 'understand the meaning of respondents' experiences and life worlds' (Warren 2002, 83), focus groups were not considered appropriate, and I decided to use semi-structured in-depth interviews inspired by a phenomenological and postcolonial feminist perspective (Oakley 1981; Visweswaran 1994; Shome and Hegde 2002; Gajjala 2004, 2012; Donald 2009). Ideally, it would be interesting to interview women from a diverse range of backgrounds all over India. However, considering the limited scope of this study and the abundance of studies exploring the study habits of the middle-class in India, as well as the diversity in India, I decided to focus on the experiences of working-class women, ensuring that it included diversity in terms of religion, age, caste and hometown. Though many axes of marginalisation exist, social class seemed the best starting point for a study such as this. Thus, I used a mixture of theoretical and snowball sampling, where my selection criteria were a rough indication of class status. Overall, thirteen interviews were conducted over the months of June and July 2017. A small cash supplement was provided to the interviewees.

Following ethical approval from my supervisor, a consent form and an information sheet were prepared in Hindi and Urdu. However, on realising that the interviewees were more comfortable with verbal explanations, and wary of signing documents, I chose to give oral explanations and recorded verbal consent before each interview. I made sure that they were aware that they could refuse to answer any questions, or stop the interview at any time, and gave them my contact details if they wanted to change their mind later.

Kamala Visweswaran (1994) highlights the role of location in affecting the power relations in the interview process. I conducted interviews wherever the participants felt it was most

convenient, whether it was at their workplace when there was a lull in the work, or in their homes. While most interviews were conducted alone, this was not always possible. Locations such as one-room homes, or a terrace which was also used as a playground by the children of the building meant neighbours or children were sometimes present.

A topic guide was developed, but I was guided more by what the participants themselves wanted to talk about, listening closely, and asking follow-up questions. The interview data was transcribed verbatim, and I chose to conduct the analysis with untranslated text. Since my choice of method of analysis is thematic analysis, this did not produce as much of a challenge. However, in translating the passages I choose to include here, I was aware of the many cadences and nuances lost, and I have tried to include notes where word choices seemed significant. After I fully transcribed the recordings, the data was analysed through thematic analysis, a 'form of pattern recognition within the data, where emerging themes become the categories for analysis' (Fereday and Muir-Cochrane 2006, 4). Open and Axial coding procedures were employed, which were then organised into themes.

I reflected on the various speaking positions and the fractured subjectivities (Warren 2002) that came up during the interview. For instance, my class identity seemed to be encapsulated in the use of a high-end smartphone to record the interviews. It was often used as a reference point such as when Seeta said to me 'No one in my family has a phone like that yet'. At other moments, shared solidarities emerged between the women and I. One such instance was when Shagufta, a few years older than me, realised that we both planned to teach, and offered me advice about resources I could seek out. At other times, the interviewees adopted the role of the older woman who had to guide my choices, especially relating to matrimony.

Sitara, in her late 30s, who has known me for some years, advised me seriously about the need to find the right balance between education and career, and fulfilling the expectations of my family and society. I found a strange mirroring when I said that like her eleven-year-old daughter Rumi, who gets annoyed when her extended family bring up the issue of her marriage, I too wanted to follow my dreams first. This mirroring was distorted and made terrible by the fact that I am more than a decade Rumi's senior.

Thus, the deep disjunctures between our worlds were much larger than the overlaps. In showcasing their voices, I am aware of the privilege which grants me the power of the pen to write texts inaccessible to many of them.

'These phones are not for people like us': Issues of Ownership

Technology was an ubiquitous presence in women's lives. Whether they took the form of medical machinery and the computerised entry system in their workplace; the admission system in the government school; the computer and machines which take your biometric identity; or the TV and multiple gadgetry present in the houses they cleaned. However, this did not mean that they owned phones or computers. Out of the thirteen women I interviewed, only four owned their own phones, and one had a laptop in the household. Out of these, three were smartphones. A further three had owned personal phones in the past. Everyone's household contained at least one mobile phone, but they usually belonged or at least stayed in the possession of husbands or sons.

Yaseeran, in her forties, lives in a one-bedroom flat. Her household consists of her husband, a daughter and a son, his wife, and a grandson. Shifting to Delhi from rural West Bengal more than a decade ago, she is the primary earner of the family, along with her son who drives an e-rickshaw in the neighbourhood. She works in four homes where her duties consist of buying ingredients, cooking meals, and doing other household tasks. Her description of her household situation was as follows:

> **IR**: Who has the phone usually?
>
> **Yaseeran**: My son takes it outside. Sometimes he takes it, sometimes he leaves it. That's what he does. I tell him to keep the phone at home, if I have some work, I might get a call. Some employer wants to call me, or any other thing… Then how can I call and tell them without a phone?

This was considered ordinary by most of the women, though Yaseeran expresses some frustration here. However, the difficulty which not having the phone in your possession resulted in sometimes is highlighted in the story of Sitara, who is also from a village in West Bengal, as she told me the story of how she happened to come to Delhi. She described the moment she realised that her husband had gambled away the last of their money, and how she had to 'hide (chipke)' and make a call from his mobile. This seemed to hold true even more in the case of younger girls. Both Yaseeran and Sitara spoke about their daughters who begged their mothers to buy phones for them. Sandhya, the youngest of the interviewees at eighteen, humorously described the way she had to cajole and bribe her elder brothers so she could have some time on their phones.

Many women saw smartphones as a luxury product, one which they did not consider 'appropriate' or useful in their own lives. Seeta, a forty-year-old, who does part-time work hemming clothes and attaching buttons and hooks, brought up the issue of affordability.

Explaining why she prefers a new non-smartphone over a used smartphone, she also brings up the fragility of mobile phones.

> **IR**: Okay. And which phone do you have now? The small one?
>
> **Seeta**: Yes, it is the small one (non smart-phone). Dear, till now I have not been able to buy such a phone (pointing at my phone). No one in my family has a phone like that yet. Because, dear, if you have money, only then you will buy these things. For instance, if such a mobile costs 7000 rupees, so if you buy a mobile which costs 7000, what will you eat all month? Everything has to be considered. So I take phones that are of my level (aukat). I bought a phone of 1200 rupees now.

Seeta's use of the word 'aukat' (level/status/position) is very significant, and points to a clear demarcation in her mind between those who can successfully use smartphones, and for herself, for whom it would be overstepping some kind of class boundary. This is articulated by Salma as well.

Salma, who migrated from Bihar some years ago, works as a domestic help in one of the gated communities in Delhi. When I asked if she ever used her phone for anything else besides making calls, she had a scathing reply which makes a clear link between social class positions and benefiting from ICTs:

> **Salma**: What else will I use it for? We are poor people.. When there is need to call home (her village), I recharge the phone for 20 rupees. We don't have hundreds of rupees balance all the time, like you. Where I work, there, they sit like fat queens (maharanis) and order this, that, do shopping worth lakhs from their phones... This is for you all. These phones are not for people like us.

Many women talked about how easy it was to break and lose phones, and thus, how they were something that constantly need to be replaced or repaired. Some women had owned phones in the past, which for one reason or another, could not be replaced or renewed. One reason for women not keeping the household mobile phones with them was that many did not know how to perform basic operational functions on them. The biggest factor in this, according to them, was that of literacy and education.

'When I haven't studied anything, then from where will I know how to make phones work?': Literacy, Education and Stigma

As per the 2011 census, the overall literacy rate in India is 74.04%. However, this varies dramatically by region and gender. Thus, the literacy rate for women is 65.46% against 82.14% for men.[4] While Delhi has relatively high literacy rates for women (80.76%), many of the

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[4] http://www.census2011.co.in/literacy.php

interviewees were from neighbouring states such as West Bengal (70.54%), Uttar Pradesh (57.18%) and Bihar (51.50%).

Many women explained that lack of literacy or education was the reason ICTs were not for them. Rameshwari, a Dalit woman who travelled hours to reach the neighbourhood where she collected garbage from the homes and cleaned out the drains, answered thus when I asked her if she used the phone:

> **Rameshwari**: No, no, I don't know all that. When I haven't studied anything, then from where will I know how to make phones work? My children sometimes say to me, Mummy, this is how, but I forget after a while, I don't know these things. Yes, when they put the call on the phone and hand it to me, then I talk to my daughters, then I am able to talk on it.

The link between ICTs and educational attainment is well-documented empirically. Thus, education is seen to be positively related to Internet adoption because of 'greater awareness, training, capabilities, and ability to evaluate content' (Pearce and Rice 2014, 4).

Though the use of ICTs and education is well-linked in the digital divide literature, a few things become significant here. One, some women pointed to their lack of proficiency in English as a barrier. Even with government and corporate efforts to create content in local languages, both hardware and software use requires some proficiency in a global language (Pearce and Rice 2014; Wijetunga 2014; Grazzi and Vergara 2014). What is more significant is the psychological link between English and upward social mobility in India. This was also articulated by other women. For Pammi, computers and English seemed to be exclusively linked together. Thus, when I asked her if she ever thought she would learn computers, she said matter-of-factly that she would never be able to learn as she did not know English.

Second, what seemed especially significant was that it did not seem to affect men the same way. Thus, while Pammi's husband worked in the same position as her and only had a year or two more schooling than her, he not only used a smartphone, but navigated the internet with confidence. Pammi spoke with pride of how he watched *YouTube* videos and learnt to fix phones and how he sent money to the village through his phone. It was his old smartphone that Pammi had, but she did not do much except attend calls and was slowly learning to read better by recognising how names and numbers connected to each other.

This was also apparent in the case of Shail and Shabana. Shail who was relatively well-educated and had studied until class 10 had a non-smart phone and had never used the internet. Shail, whose husband is an auto-rickshaw driver, became embarrassed when I asked her about the phone I saw lying on the bed. It was small, and had a crack across the screen. She told me that her husband had two smartphones.

This requires further research to explore if the stigma of being 'less educated' affects men and women differently. Shail struck me as a very driven woman, running a tailoring business from her home, extremely concerned that her thirteen year old daughter should not do household chores or learn traditionally feminine skills like stitching and embroidery but focus on her education. When I asked if she had ever used the laptop (some employer had given her husband his old and slightly defective laptop), she said 'I'm not interested in these things. (Mujhe ye sab ka shauk nahi hai)'. During analysis, I was struck by the word, which came up often in the transcripts.

'Giving an unmarried girl a phone is wrong': Upper-caste Femininity and the Governance of 'Shauk'

The word 'shauk' is originally from the Urdu language, but has become part of Hindi as well. In the context of the sentence spoken above, it can be translated as 'interest' but it also used for 'hobby' and less commonly 'desire'. Thus, the adjective 'shaukeen', a derivative of shauk, has upper-class connotations as it refers to someone who has a lot of (usually expensive) tastes or hobbies.

What struck me during analysis was the prevalence of women who said they were not interested in technology. In theory, most felt that the world has overall become a better place through technology, and made life easier. It is completely credible that they did not find a lot of use of ICTs – and not just because they felt they could not fully use it. As Eubanks (2013, 30) points out, this should not be taken as technological pessimism but the beginnings of a critical outlook which makes the connections between technology and inequity.

However, at least in the case of upper-caste, single, young women (Sandhya, Shagufta and Seema), other social forces seemed to be at play. In their declarations, they often painted themselves against others, real or imagined.

Thus, when I asked about her sister, Shagufta said 'She has *shauk* for laptop, for a big mobile phone. Her phone is more expensive than mine.' And when I asked if she likes using her phone, she drew a clear line between 'those who are stuck to their phones 24/7' and herself, who uses phone 'very little', 'by chance'. Similarly, Seema, said, 'I'm not very interested in these things, because I don't get time at all. I work full time, seven days a week, and when I come home, I want to spend time with my son.' but talked about her younger brother 'who has a lot of *shauk* - for latest mobile phones, bikes, cars etc'.

Interestingly, when I talked further about what they used their phones for, both Shagufta and Seema said they logged into *Facebook* and used *WhatsApp* almost every night. For Shagufta,

it was a routine - 'I scroll through *Facebook* every night, look at what my friends are posting, their status, timelines, share a few photos with messages, then I go to sleep.'

Sandhya, an eighteen-year-old in high school and the only girl in the family, lives with her parents and her two brothers. It was in her case that the links between upper-caste notions of respectability of women, and usage of ICTs became most apparent. During our one hour interview, she repeated the sentiment that she didn't need phones and wasn't interested in them, at least five times, sometimes attributing it to her friends, with whom she agreed. And yet, she expressed her frustration when her elder brother does not let her use his phone, and her joy at using her father's.

Leela Dube (2003) analyses the gendered structures that caste practices rely upon, and highlights that notions of caste morality and caste purity are exercised through the gendered regulation of sexuality. Thus, a concern with the 'purity' of upper-caste women results in restrictions placed on young women's mobility and life choices, guised in the rhetoric of women's safety, ensuring their 'sexual safety as defined by patriarchal families, the community, and the state' (Phadke 2005). Thus, Sandhya explains why her aunt and mother oppose the use of phones by young women:

> **Sandhya**: No one thinks phones are a good thing, not my mother, not my aunt. She says, 'what use do girls have of phones?' She says, 'when you're married then you can have your own phone, you can fulfill all your desires (*shauk*), no one will stop you then. But giving an unmarried girl a phone is wrong'. So I said, 'yes, you are right. Whatever you say, that will be done'. *laughs* Anyways, I say, what use do I have of phones?

As Sandhya talked about the 'bad atmosphere' (kharab mahaul) of her co-ed government school, she differentiated between girls who 'disappeared with boys' and her own group of friends, who were 'good girls' and agreed that 'they had no use for phones'. Thus, notions of the 'good girl' include not only not using phones, but not even wanting them. That this governing of desire is linked to women's sexuality and purity is apparent when phones are seen to be permissible after marriage by Sandhya's mother (depending on her husband's permission, of course).

'I will be trapped. That's why I don't want a mobile.': ICTs and Employers

Some women felt that phones not only did not add any value to their lives, but were in fact an hindrance. When I asked Sitara if she wanted her own phone, she said no. When I asked why, she started laughing. With an arch look, she said

> **Sitara**: Look, I work in four homes everyday. Suppose I am working, and my mobile is ringing. So will you work or pick up the phone? So this is why, if you

> keep mobile, they will say give me your number, she will say give me your number.
>
> **IR**: Who?
>
> **Sitara**: Where I work. Everyone will ask for my number. And then if they have any need, it will be 'please come Sitara, please come Sitara' *laughs*. I will be trapped. That's why I don't want a mobile.

For her, mobiles were considered a tool employers could use to take advantage of you. This was also the case with other women who worked as domestic servants. Salma and Vimla talked about how they would ignore calls from their employers when they skipped a day off work. Vimla explained that once you pick up the call, the employers would say, 'come, we will give you money for medicine', but once you are actually there, they make you do all the work. The dynamic between middle-class women and their domestic help is such that the latter often do not feel able to refuse something directly.

'I will teach her computers, even if it means not eating vegetables': Computers and the dream of employment

Aside from Shail's home, which had a slightly defective laptop, none of the households contained a computer. Interestingly, mobiles and computers seemed to be regarded as two completely separate categories. Thus, for example, the restriction on phones did not seem to extend to computers. Thus, Sandhya talked about wanting to learn to use the computer from a nearby NGO. She added it to a long list of skills she had to learn before marriage: stitching, cooking, and the beautician and computer course at the NGO.

This interesting juxtaposition of learning to use computers as a skill which not only increases your employment opportunities but your bridal prospects could be seen in the imagination of Seeta. Thus, explaining why she wanted her daughter to study further than class 8, Seeta says:

> **Seeta**: So I think that I will definitely teach her computers. Even if it means not eating vegetables. It is the truth. I will eat chutney-roti, but I will teach her computers. I will teach her computers, then I will prepare for her marriage.
>
> **IR**: So do you really think learning computers is so beneficial, for anyone..?
>
> **Seeta**: Yes, for anyone. Who knows how many people you will find with computers. I have two girls in my extended family. Everywhere, my dear, everywhere they are using computers for their work. Who knows how many boys, how many girls they require for this. When you have this skill in your hand, then you will find a lot (of jobs).

For Seeta, her daughter can escape the difficulties of her own life, by getting married into a rich household, where she can help earn, if needed. And 'learning computer' seemed to her the best way to achieve this dream. However, it became apparent that she would not be allowing her daughter much say in this decision. When she vehemently expressed that she would not

give her daughter a mobile phone even when she grew older, I asked her: wouldn't those same things be available if she learns computers?

> **Seeta**: If I ever see her... Doing something dishonourable (oonch-neech)... Then I will not educate her, because then, something else has entered her mind. Then I will make her sit at home, and I will get her married.

Thus, her dreams for her daughter functioned within strictly defined caste and gender norms.

Women who had more experience of ICTs, did not seem to think that learning to use computers led to better employment opportunities on its own. Twenty five year old Shagufta, pursuing a masters through distance education, spoke at length about how useful she has found the internet, in opening new avenues for her. Being the eldest in the house, with a mother who does not work and a father who does not provide support, Shagufta was keen on getting a good job for herself. I asked her if she thought computer classes would aid her in this, but she felt that since she already knew the basics, learning more would not be a big help. Similarly, Seema also felt that it would be much better for her to do vocational course instead of learning to use computers, if she wanted to find a better job for herself, and create a better future for her son.

Conclusion

Through semi-structured interviews, this study has attempted to explore the role of ICTs in the lives of working-class women in Delhi. A few important themes have emerged. While this study focused on computers, mobile phones and the internet, there is a need for a broader conception of technology and a need to look beyond access. A focus which only thinks of justice and technology in terms of distribution is unable to recognise when technology becomes part of the oppressive mechanism which employers use to exert control on women, or when it becomes part of the government system which refuses to recognise you and shows you your helplessness.

Working class women in India exhibit a range of opinions about and experiences with ICTs. What has emerged is that social location deeply affects women's experiences with technology. ICTs are mired in complex ways in the production of caste, gender, class and religious identities through cultural norms.

The policy implications of this are manifold. The assumption that technology is neutral and an a priori source for democratisation and participation for everyone, must be rethought. Justice is not only a matter of having access to the digital infrastructure or the internet, but experiences with ICTs are profoundly shaped by existing inequalities in society. Dorothea Kleine (2013) finds that though installed with the best intentions of transparency and efficiency, the e-

procurement system in Chile resulted in the marginalisation of small traders. As Robin Mansell (2012, 186) writes,

> Adaptive action is needed to encourage correction such that investment in hardware and software is not treated as a proxy for the capacities of people to make sense of their mediated worlds [...] Public and private investment in ICTs would be scrutinized in the light of competing claims over scarce resources.

Arguments about development and social inclusion of marginalised communities through ICTs must confront these issues.

In this study, I have attempted to be explicit about my location, and how it has shaped this project. While caste is seen as a uniquely Indian phenomenon, the issues highlighted in this study should not be taken as specifically Indian problems, those related to the 'developing' world, or as analysis of the essentialist category of the 'third world woman' (Mohanty, 1991). Instead, I have attempted to reflect on the intersectionality of women's experiences, and reflect on how this disrupts the dominant imaginary in relation to ICTs and marginalised communities.

A larger project which employs a mixed methodology of critical analysis of documents, ethnography and participant observation with all genders, can overcome some of the limitations of this study. Research must explore further the links between caste practices and technology in contemporary India. There is also a need to connect this to the political economy of ICTs. Finally, as Snyder and Prinsloo (2007, 175) write,

> Social context, far more than hardware, shapes the use of new technologies; new technologies do not hold the key to human progress; new technologies are neither causes nor cures as the context in which they are used or not used is all-important.

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Embodied Online Activism: Breastfeeding Activism (Lactivism) on *Facebook*

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ABSTRACT

Online support communities for people with various health problems and related online activist groups have been the focus of scholarly attention for three decades. The arrival of social media increased the popularity and breadth of both phenomena. Breastfeeding online activism represents an interesting case in how it connects the (health) support and activist online presences of breastfeeding women. Furthermore, breastfeeding activism - or lactivism - is a form of embodied activism, often performed through breastfeeding. Stemming from over six years of observant participation in breastfeeding spaces online, this article traces the ways in which lactivists use *Facebook* to further their cause. From the creation of support groups, through the use of *Facebook* capabilities to organise action and create structures, to *Facebook*-specific forms of mass action, including image flooding and negrating, I argue that the emergence of lactivism as we know it is intimately connected with, and through, the medium.

KEYWORDS

breastfeeding, activism, embodiment, social media, lactivism

Lactivism can be defined as practices of embodied breastfeeding activism carried out by breastfeeding women and enacted *through* breastfeeding (Stearns 2014). Breastfeeding itself, is a 'daily pattern of embodied living' (Hausman 2004, 278) and an 'embodied form of caregiving' (277), affected by the social structures and forms of consciousness which shape it as a practice, as well as the material and semiotic gendered realities of breastfeeding bodies. Breastfeeding parents'[5] engagements online are complex affairs through which breastfeeding bodies are 'translated' into online embodiment, where bodily, technological, reflexive and social aspects are intertwined (Rudnicki 2017). The embodied lactivist 'selves' who engage on

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[5] Throughout this paper I am primarily talking about breastfeeding/women/mothers, but where possible aim to use more gender-neutral language in recognition of the reality of nursing parents who do not identify as woman/female/mother. This is not always possible as some forms of activism are specifically dealing with the oppressive structures of patriarchy and their effects on *women's* bodies.

and offline are not separable. Nor can they be separated from the activities of exchanging advice, information, support, and knowledge within *Facebook* groups and on various 'walls', and ever stricter policy of personal pages being those of 'real people', insistence on real names, pictures and other 'authentic' data about oneself, but also the growing number of body tracking and multimedia functions *Facebook* contains. This paper argues that lactivism as we know it is intimately intertwined with the possibilities offered by online environments. It seeks to trace the ways in which lactivists are making use of possibilities offered by networked publics (boyd 2010), and more precisely, of the specific affordances of the interactive social platform of *Facebook*. This work stems from over six years of 'observant participation' (Moeran 2007) in lactivist and breastfeeding support groups and insider activist research (Mecinska 2018), and follows Stearns' (2014) injunction to study emergent forms of embodied breastfeeding activism (lactivism) enabled by online environments.

From private to global to digital mundane: a brief overview of lactivist history

The story of the breastfeeding movement parallels that of other embodied health movements (EHM), defined by Brown et al. (2004) as social movements addressing health issues by challenging scientific models and problems caused by oversight of the health issue. Like the breastfeeding movement challenging the 'bottle preference' of HCPs (Van Esterik 1989, Palmer 2009), EHMs challenge the established practices and knowledge from 'an embodied experiential perspective' of their participants (Brown et al. 2004, 54). Such formations have been the focus of scholarly attention as part of the broader interest in health social movements and patient groups. In most studies attention was focused on institutionalised actors, such as NGOs, patient coalitions, and groups which impact policy-making (Epstein 2008). The full 'organisational continuum', which according to the sociologist Kira Landzelius contains also 'quasi-organised, loose networks' organised by activists and increasingly appearing in online environments as virtual communities 'imagineered into existence...by cyber-activists' (2006, 532-3) is still being charted.

When the first women's breastfeeding support group was founded in 1956, breastfeeding was very much a 'private' issue (Weiner 1994, Tomori 2014, Van Esterik 1989, Hausman 2003). Over the course of the next 30 years it has become not only a public issue, but a global one, coinciding with public health goals of governments and transnational organisations, and culminating in policy-changing global initiatives (WHO 1981, Greiner 2000). Since that time, a movement coalesced around breastfeeding, grouping many actors – not all of whom can be said to represent the interests of women (Labbok 2015, Kedrowski 2010, Faircloth 2013). One of the ways this movement acts is by supporting parents who wish to breastfeed providing them

with information, knowledge and resources. This can take different organisational forms, from multimedia information hubs to running community support groups. The organisation whose creation in the US is often taken as the starting point of the movement, La Leche League (LLL), works through its established multimedia presence to disseminate findings of research and publications on breast/chest-feeding (LLLI 2012, Hausman 2003, Faircloth 2013, Torres 2014). It operates internationally through national chapters and local groups run by accredited LLL leaders (Weiner 1994, Tomori 2014, Torres 2014, Faircloth 2013). Organisations of similar scope but more localised character are present in many countries; in the UK the Association of Breastfeeding Mothers, the Breastfeeding Network, and National Childbirth Trust engage in publications, research and support, delivering services with the local NHS trusts, and lobbying Parliament and other institutions.

Grass-roots breastfeeding support used to be understood and studied as face-to-face support groups based on formal and informal peer support (Dowling 2014, Faircloth 2013, Aiken and Thomson 2013). Over the last ten years, with a growing importance of mediatised sociability and the creation of 'digital mundane' practices of daily interactions and constant connectivity (Maltby and Thornham 2016, Wilson and Chivers Yochim 2017), a new form of grass-roots mobilisation has emerged. Research observes that connectivity is changing the ways in which women develop competencies in mothering practices, including breastfeeding (Romano 2007; McDaniel et al. 2011, Huberty et al. 2013, Fredriksen et al. 2016, Leune and Nizard 2012, Radkowska-Walkowicz 2009, Zdrojewska-Zywiecka 2012). Studies on parents involved in patient groups online (Akrich 2010, Schaffer et al. 2008) offer important insights into how online spaces facilitate information sharing and knowledge building and foster social support often leading to mobilization and activism around the health issue. Breastfeeding activism online parallels many of those forms of organising and sharing (Mecinska 2018). As Kate Boyer observes, new forms of activism in support of breastfeeding 'can be seen as emerging out of the magnitude of research highlighting the unique benefits of breast milk', including the social and economic importance of the practice, easily shared online, and may be facilitated 'by the ability to use the internet to organise' (2011, 431).

Lactivism and breastfeeding: embodiment online

My research engagement with the breastfeeding online community and participation in lactivist online groups is inextricably intertwined with over six years of embodied practice of breastfeeding two children to natural term. I therefore occupy a complex position of researcher-as-informant (Hine 2000, 2015), one on which I reflect elsewhere (Mecinska 2018), but which allows for a rich, ethnographic engagement with lactivism off and online. This paper,

specifically, traces some lactivist strategies and practices, arising from observant participation in Polish, UK and international breastfeeding support groups on *Facebook*. These groups vary in size, from several hundred to over twenty thousand members (Mecinska 2018). Throughout the process I strived to remain open about my research and consulted with fellow activist continuously. Due to varying levels of 'secrecy' of the groups and wishes of their administration and members, some groups are partially or wholly anonymised in my work, while most activists have chosen to be partially recognisable to their peers by using their first names or initials. Over the period of my involvement in groups there have been many changes to the technological affordances of *Facebook*, some of which I reference further in the article. These have impacted on the development and maturing of some forms of lactivist action, but also changes to the status, numbers, makeup, and engagement in action in specific groups, the details of which are beyond the scope of this article.

What this extended period of observation, interviews and exchanges in the field allowed me to understand is the way in which participation in groups engages breastfeeding parents on an *embodied* level by capturing our selves, senses and emotions, based on the organising principles of sharing and presence. While this article goes on to chart the forms of sharing that involve objects, information and knowledge, within groups breastfeeding parents are also *sharing in* the heartbreak and in the triumphs of others who manage to breastfeed despite negative comments from friends, family and healthcare professionals. The frequency of representations of breastfeeding used within group 'spaces' is another way in which embodiment is part of the online mundane (cf. Ferreday 2009, Tiidenberg 2015).We share pictures of ourselves breastfeeding our children ('brelfies'), experiencing the pleasure and navigating the exposure this kind of sharing can bring, including anger and fear of charges of 'indecency' (cf. Boon and Pentney 2015, Giles 2015, Tiidenberg 2016). We can also be 'vicariously traumatised' (Pearlman 1995) by the experiences of others: death of a fellow member's child, reports of neglect, abuse, illness or stories of birth trauma. The complexities of 'translations' of self into social media spaces (Rudnicki 2017) are also premised on presence - being 'on' for the night feeds, tapping away to fellow night-feeders with one hand, *whilst* nursing a child. Presence in a group is therefore experienced and performed on a personal, intimate level, but also 'done' in public ways.

As L.T. Taylor (2002) argues, 'presence is one of the most elusive and evocative aspects of virtual systems' – an integral part of the 'immersion' and of being 'in' a space/environment that users of mediated environments experience, one that 'goes to the heart of what feels "real"' (42). Feminist researchers of online communities remind us that online exchanges and 'presences' are not distinct and separate from the users/members daily lives: Radhika Gajjala

(2002) points to 'embodied negotiation' of discursive spaces and the interconnectedness of online communities and off-line materialities, while Adi Kuntsman notes that 'words in cyberspace [...] are never "just words"' (2009, 25). A sense of 'being there' and of 'being there for each other' are within the spaces of *Facebook* groups crafted through words – posts, comments – and an increasing repertoire of other expressive, technologically facilitated, mostly visual inputs: reactions ('likes', 'loves', and 'anger'), stickers, memes and gifs[6]. From the many emotionally charged exchanges that occur online and from this elusive sense of presence a notion of 'togetherness' may emerge (cf. Bergh 2017), through which spaces of sharing and support focused on practice and experience may lead to politicised engagements, which blur the boundaries between activism, protest, advocacy, and hegemonic knowledge negotiations (Akrich 2010). This article looks, in turn, at the ways in which lactivists on *Facebook* craft both the support and the activism with the use of capabilities present within the social media platform.

In-group support

Breastfeeding support groups are vital resources for living with a 'health conundrum' that the dyadic breastfeeding embodiment poses, and in this sense are both similar to, and different from, typical patient (health *problem*) groups. Like other groups, *Facebook* breastfeeding groups are primarily spaces of support, in which informational and instrumental support are inextricably linked with affirmation and emotional support parents receive (Mecinska 2018, 2018 a, cf. Lin and Bhatacharjee 2009, Fredriksen et al. 2016, Drentea and Moren-Cross 2005). The 'knowledge base' on breastfeeding (Boyer 2011) – research on human milk and lactation – is used to learn to live as a breastfeeding body and turned by group members into practical, actionable know-how (Pols 2013). Biomedical knowledge on breastfeeding is also used by lactivist to justify and defend the practice (cf. Faircloth 2013, Hausman 2003), bolstered by technologically-facilitated knowledge dissemination, using pictorial content (memes, infographics) and mediated connectivity, which allows for breastfeeding knowledge to be circulated quickly and efficiently.
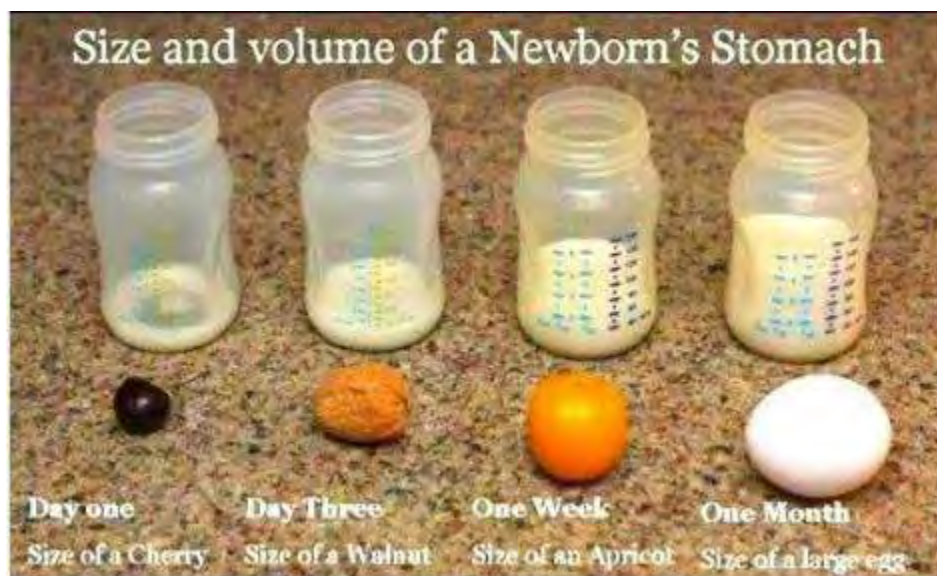
One example of this is the *stomach size meme* [7] (Fig.1), which ranks amongst the most frequently shared lactivist images, using comparisons with fruit, marbles, or sweets to visualise the size of a newborn infant's stomach. Its widespread use in online forms of breastfeeding activism - in groups, but also by pages and blogs - attests to a synergy between content (easy to read, pictorial information) and its digital format (easy to duplicate, copy, forward, and

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[6] Respectively: small, colourful character-based images used to convey emotion or thoughts, image or text-based typically humorous visuals designed for sharing, and moving images in Graphic Interchange Format
[7] The accuracy of calling it a meme may be questionable, yet this is what groups call it.

access on mobile and hand-held devices). Typically posted as a comment or relayed in a 'PM' (private message), the swiftness of reply and the ease of re-posting are crucial, if the information is to reach a person pressurised to use formula to supplement. This is an example of knowledge rendered in an accessible way, shared between members as information and instruction, but also to reassure first-time breastfeeders that they are producing enough milk to feed their infant. As digital artefacts 'memes' are also manipulable - easy to adapt, edit and (re)produce in different linguistic versions, another aspect of importance across different contexts of lactivism.

Figure 1: Variants of stomach size meme (authors: unknown, unknown, unknown, blizniaki na piersi)

ILE MLEKA POTRZEBUJE NOWORODEK?

W PIERWSZEJ DOBIE	W TRZECIEJ DOBIE	PO TYGODNIU	PO MIESIĄCU
5-7 ml	22-27 ml	45-60 ml	80-150 ml

www.bitzniakinapiersi.pl

A related tactic used by lactivists is having a collection of 'handy' memes and 'useful' links. It represents the less-visible aspect of lactivism that is the mundane work of knowledge building and support in a digital environment. Within *Facebook* groups searching for relevant information about breastfeeding may also involve searching the group's 'docs' collated by members/admin, or using the built-in search tool ('spy glass'). Such knowledge elements are then put to different uses in a wider politico-cultural environment which prioritises individual responsibility for health (Mecinska 2018a). A fairly common practice, this way of creating own 'stores' of 'research' for easy dissemination resonates with studies on collating and circulating of health information more broadly (Nettleton et al. 2004). It can be argued, therefore, that the specific effectiveness of knowledge-based support offered is facilitated by the specific technological capabilities of *Facebook*. Through the use of its tools – groups, image and document sharing, searches, and private messaging – lactivists are swiftly disseminating argumentation related to breastfeeding, which can be used to their advantage *outside* the groups. In this sense, the internal (support) and external (activist) functions of groups are inextricably linked, with the actions of the support group serving as a crucial space for creating awareness of the importance and value of breastfeeding (Mecinska 2018a) and further for lactivist mobilisation, to both *Facebook*-specific and 'spillover' actions. In order to understand the lactivist 'repertoire of contention' (Tarrow 2006), forms of joint and mass action performed on *Facebook* are considered, before moving to forms staged externally, which nevertheless remain connected to *Facebook* spaces.

Everyday electronic contention

The 'tactics of electronic contention' (Costanza-Chock 2003) employed by lactivists cover 'conventional' work of augmenting and facilitating off-line movement organising. From the distribution and gathering of information and research, through artistic production, online petitioning, and fundraising, to representation through *Facebook* walls and groups. But it is the 'visible' actions that are popularly recognised as lactivism. These may be the kinds of actions labelled 'disruptive' (Costanza-Chock 2003) – virtual sit-ins, increases of traffic to sites

resulting in denial of service (temporary removal), alterations of sites expressing opposing views, and email or form floods – or borderline, like the coordination of offline protest through online means. Taking this categorisation as a starting point, chosen forms of 'electronic contention' performed by *Facebook* lactivists are considered here.

Some forms of disruptive online tactics require considerable technological savvy, but lactivist variants on *Facebook* have a low threshold for participation. Rather, my observation demonstrates that lactivists seem to be swiftly making use of tools available on *Facebook*. For example, alterations to 'walls' have been made easier through the 'report a correction' feature. Using this function lactivists blocked from commenting and engaging in debate on a 'bingo'[8] wall repeatedly corrected the erroneous claims made in its public posts (07/17). Similarly, the function of 'rating' business pages facilitates 'negrating', or negative rating of pages representing businesses deemed to be discriminating against breastfeeding women or expressing negative views on breastfeeding. A coordinated mass action, negrating involves posting negative ratings and reviews on the offender's wall and bringing its rating down using *Facebook*'s star system. Negrating aims to negatively impact the reputation of an organisation (reputational damage). Both of these direct and disruptive forms of action are perceived from within the movement as 'defence' and as an 'adjustment' or 'corrective' measure, but may be interpreted by the affected entities (and their followers) as a (coordinated) 'attack'. What matters here, is the ease with which members alerted through a group engage in direct action.

Visualising and verbalising reproach

Related forms of action involving increases in traffic and engaging in a discursive 'rectification' effort are closely linked to the everyday lactivist monitoring of the effectiveness of protective legislation stemming from the *International Code of Marketing of Breast-milk Substitutes (Code)* (WHO 1981, Shubber 2011). Evidence of Code breaches might be posted to the offending entity's *Facebook* pages, and re-posted in a group, as photographs or screen captures of activities prohibited under the Code, such as promotions at point of sale (Fig. 2) or specific advertising copy *sighted* by a lactivist. This propels other members to comment on the offender's page and report back on the issue within the group. Comments posted by *Facebook* users on company pages are visible to their friends, to other *Facebook* users connected to that page, and to others commenting on the item. Thus, posting an image is a form of visualised evidential reproach, targeted at an entity and involving charges of perceived wrongdoing or misinformation. Reproachful evidence is here a disruption of the company's communication

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[8] A business-backed quasi-NGO

and a way of changing the contents of its page, bringing to public awareness the possibility of breaking the law.

Figure 2: Evidence of *Code* breaking through promotion of first stage substitute milk at POS in images posted by a UK-based *Facebook* group members

Reproach might also be *verbalised* against companies breaking the Code based on their advertising copy. Verbalising, an individual *Facebook* user will address another entity directly or by 'tagging' them in a post on their own wall, to correct an instance of misinformation or a 'mistake'. An example of this is Lucy, a lactivist and member of several UK-based groups, addressing Nestlé:

> Hello Nestlé! Just a concern I've got about your ability to "research advancing baby nutrition" over the last 90 years without seeming to understand how breastmilk is made... the adverts you funded last year seem to suggest that breast milk is directly derived from food... it's not. It's synthesised from blood not burgers, here's a link for your scientists, it should explain it fairly easily [...] (30/06/16)

Lucy uses sarcasm as a way to upset the company's chosen communication and she also provides the company with a link to a lactivist website, at once addressing manufacturer's misinformation campaign and popularising lactivist knowledge resources. Importantly, targeting Nestlé is also part of one of the longest standing (and growing) consumer boycotts, initiated by breastfeeding activists nearly 40 years ago (Van Esterik 1989, Palmer 2009).

Reproaches may turn into calls for a boycott, as was the case during the Dove campaign in the summer of 2017. Dove's advertising copy read '75% say breastfeeding in public is fine, 25% say put them away' which quickly led to reproach from the lactivist community interrupting Dove's intended message and communication. Dove was further seen as responding inadequately to the reproach, as evidenced by comments to its statement on *Facebook* (04/07/17) using a hashtag calling for consumer action (#doveboycott). Reproaches may be framed as a consumer 'intervention' or aimed at 'corporate responsibility', but their main function is to gain visibility for lactivist opposition to specific law-breaking, unethical, harmful, or misleading corporate practices. It has been suggested that consumer boycotts launched by individuals on the internet are ineffective in inflicting economic harm on the targeted firm (Koku 2011, 2012), but the activist counter is that a sustained action may prove effective 'if the aim is to undermine companies that stand in the way of a movement' (Reed 2017). Important here, is the way these actions are grounded in the mundane orientations of the lives of the individuals who initiate them, and the way in which they use mediatised projections of their voice and their sight, their very embodied senses, in constructing the reproach.

The ways in which such individual interventions are then multiplied through specific technological means by lactivists whose mutual allegiance grows out of a sense of commonality predicated on engagement in an embodied practice of breastfeeding, is equally important for understanding the role of embodiment in online activism. Actions which use social media technologies in similar ways, like metadata tagging to raise awareness of an issue (hashtags) or documentation of transgressions and harassment (hollabacks), are not uniquely lactivist and have been used across social media (Ferreday 2017, Pearson and Trevisan 2015). Some critics see these forms of action as less effective than activists assume: as a result of their immersion in mediatised environments, social media activists over estimate the effect of these interventions in the world outside the 'mediatised bubble' (Nagle 2013). Yet privileging 'real life' action may make little sense in a world where online interactions are inextricably interwoven in the fabric of our daily lives. Furthermore, *Facebook* and off-line actions have a tendency to *spillover* into one another in ways described below.

Spillovers and visibility

Facebook pages and groups have certainly facilitated the organisation of forms of embodied activist action involving occupation of public or quasi-public spaces, which then sent ripples across social media. An example here might be the Free to Feed protest organised outside Claridge's Hotel in London in response to the upmarket establishment's unfavourable treatment of a breastfeeding woman (cf Mecinska 2018). It started with a tweet by the victim

and resulted in its own hashtag #OstentatiousBreastfeeding. The action of occupying a space, as performed by the women outside Claridge's, forces the spectators to confront 'latent and overt assumptions about motherhood in relation to parenting proficiency, civic responsibility, maternal sexuality, and political efficacy' (Carpenter 2006, 348). Such *performances* of breastfeeding frame the act as an agential, representational activity, which troubles 'the archaic notion of the breastfeeding mother as an iconic symbol of subservient, home-bounded domesticity' (350). Here, 'holding a public event in which breastfeeding is specifically supported and encouraged' is a way to 'seek to change norms around how urban space is understood', an effort to expand the boundaries of where care-work is allowed to take place (Boyer 2011, 434).

The visibility and 'spectacle' of group nursing is staged with the aim of creating 'a public forum as a conduit for social transformation' (Carpenter 2006, 350). Exposure has a double meaning in relation to such lactivist actions: exposing the breast and creating a conscious display of breastfeeding, one which can subsequently be re-enacted through social media representations. The desired effect is to *affect* the audience and social media allow lactivists to organise these and make them visible to wider audiences. Because of this, lactivists consciously stage, perform, document and then use social media to re-enact nursing-in-public (NIP) through images shared online (Fig. 3). These visuals are tied to the individual and collective experiences of staging embodied lactivist protest, and have the potential to 'carry' these embodied practices through to the online realm (Bergh 2017). Visibility is a crucial motivator for those who advocate for NIP, as research suggests that '*embodied knowledge* gained from seeing breastfeeding' is most likely to positively influence decisions to breastfeed (Hoddinot and Pill 1999). Breastfeeding, as a bodily capability, is developed (learned) through observation of how others fulfil it in the conditions of a given society; when breastfeeding women are removed from public space, an aspect of intergenerational and peer learning vanishes. Similarly to group nursing, NIP is increasingly framed within lactivist groups as a one person intervention aimed at 'normalising' breastfeeding. The tactical deployment of such practices is based on an interconnectedness of speaking, thinking and doing (de Certeau 1988, 79).

When NIP-ing and documenting NIPs in brelfies lactivists reveal bodies that do not fit 'the narrow standards' of 'consumer culture's norms of appearances' and not 'easily commodifiable' (Tiidenberg and Gómez-Cruz 2015, 15). Brelfies are frequently met with outpourings of hostility and misogyny, and lactivist spaces are often centred on an awareness of becoming an object of abjection (Kowalczyk 2010). This further underscores the embodied politics of doing breastfeeding as 'doing the taboo thing' (Boyer 2011). Lactating bodies engaged in NIP in this sense speak to Rebecca Coleman's 'bodies as becoming' (2008), not

limited to body and image, but imbued with, and seeping into, daily practice and politics. In this context women's embodied practice of breastfeeding projected and augmented using social media becomes a movement tactic, a daily mass action, an embodied and sustained opposition to the denigration voiced by detractors.

Figure 3: Documenting and sharing NIP (UKBAPS, KCNU, UKBAPS)
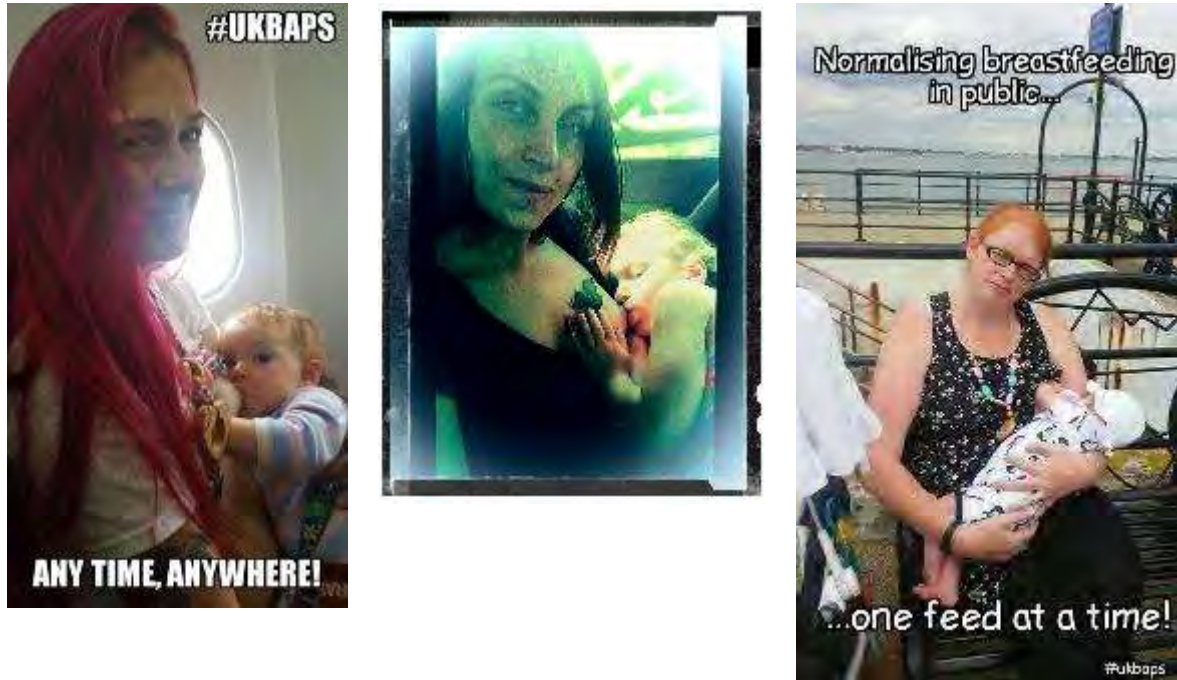
Lactivism as we know it

The instances I describe here do not exhaust the types of actions and activities that lactivists on *Facebook* and other social media platforms and online environments undertake. They reveal, however, the ways in which lactivists' doing of politics and doing of intimacies with and through their devices is shaping lactivism. Participation in online groups is often practiced side-by-side with breastfeeding, with many of the women I spoke to describing it as being '*on the bed feeding, on the laptop'.* This reminds us that, as Hine suggests, the ways in which the online world 'is embedded into our lives' is partly made through our embodied engagement(s) with it and that, in turn, these engagements 'can shape our experience of embodiment as the information and insights we find online help us to understand ourselves in new ways' (2015, 24). The transformative potential of being/feeling part of something through such embodied engagements, which for lactivists on *Facebook* happens both in groups and in the forms of action, resonates with literature on social movement participation (Taylor and Leitz 2010, Shrock et al. 2004, Bergh 2017). In instances such as those described above, mutual support, group cohesion and commonality based on the embodied practice of breastfeeding may be

expressed by 'liking', otherwise reacting, or commenting on a post by a '*fellow breastfeeding mama*'. Moreover, media have become 'infrastructures of intimacy' and connections are now formed not only with other people, but with 'devices, apps and platforms' (Paasonen 2018, 104). The forms of action facilitated by the specific technological infrastructure of *Facebook* and the activities of lactivist groups within its specific landscape are intertwined with the intimate connections between '*wise ladies on my phone*' and our intimacies. Through mass actions involving posting of brelfies or documenting NIP lactivism has also shaped the medium. *Facebook* used to routinely remove breastfeeding images and users who shared such images risked having their accounts suspended or deleted (cf. Lunceford, 2012), but following considerable pressure by lactivists *Facebook* had to acknowledge that sharing breastfeeding images is not a violation of its 'community standards' and does not represent obscene material. Repeated posting of the same type of imagery purposefully risking being 'banned' by *Facebook*, also demonstrates the ways in which tactics used by lactivists are based on 'ethics of tenacity' (de Certau 1988, 26) – unrelenting devotion to what is seen as 'just'. Feona Atwood, Jamie Hakim and Alison Winch (2017, 250) note that while the sphere of the intimate 'excites considerable fascination and attention', it is seen at present as 'relatively unimportant within the wider scheme of political and public life', due in part to the division between the 'capitalist sphere of production and the site of social reproduction'. Doggedly intruding the public with the embodied practice of breastfeeding and a politics rooted in an allegiance to others who engage in it, lactivism seems to be (re)politicising the intimate.

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China's Cinema Watchdogs on the World Wide Web: How Social Networking Sites *Weibo* and *Douban* are helping to shape the development of the Chinese film industry

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ABSTRACT

Online communities play an important role in the development of the Chinese film industry in several significant ways. Taking social media as its focus, this article explores three areas of influence; promoting transparency, critiquing and policing. In China, the leaking of private industry documents, such as employment contracts and memos including information about incentives put forth by the State, are shared on social media with the intention of helping to ensure the opacity and integrity of the industry. Furthermore, where State-run media channels in China are heavily censored, film critiques are made possible through less-restricted social media sites such as *Douban*. Finally, this paper explores the role that users of social media play in policing distributors and cinema chains who are accused of committing box office fraud when Chinese film industry personnel and cinemagoers use social media to call out malfeasance. Thus, this paper contributes to existing research interested in State intervention in the Chinese cinema industry and the consequences of that intervention.

KEYWORDS

China, box office, film industry, social media, censorship, Sina Weibo, Douban

Introduction

Chinese cinema, in line with the country's economic rise, has experienced a dramatic increase in market share (Frater 2018) and in the sophistication of its infrastructure (Frater 2015a; Beech 2017). In an industry and market that is still dominated by State-censorship and tension between Communist ideology and Capitalist market aspirations, social media technologies offer a platform through which the Chinese film industry and its national audience intersect. The relationship between social media and the development of the Chinese film industry has not been widely documented. Given the size and scale of growth in China's film market and internet population, the need for academic research in this area seems increasingly important

since understanding the Chinese market has become a financial imperative not only for the domestic film industry but for the global film industry at large (Su 2016; Kokas 2017; Beech 2017). China's box office power is undeniable and foreign film industries, including Hollywood, recognise the intensifying need to cater to a Chinese audience. As I will demonstrate, the link between social media and the development of the Chinese film industry is indeed highly significant as social media services and the online communities comprised within – in a number of impactful ways – can be viewed as a nexus between Chinese film audiences, the Chinese film industry and the Chinese government.

In 2008, China surpassed the United States (U.S.) to become the world's largest internet market (Barboza 2008) and, as of 2016, more than half the population of China have gained access to the internet, almost trebling the U.S. in market size (CNNIC 2017). As the Chinese internet population grows, so too does their strength in numbers of users, as is demonstrated through social media technologies such *Weibo* and *Douban*, which are examples of social media sites (or social media services) where online communities interact. Scholarly attention has been paid to the purpose and structure of online communities (Wellman 1982; Rheingold 1993; Hiltz 1985), with more recent research acknowledging the ever-increasing diversity of modalities and members involved in online spaces as well as the advancements in methodologies for analysing such communities (Muller et al. 2012). This paper is based on the definition of an online community as 'a group of people, who come together for a purpose online, and who are governed by norms and policies' (Preece 2000, 11). The definition of social media is taken here to refer to an online, user-centric space, populated with user-generated content (Obar and Wildman 2015; El Ouirdi et al. 2014). Social media is comprised of or facilitated through social media services. The definition of a social media service is also the subject of debate, largely owing to the velocity of technological evolution, which problematises its definability. This paper draws upon Obar and Wildman (2015) who define a social media service as a web-based service that enables users to create and share an individual profile, which others can then view and interact with, wherein user-generated content is the main attraction and the 'lifeblood' of the platform; status updates; 'Tweets', photos and pictures are examples of the user-generated decisions and contributions that 'fuel' social media sites.

In China, where traditional media are highly censored, social media can facilitate debates that would otherwise not be possible or may not be as open or critical (Rauchfleisch and Schäfer 2015). Censors continue to closely monitor social media sites in China, on the lookout for 'problematic content', and are quick and effective in censoring such chatter in most cases (Bamman et al. 2012; Rauchfleisch and Schäfer 2015). Problematic content in this case generally refers to a list of keywords or visual symbols associated with sensitive or prohibited

content or any critiques or underlying ideologies that harm the legitimacy of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP)[9] and the State (Hui and Rajagopalan 2013). In practice, users adapt to censorship practices and are able to, at times, successfully circumvent censorship using tools like VPN blockers (Rauchfleisch and Schäfer 2015) or encoding their posts using visual symbols such as memes (Mina 2014) or images to evade censors, such as in the recent examples of Chinese leaders being referenced by characters from Winnie the Pooh (McDonell 2017).

Much has been written on the role of social media in China, particularly on its role under the influence of censorship (Bamman et al. 2012; Jiang 2010; Fu et al. 2013) but also on its role as a public sphere; enabling open communication, collective action and even protest (Zheng and Wu 2005; Yang 2003) and expanding citizens' 'unofficial democracy' (Yang 2011). Little research has been done on the role that social media plays in shaping the rapidly developing Chinese domestic film industry. I will address that gap by demonstrating the ways in which social media services provide forums where industry-related communication can take place, and where opacity and awareness are promoted, and in doing so, helps to sustain and improve the development of the Chinese domestic film industry. This article focuses primarily on two of the most prominent social media sites in China; *Sina Weibo* (shortened to *Weibo*) and *Douban*. Three key areas of impact will be explored; the leaking of industry documents, social media as a forum for film criticism, and the uncovering of box office irregularities.

Leaking Documents, Promoting Transparency

China's record of censoring and prohibiting access to the internet and social media sites is well documented (MacKinnon 2007; Liang and Lu 2010; Xu, Mao and Halderman 2011; Fu, Chan and Chau 2013) and much discussed, as is their struggle to enforce censorship and prohibition in the face of VPN blockers and other tools that are used to circumvent obstacles. In the wake of the 'Great Firewall of China' and the banning of social media sites such as *Twitter* and *Facebook* in 2009, *Weibo* was launched and quickly became wildly popular, overtaking *Twitter* in market influence and user number in 2017 (Allen 2017; Armstrong and Wang 2017). *Weibo* is an online forum full of celebrities, athletes, scholars and artists as well as millions of regular users from across the Chinese-speaking world (Ramzy 2011). While social media services such as *Weibo* do not have State-backing – as is the case of most mainstream media – it is by no means exempt from censorship or government control. In recent years the Chinese government has engaged in a series of crackdowns on social media; imposing fines on social media sites

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[9] This paper prefers the abbreviation CCP for Chinese Communist Party, rather than the CPC abbreviation for Communist Party of China. CCP is the usage most commonly found in Western media and scholarship.

for allowing the spread of information that it deems to jeopardise national security, public safety and social order (Gao 2017); implementing campaigns of intimidation against influential internet users that are seen to spread unappealing messages (Chin and Mozur 2013); and closing sites on a temporary basis to stop the 'spread of harmful content' (Hui 2018). *Weibo*, as one of China's most popular social media sites, has been at the heart of these campaigns, which have affected the service in significant ways, including increased self-censorship (Gao 2017), and the halting of live video streaming services (Frater 2017). Despite the tricky terrain, social media still presents some viable options for industry watchdogs to help increase transparency and to expose corrupt behaviour. Leaking industry documents on social media, such as reports, internal memos and contracts, is one such technique and is perhaps best demonstrated by the Fan Bingbing scandal of 2018.

In May 2018, Chinese television host Cui Yongyuan took to *Weibo* to leak details of actress Fan Bingbing's employment contracts, accusing the actress of being overpaid (Brzeski 2018). 'Star power' or the attachment of human capital to projects has long since been one of the ways that studios and investors seek to mitigate financial risk (Wyatt 1994; Wasko 2003; De Vany 2004). As Geoff King (2002, 159) suggests, stars 'generally represent the most consistently reliable indicators of box office potential'. It makes sense, then, that alongside the dramatic increase in China's box office and the amount of money invested in the industry, Chinese film stars' salaries were rapidly escalating. The rate and scale of the escalation became a growing concern for the industry where the disproportionate fees for on-screen talent meant that budgets were being distorted, often with the majority of the budget being spent on talent, leaving a disproportionate and insufficient amount to be spent on the rest of the production (Frater 2016). P. David Marshall (2014, xi) notes the transformative impact that online culture has had on the practices and experiences of popular culture, including film, which has 'accelerated our access to celebrity culture' through the 'instantaneity of celebrity images' and the ubiquity of contemporary 'search culture'. This connection between audience and celebrity has been augmented by the ability to 'follow' certain celebrities, receiving updates signalled to mobile phones (Marshall 2014). In the age of social media, a star's influence and audience-base can be seen to be measured, at least in part, by the number of 'followers' they have on social media sites. Of course, this number only reflects a specific cross-section of a star's fanbase, namely internet-users that are active on particular social media sites, but if a celebrity has a significant number of followers it stands to reason that their reach of influence is at least more predictable. In China, *Weibo*, akin to *Twitter*, operates an open platform communication model whereby even non-account holders can access it and posts are public by default, as are reposts, comments and 'likes', leading to a tremendous level of potential exposure.

The dramatic increase in actor's fees led to a disproportionate pay-scale, in which on-screen talent could expect a similar compensation for a single television appearance as for a role on a feature film that would require weeks of their schedule, leading to 'bidding wars' and an increasing problem of securing talent (Frater 2016). There are few better examples of this expenditure disparity than Fan Bingbing, who ranked 5th in *Forbes'* 'World's Highest-Paid Actress' list in 2016 (Forbes 2016). Bingbing is one of China's most famous and successful actresses, regularly featured in the highest-grossing domestic films and acting as an ambassador for global brands such as L'Oreal and Louis Vuitton, all of which is shared with the world via a meticulously created and maintained public image (Ming 2015). It is thus unsurprising that Cui Yongyuan chose to single out Bingbing, accusing her exorbitant fees of 'harming the industry' (Brzeski 2018).

The documents leaked by Yongyuan appeared to reveal two significant points: firstly, that Bingbing appeared to be paid excessively ($1.56 million for four days work) and secondly that she appeared to have been paid twice for the same work through a contracting system known in the industry as 'dual contracts' (*yiyang hetong*), reportedly employed as tax evasion techniques (Brzeski 2018). The reaction to this leak was momentous; as an article in *Variety* reported at the time, 'Cui's allegations exploded across Chinese social media over the weekend, with the hashtag "Cui Yongyuan bombarding Fan Bingbing" viewed over 38 million times on *Weibo*' before it was removed by censors (Brzeski 2018). The authorities appeared likewise to react quickly, ordering tax bureaus to investigate and leading Chinese film companies, as well as those associated with Bingbing, saw their shares drop (Brzeski 2018) thus demonstrating the scale of the power and reach of social media communities.

However, the same example served simultaneously to demonstrate the danger of bestowing such power to 'netizens'. False news and rumours are commonplace online and can spread rapidly before they are able to be quashed or rectified. In Fan Bingbing's case, it was established shortly after the leak that the second contract did not belong to her (Brzeski 2018). With the dramatic growth and reach of social media sites such as *Weibo*, the sheer speed at which information travels online makes it virtually impossible to stop a rumour in its tracks (Reuters 2011). The Chinese government has launched 'antirumour campaigns' in a bid to curtail the issue (Chin and Mozur 2013). According to said campaigns, any post based on rumours or 'false information' that is shared more than a certain number of times will be liable for defamation charges (Kaiman 2013). This kind of *truth scrutiny* is likely to encourage self-censorship, while at the same time providing the government an additional means to silence dissidents (Kaiman 2013).

Despite the misleading nature of the Fan Bingbing contract leak, the Chinese government responded by launching an investigation into tax practices in the entertainment industry (Chow and Frater 2018). Not long after, in July 2018, Bingbing 'disappeared' from the public eye and social media, reappearing three months later having been presumably detained by the Chinese government, and issued to pay a tax bill of $129 million (RMB 883 million) for back taxes and fines (Chow and Frater 2018). Upon her reappearance Bingbing issued an open letter apology via her *Weibo* account, which has been 'liked' more than two million times and re-posted nearly 350,000 times (*Weibo* 2018). Based on the comments and blogs relating to Bingbing's post, *Variety* reported that fans 'generally agreed with the authorities but also declared their love and support for the actress' (Chu and Chow 2018). *Weibo* can, in this instance, be seen to play the role of arbitrator throughout the Fan Bingbing scandal. This case, along with the runaway escalation of talent remuneration, prompted the Chinese government to intervene; issuing a cap on film stars' salaries (40% of the total film budget) and laying blame on the entertainment industry for promoting 'money worship' and 'distorting social values' (Frater 2016; Kuo 2018). The example of Bingbing's leaked employment contracts thus provides an illuminating example of how social media services provide a platform from which its users, acting as industry 'watchdogs', can promote transparency within the industry. In addition to promoting industrial transparency, online communities also use social media sites to promote film criticism. In the following discussion I will demonstrate this using the example of *Douban*.

Douban and Film Criticism

Film criticism plays an important role in the qualitative analysis and performance of cinema and in the development of national (and international) cinemas. Film critics provide information on and advertisement of new releases as well as aiding in creating or reinforcing reputations of stars and filmmakers, and influencing preference (Cameron 1995). The relationship between film reviews and box office success has been demonstrated in numerous studies (Litman 1983; Litman and Kohl 1989; Ravid 1999; Gemser, Van Oostrum and Leenders 2006). Eliashberg and Shugan (1997) were the first to propose the role of film reviews as influencers on film behaviour (leading audiences toward or away from certain films) and predictors (a reflection of the ultimate success of a film). It is a well-documented fact that the mainstream media in China is propagandist in nature (Latham 2007; Zhang 2012; Johnson 2012). Open film criticism in China is thus limited to platforms that exist outside of the mainstream media, namely magazines, conferences and forums that are not affiliated with the CCP. The most 'visible', accessible forums exist online via social media services.

Writing in 1994, Mayfair Mei-Hui Yang considered the existence of a public sphere in China by way of the example of film discussion, concluding that, at that point in time, there was no evidence of a public sphere in China. Notions of the public sphere refer to the discussion of public opinion and social criticism by way of public debates that are independent of State and market domination (Habermas 1989). Sites like *Douban* provide a platform for China's intelligentsia to talk about books, music, and films and feature a review aggregator similar to Rotten Tomatoes (Brzeski 2016) but there is a distinct absence of professional film criticism (Wang 2011). The opportunities for film criticism in China suffer on three key fronts. Firstly, there is the influence of the State-censorship, which, as well as providing incentives to inflate domestic performance, also puts a stronghold on any films deemed to reflect negatively on the CCP or their concerns. Secondly, the Chinese film industry, and Chinese culture in general, is built upon personal connections (*guanxi*), which can stifle a negative review if the reviewer has met the director or someone involved with the production (Sebag-Montefiore 2012). Lastly, corruption and bribes play a large role in determining critical opinions of films, with bribes for positive reviews customarily 'handed out' at movie premieres (Sebag-Montefiore 2012). In light of these conditions, it is unsurprising that Chinese consumers do not pay as much attention to reviews as markets like the U.S., and seemingly choose to see films 'at random' (Sebag-Montefiore 2012).

Social media services can be seen to re-balance the power dynamic between audience and industry by promoting audience agency. The role that *Douban* plays in facilitating film criticism is a perfect example of this. Though *Douban* is by no means exempt from censorship. Similar to *Weibo*, *Douban* is closely monitored by the CCP.

The power and impact that film critiques on review aggregators such as *Douban* have on the domestic film industry is perhaps best demonstrated by their conceived role during the downturn in China's box office figures in 2016. Chinese social media users took to sites like *Douban* to proclaim the downturn a reflection of the low quality of domestic releases (Ryan 2016), as was demonstrated by the 'critical consensus' of low scores and negative reviews on sites such as *Douban* (Brzeski 2016). In this sense, social media users can be seen to continually monitor the relative quality of domestic films. Chinese state media also blamed the low quality of domestic films for the drop in box office numbers, while the CCP's official media representative, *People's Daily*, blamed the critics themselves, accusing sites like *Douban* of publishing excessively negative reviews to boost their own ratings and even suggesting that the site may have been hacked (Brzeski 2016). Despite the odds stacked against an openly critical film culture in China, there is cause for optimism. Mayfair Mei-Hui Yang suggested in 1994 that the structuring and institutionalisation of film discussion groups would help to

establish a public sphere and might even be used to deflect or neutralise state discourses owing to the selective and creative appropriation of filmic texts and their historical and cultural contexts. The presence of online film criticism and debate can be seen to achieve this, with the relative 'freedom' that it enjoys and within the collective communities through which information is shared and discussed.

As the Chinese film market continues to grow, the appetite for films ever increasing along with it, the industry continues to develop; production values increase, practices become institutionalised and studios mature. It seems fair to hold confidence that film criticism will develop likewise. As I have previously demonstrated, the leaking of industry documents on social media can be seen to promote industrial transparency and, in the same way, the existence of film criticism on social media sites can be seen to hold films themselves to certain quality expectations. In addition to holding the industry to account in these ways, social media users can also be seen to act as watchdogs; policing the industry on the lookout for malfeasance, such as in the case of box office manipulation, as I will demonstrate in the final section of this paper.

Box Office Manipulation

There are tremendous incentives for China to demonstrate and develop its film market from a political, economic and cultural perspective. It is therefore perhaps unsurprising, even unavoidable, that irregularities have been observed in Chinese box office reporting. The Chinese government seek to capitalise on their growing market force power, to further increase opportunity for economic growth (Rosen 2012; Su 2016) and to extend the global influence of Chinese cinema; to rival Hollywood and to achieve 'cultural prominence' comparable to their 'economic significance' (Curtin 2012, 195) and the ever-increasing size of the Chinese film market is a significant bargaining chip in their ongoing content and access-related disputes with the U.S. (Lang and Maddaus 2017). There are, of course, also significant reasons for China to promote its domestic films locally and encourage domestic filmmaking. China has long used cinema as a 'means to counter growing political turmoil and reinforce positive images of the CCP and its leaders', a tool for advancing patriotism and socialist ideals (Geltzer 2017, 131) and for discouraging capitalism and individualism (Su 2016). China also has incentive to limit or dissuade viewing of Western, especially American, films that spread the influence of foreign capitalist values and raise concerns regarding the erosion of Chinese national identity (Geltzer 2017). Hollywood has a strong track record of dominating film markets worldwide and, in doing so, promotes or at the very least communicates American values and culture (Miller et al. 2005; Mirrlees 2013). Beyond limiting foreign influences, the Chinese government wants to harness the power of cinema to help advance socialist values and a sense of national identity

and social unification, as outlined in the 2016 Film Industry Promotion Law provisions (SAPPRFT 2016; China Law Translate 2016). These aspirations are jeopardised by the spreading of capitalist values and American culture via Hollywood (Su 2016). To this end, significant incentives exist for Chinese cinemas to ensure that domestic films out-perform foreign imports, such as rewarding cinemas for showing Chinese films rather than foreign imports (Shoard 2016) and offering financial incentives for achieving box office quotas for Chinese films (Brzeski 2015a). To mitigate these incentives, there exists within the Chinese film industry a myriad of techniques used to skew or augment the country's box office figures.

China has had a long history of box office irregularities; from distributors skimming profits, to ticket-doctoring, where tickets for domestic releases are issued and the title is then crossed out and the name of another film (usually a foreign import) written over the top (Lang and Maddaus 2017). In another tactic, film companies bulk buy tickets for their own films to boost box office figures and create a 'buzz' (Burkitt 2016). These 'ghost screenings' are an 'under-the-radar' marketing strategy widely used in China, according to Chinese film industry insiders, and help to keep foreign films at a disadvantage (Burkitt 2016). Bulk-buying tickets is considered a 'short term' strategy, and one that is more cost-effective than advertising due to the tickets often being resold to online discounters, thus recouping the distributors' outlays (Burkitt 2016). In addition, there are claims that the box office returns of foreign films are under-reported, so as to avoid paying incumbent taxes or revenue shares (Burkitt 2016). Distortions of ticket sales can even go so far as to falsify tickets entirely by selling more tickets than there are seats (Brzeski 2015b) and by scheduling 'faux-performances' in the same screen to start fifteen minutes apart from one another (Shaffer 2015). All of these tactics are only made possible by the loopholes afforded by online ticketing.

In 2016, the Chinese government enacted the highly anticipated 'Film Industry Promotion Law', which addressed the problem of box office reporting along with other issues (SAPPRFT 2016). In order to understand why the Chinese government issued these laws at this time it is necessary to address the complex relationship between the government and film industry in China. Yingchi Chu (2002, 45) notes that 'any attempt to understand Chinese cinema must start from film policy'. Chu (2002) and others (Xia 1987; Kokas 2017; Wang 2013) note that the role of cinema in China has been characterised by government intervention and framed by Communist ideology, utilising cinema as a tool for educating the masses and promoting Socialist values. During the Maoist era, the Chinese film industry was fully financed by the Communist Party and made only propaganda films to further the ideologies of the time. Following Mao's death and the consequent economic reforms under Deng Xiaoping's 'open door policy', the government distanced itself from the film industry by withdrawing funding

for State-owned film studios, but issues of State-control and censorship remained in effect (Chu 2002; Su 2016). Underinvestment and competition from television and a thriving pirate video market put tremendous strain on the Chinese film industry (Zhao 2008) and Hollywood imports were seen as the most feasible option to revitalise the domestic film market (Su 2016). Thus, in response to economic strife, a ten-film quota for revenue-sharing foreign imports was implemented in 1994 (Rosen 2002; Su 2016; Kokas 2017). In 2006 the Chinese Film Bureau released a set of reforms under a new guiding principle that all foreign film imports should serve China's national interests and goals (Su 2016) and would remain relatively unchanged until 2016 when the Chinese Film Promotion Law was passed.

The 2016 Film Industry Promotion Law of the People's Republic of China was passed on November 7th 2016, to take effect on March 1st 2017 (SAPPRFT 2016, China Law Translate 2016) and can be seen to be a response to the ongoing pressure that the U.S. government had been putting on China to comply with the stipulations of their agreement to enter the World Trade Organisation (WTO). In 2012 the 'Memorandum of Understanding [MOU] between the People's Republic of China and the United States of America Regarding Films for Theatrical Release', also known as the US-China Film Agreement, forced China to increase the film quota and stipulated the agreement be reviewed in 2017 (Kokas 2017; U.S. Department of State 2012). In this 'understanding' China agreed to certain provisions, including an increase to the quota system to allow in an additional fourteen 'enhanced format' films, and increasing the U.S. gross box office revenue share for revenue-sharing films in the twenty-film quota from 13 to 25% (U.S. Department of State 2012). The MOU also made the provision for privately-owned Chinese businesses to distribute foreign films, thus ending the previous State monopoly (EntGroup 2013). The provisions of the MOU appeared to give way to allow for more control over foreign imports, but in practice the process of gaining exhibition in China was obscured by too few slots on the quota, continued State-owned distribution monopolies, opaque censorship processes, and issues with release dates problematised by blackout periods, all of which the U.S. continually lobbied violated the WTO agreement (Frater 2013; Kokas 2017). One of the objectives of China's 2016 Film Promotion Law was to set out penalties for inaccurate box office reporting, as well as to allow U.S. and other foreign studios to audit the box office receipts for their films (Canaves 2016), following on from an accord agreed 'in secret' in 2015 between the Motion Picture Association of America (MPAA) and Xi Jinping during his first state visit to the U.S. in September 2015 (Brzeski 2015c).

The motivation for China to augment its box office figures has been well established by now, but there are also many reasons why inaccurate box office reporting is harmful to the development of the Chinese film industry. Irregularities in box office reporting skew the market

and render analyses flawed. Perhaps most significantly, by misreporting box office figures it makes understanding the Chinese market that much harder, since box office returns do not accurately portray the Chinese market behaviour. Film markets are highly unpredictable by nature and forecasting is complicated by an ever-changing set of variables (De Vany 2004). Box office revenues are one way in which the industry attempts to know its audience and these figures provide valuable information about audience likes and dislikes, which in turn inform industry contract clauses affecting 'prices, careers, bookings and compensation' (De Vany 2004, 3). By compromising this insight into the market, the Chinese industry analysts and filmmakers are denied crucial information, which is detrimental to the development of the industry.

Article 34 of the 2016 Film Act attempts to address the problem of box office reporting by stipulating that theatres and distribution companies 'truthfully keep statistics on ticket sales and provide truthful and accurate statistical data [...] must not use fake transactions, falsely concealing tickets or other unjust methods to trick or mislead audiences, disrupting order of the film marketplace' (SAPPRFT 2016; China Law Translate 2016). Article 51 sets out financial penalties for those who break the law (SAPPRFT 2016; China Law Translate 2016). Where Chinese regulators fail in enforcing these rules, however, social media communities step in, acting as watchdogs over their own industry, ready to decry and, importantly, document malfeasance. The role of social media as a monitor of box office irregularities is perhaps best demonstrated in a series of high-profile cases in 2015.

Uncovering Box Office Irregularities

In the spring and summer of 2015 these irregularities came into the forefront after a succession of exposures and embarrassments for Chinese box office reporting. In April 2015 *Furious 7* (2015) stormed the Chinese market, obliterating records on its way. It opened in April and scored the highest ever single day debut, $68.6m (Child 2015). Though this will have substantially rewarded both U.S. and Chinese parties financially it also caused concerns; Chinese filmmakers like Feng Xiaogang suggested that the economic success of *Furious 7* set the bar unreasonably high for future domestic releases (Frater 2015b). Chinese domestic cinema was already struggling at this point to match the revenue of U.S. releases, and the huge success of *Furious 7* only made this disparity more evident.

In August 2015 *Terminator: Genisys* (2015) was the first Hollywood title allowed into China following the summer blackout period and became the weekend box office winner (Frater 2015b). However, it was also a high-profile victim of box office fraud, with Chinese film company Chief Executive Officers taking to social media to call out the misconduct (Brzeski

2015a). The film opened in Chinese cinemas on August 23rd and took $27.4 million on its opening day; the fourth-biggest opening day for a U.S. release in China (Lang 2015). A week later, on August 28th, *The Hundred Regiments Offensive* (*Baituan dazhan* 2015), a propaganda film produced by state-owned film companies to commemorate the anniversary of World War II, was released and appeared to knock *Genisys* off the top spot (Brzeski 2015a). The Chinese government claimed this unexpected success was down to patriotism but after an essay titled 'Entertainment Capitalism' was published anonymously shortly after *Regiments'* release, cries of foul play by industry personnel in China's private film companies claimed that box office irregularities were occurring (Brzeski 2015a). It was alleged by the anonymous author of 'Entertainment Capitalism' that major cinema chains in China were ordered by the China Film Group distribution arm to meet specific box office targets for *Regiments*, and in doing so would benefit from one hundred percent of the box office revenue (rather than the customary sixty-seven percent) in addition to tax reimbursements, thus providing a powerful financial incentive to sell as many tickets for *Regiments* as possible (Brzeski 2015a; Papish 2016a). According to a cinema chain manager in China who spoke anonymously to *The Hollywood Reporter*, the claims made in 'Entertainment Capitalism' were accurate (Brzeski 2015a). Cinemagoers began circulating photos of tickets for *Regiments* with the title scribbled out and another title written in and some even filmed the process as evidence of ticket doctoring (Brzeski 2015a).

Around the same time the domestic film, *Monster Hunt* (*Zhuoyaoji* 2015), shocked the industry by overtaking *Furious 7* as the biggest box office yielding film in China, which, on paper, was an impressive feat. However, *Monster Hunt* was given twice the run of *Furious 7* and was released during the summer blackout period with no foreign competition (Tartaglione 2015). In addition, allegations came to light that cinema chain Broadway Circuit, operated by *Monster Hunt*'s producers EDKO Films, had been inflating its box office returns and underreporting the sales of *Furious 7* (Brzeski 2015b). After the Chinese state broadcaster CCTV reported on the issue, EDKO admitted giving away $6.2 million worth of tickets, which it claimed were for 'public welfare screenings' but widespread reports from cinemagoers revealed that 'sold out' screenings were often nearly empty (Brzeski 2015e). In addition, showings were said to be playing every fifteen minutes on the same screen. This inconsistent and inaccurate reporting from the Chinese box office prompted *Box Office Mojo* to refuse to count *Monster Hunt* in its box office records and to no longer update Chinese box office results due to an absence of consistent and accurate data (Child 2016).

This series of events brought to the forefront the problem of legitimate Chinese box office reporting, which presented the U.S. with a bargaining chip against which they were able to push for stricter rules in the 2015 Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) and the Film

Production Law including new auditing policies outlined in the agreement with Xi Jinping (Brzeski 2015d; Dresden 2015). Despite the spotlight and scrutiny that Chinese exhibitors then found themselves under, the problems persisted. In March 2016 following the release of *IP Man 3* (*Yewen 3* 2016) the film's thirteen distributors were accused of bulk buying tickets and setting up ghost screenings to boost box office sales on its opening weekend (Papish 2016a; 2016b). The State Administration of Press, Publication, Radio, Film and Television (SAPPRFT), which was at that time China's media and entertainment regulatory body, asked to see ticketing contracts between Dayinmu Film Distribution - the film's distributor - and online ticket sellers on the presumption of box office fraud and the China Film Group acknowledged cases of overlapping, 'invalid' screenings and said it would 'punish' the theatre owners (Burkitt 2016). An audit for the Motion Picture Association of America (MPAA) found that ticket sales were under-reported in 2016 to the tune of 9%, or more than $40 million, discovering among the irregularities 'revenue categorized as concession rather than ticket sales, screenings that went unreported and audience sizes that were under-reported' (Ma 2017). In 2017 the Chinese media regulators charged more than 300 cinemas with box office fraud as part of a bid to usher in a 'new legal era' for the Chinese film industry (Clover and Ju 2017). This series of events, brought to the forefront and documented online by Chinese cinema watchdogs, is yet another demonstration of the powerful role that social media plays in the development of the Chinese film industry.

Conclusion

With the seemingly exponential growth of the internet market in China, and the film market along with it, the role of online communities is only increasing in importance. As this paper has shown, using several examples as demonstrative, social media sites like *Sina Weibo* and *Douban* play significant roles in the shaping of the domestic film industry in China. As illustrated through the case study of the Fan Bingbing scandal, 'industry watchdogs' hold studios and distributors to account on *Weibo*, where industry personnel, celebrities and studios communicate, some striving for transparency, others fighting against it. Censorship continues to stifle creativity in the arts, and film criticism along with it. However, as the example of *Douban* has demonstrated, alongside the rapidly growing market, understanding and mastery of, and appreciation for the film industry and its facets is increasing. Live blogging and video streaming have enabled fraudulent behaviour to be documented in ways that would otherwise not be possible in such a highly-censored, top-down media culture as has been exemplified by the series of events of uncovering box office irregularities in summer 2015. In a political and industrial climate that seeks to balance the contradictory aims of capitalist growth and

communist values, online communities such as those on social media sites like *Weibo* and *Douban*, act as a means to promote communication, opacity and awareness and in doing so, help to sustain and improve the development of the Chinese domestic film industry. In China, social media technologies and their governance are continually developing. This ongoing state of flux lays bare a wealth of opportunities for future scholarship. Taking this paper as a starting point, a more detailed examination of the emergence of a discipline of online film criticism would be of great value to Chinese film scholarship. While I have alluded to the notion of social media 'followers' as determinants of the market value of film actors, a more detailed study is required to explore in detail the complex relationship between film stars and their social media fanbase, as well as the role that that relationship plays in the context of film marketing and distribution. An analysis of the impact of social media reviews and ratings on box office performance would be a valuable topic for future research. The ongoing increase in the size of the Chinese film market and the sophistication of the Chinese film industry will only make this area more relevant. Through the examples of *Weibo* and *Douban* this paper has identified the significant means by which social media is impacting upon the development of the Chinese film industry, demonstrating the complex ways that social media services enable interaction between audience, industry, and government and detailing the wide-ranging and ongoing implications of this crucial intersection.

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Spaces of social representation in the new urban landscape: the case of Kypseli Municipal Market, Athens, Greece

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ABSTRACT

While being an indicator of a well-regulated economy, public markets also function as spaces of socialization, cultural representation and a formative factor for community identities. In addition, a new trend in the specific field of study has emerged in the past ten years that approaches the institution of public markets as an expression of informal practices, co-operative economy and resistance to the ongoing commercialization and privatization of urban space. A case as such has been the historic municipal market of Kypseli, one of Athens' most vibrant and densely populated districts. This paper seeks to explore the different stages of social agency and those public initiatives associated with the communal space of Kypseli Market by addressing the following question: How these forces have attempted to reintroduce the space's character and functionality as a response to the challenges of privatization, commercialization and social exclusion of underprivileged groups of people, namely refugees, migrants and members of lower class stratification?

KEYWORDS

public space, social representations, community, democracy, co-operation

Introduction: Public Markets as a component of social life

Studying public markets[10] can be a complex, multidisciplinary research process as the existence of the marketplace itself reflects 'the specific needs and desires of a society [or a nation/country] in a specific era of its cultural and industrial development' (Geist 1983, 12). The institutionalisation of the marketplace can be traced back to the times of Ancient Greece and the *agora* (literally 'the gathering place') which, apart from a goods distribution point, functioned as 'the focal point of community life in the Greek city state' (Thompson 1954, 9) as well as the stage for political assemblies, judicial cases and administrative duties (Zucker

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[10] This paper adopts Julie Flynn's definition of a market as 'a dedicated building or urban space with discernible boundaries that is devoted to the sale of consumer goods' (Flynn 2014, 10).

1959; Gumpert and Drucker 1992; Hall 1998). As it occurs, the marketplace (*agora* or *forum* in the ancient Greek and Roman world respectively) was a spatial expression for all major societal functions, crucial for the city's life and (democratic) operation.

Throughout history, public markets have functioned as major locations of food and products distribution. However, their role and social significance stretches beyond that of a solely goods' distribution point and regulator of local economies. As urban spaces designed, experienced, administered and celebrated by people, public markets have been ascribed with social and cultural meanings and interpretations. Thus, public markets are rendered a socio-spatial phenomenon, integral parts of contemporary urban life and 'a key place in the social, economic and political cultures of all people throughout recorded history' (Randall et al. 1996, 1). Consequently, contemporary scholarship is rather extensive, with a significant amount of contextually diverse but interestingly correlating contributions from the fields of social sciences and humanities. That would include contributions reflecting on the disciplines of urban sociology (Watson 2006; Kapell et al. 2008; Parham 2009), cultural geography (Lee 2009; Rhys-Taylor 2013, 2017), urban history and politics (Randall and Charlesworth 1996; Tangires 2008; Jones 2016), and anthropology (Black 2012; Nneka 2017).

This paper, while drawing upon the aforementioned fields of research, attempts to bring to the forefront of market studies another aspect which is particularly topical and important; that of informal practices as acts of resistance to the proliferating commercialization and homogenization of urban space. And that importance derives mostly from the socioeconomic and spatial transformations occurring in Western (predominantly European) contemporary societies where 'actually existing Neoliberalism' (Brenner and Theodore 2002) is the new narrative for urban and social reform. Furthermore, since the eruption of the humanitarian (refugee) crisis in 2011, issues of social integration, representation and citizenship have been raised in the public sphere discourses. Throughout the past decade, Greece has been rendered a case that displays such particularities, with its capital Athens balancing between economic hardship (and its consequences on all aspects of everyday life) and the ongoing humanitarian crisis, all of which are empowered and perpetuated by 'rapid globalization, a triumphant market, and the withdrawing state' (Kudva 2009, 1614).

Under this contextual framework, the paper seeks to explore how a historic landmark market of a diverse and vibrant central Athenian district responds to such socio-spatial challenges by focusing on actions and practices of several public initiatives (self-organized/informal citizens' movements) and creative public/social structures (independent collectives and municipal agents) that have attempted to revitalize and reintroduce the market to the public as a response

to emerging neoliberal discourses, social control and homogenisation of urban space. Do these practices of informality and co-operation manifest a necessity for genuinely public spaces of interaction, social integration and cultural representation(s) (especially for first and second generation immigrants)? Could the market initiatives be considered as part of an emerging social movement, a 'space-as-commons' (Stavrides 2015) and an alternative model of co-operation and social entrepreneurship?

'Commoning': an antidote to crisis (?)

From a political perspective, the archaic marketplace (*agora/forum*) functioned as a spatially deployed 'socio-political barometer' where all free male citizens would communally gather in order to socialize and reflect upon crucial matters of the city state. Despite its exclusive nature, the *agora* was a shared (common) space, particularly known for the occurrence of democratic practices and hence the democratic society. Therefore, such gatherings were aiming to communicate common issues that would apply collectively to the whole of the society/city-state, albeit not every citizen had the right to participate (women were excluded). This 'commoning' (Linebaugh 2010) describes a process that includes 'a set of social relations by which a group of people share responsibility' (McGuirk 2015), thus rendering the commons a participatory process that can be viewed as the historical continuation of genuine democratic practices.

This paper constructs its theoretical framework on commons by drawing upon contemporary sociological views that understand the common as 'the political principle on the basis of which we must construct commons and return to them to defend them, to extend them and to make them live' (O'Shaughnessy 2015; see also Dardot and Laval 2014). In contrast to the ancient exclusionary nature of the *agora*, Professor Stavrides suggests that the process of commoning is related to difference rather than commonality and, thus 'it should always be expanding on those who can participate'[11]. For Stavrides, every individual that is part of the community maintains the right to shape, participate, and be represented through its common space[12]. This perspective, while actualizing common space as 'a relation between a social group and its effort to define a world that is shared by its members' (Stavrides 2015, 11), resonates with the

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[11] Dr. Stavros Stavrides, architect and activist, is Professor of Architectural Design and Theory at the School of Architecture, National Technical University of Athens Greece, where he teaches graduate courses on housing design (including social housing), as well as a postgraduate course on the meaning of metropolitan experience. The quotation is taken from a lecture of his, given in UAL on May 22nd 2015. http://events.arts.ac.uk/event/2015/5/22/Spatial-Politics-On-Commons-and-Public-Spaces-Restless-Futures-/

[12] 'Common spaces are those spaces produced by people in their effort to establish a common world that houses, supports and expresses the community they participate in' (Stavrides 2015, 10).

Lefebvrian dialectic that realizes the existence of politics of space since (social) space is both political (Lefebvre 2009) as well as a social product (Lefebvre 1991).

In relation to the case study, these theorizations of commoning correspond with a scholarship that focuses on the study of contemporary public/informal street markets[13] and which adopts such a socio-spatial approach (Mörtenböck and Mooshammer 2008; Öz and Eder 2012; Newman and Burnett 2013; Gvion 2017) that portrays informality as 'a method of resistance to both cultural and economic hegemony' (Newman and Burnett 2013, 234) and informal marketplaces as 'important instruments of upward mobility' for vulnerable or underrepresented social and ethnic groups (Öz and Eder 2012, 298). Mörtenböck and Mooshammer regard informal street markets system (with case studies in Russia, Turkey and Bosnia) as spaces of 'ephemeral accumulation which renders informality a "shock absorber of globalisation" beyond the means of the welfare state' (2008, 349). However, as Ann Varley notes, informality 'should not be associated with the unplanned or spontaneous occupation of land' (2013, 8)[14] but should rather be regarded as 'a new paradigm for understanding urban culture' (AlSayyad 2004, 9, cited in Varley 2013) or an attempt to achieve a 'reconquest of the urban' (Brissac-Peixoto 2009, 246) that can eventually render informality a subaltern practice.

The context of this paper perceives the notion of (urban) 'commons' as a portrayal of an opposition to imposing social and cultural taxonomies and fragmentation of urban space. Greig Charnock has eloquently described 'common space' as a 'spatial dimension to contemporary forms of revolt' (Charnock 2014, 313) that can be better understood as 'cracks' which, according to Holloway (2010), can reveal the potential of a '(not-yet-) existing world built on dignity and mutual recognition rather than upon abstract labor and the command of money' (cited in Charnock 2014, 313). There are several examples in a global context that have either actualized the attributes of 'commoning' as described above (the Zapatistas in Chiapas, Mexico or the Syrian Kurds in Kobane to name a few examples), leading the people involved to 'construct a community of equals because they choose to define at least part of their life autonomously and in common' (Stavrides 2015, 12).

Is it then imperative to think of 'commoning' in the urban context as 'tiny acts of autarchy and resistance'? (McGuirk 2015) The paper attempts to address the proposed questions by conducting empirical, on-site observations, including interviews with both social agents and members of the public that participate in the market's actions, as well as extensive media

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[13] Mörtenböck and Mooshammer (2008) refer to informal markets as a 'widely scattered trading phenomena whose dynamics and forms of spatial materialisation differ greatly in character, even though they are generally tied to political and economic transformations' (347).

[14] This would refer to informal urban settlements like favelas (South America) or shantytowns (South Africa)

research. The empirical data was collected in a total period of three weeks during which the author has been participating in the market's events and daily discourses.

Kypseli: a neighbourhood of diversity with an 'upscale' background

Kypseli is one of the oldest, most historical and densely populated neighbourhoods of Athens. During 19th century, Kypseli was a predominantly rural area and officially became part of the Athenian urban web in the first quarter of the 20th century (ca. 1929). Despite the fact that Kypseli was sparsely built until 1930s, a strong wave of urbanization started transforming the area's landscape, as new one and two-storey houses began emerging. This tendency was intensified at the beginning with the arrival of Greek refugees from Minor Asia (post-1922) and later on with the settling of middle and higher social groups in the neighbourhood. During 1930s the first apartment buildings emerged displaying elements of modernistic architecture and a luxurious essence.

Kypseli's urban landscape changed dramatically in the following decades of 1950s and 1960s. The infamous building legislation 'antiparochi'[15] in coordination with the continuous influx of internal immigrants, permitted the construction of multi-storey apartment buildings (usually between 5 and 7 storeys). That would entail the demolition of the old, traditional in many cases, fabric of Kypseli as high rates of urbanization demanded new expressions of mass housing. However, by the end of 1960s, Kypseli was regarded an expensive, high-end central neighbourhood and a famous haunt for the Athenian intelligentsia and art world.

From mid-1970s until late 1980s, the neighbourhood started developing traces of saturation. Being one of Athens' most densely populated area, Kypseli was displaying major issues regarding its residential qualities (deficiency in green areas and parking spaces, noise and atmospheric pollution, high traffic etc.). That inevitably led to a degradation of land and real estate values, which led numerous middle-class households to flee to the suburbs of Athens. As a result, new populations started moving to Kypseli in early 1990s, with the majority being immigrants from former Soviet Republics (Albania, Romania, Poland and Bulgaria). During that period, even small spaces located in the basements of apartment buildings were rented in order to accommodate the increasing population of the neighbourhood. Further shifts in Kypseli's human geography occurred in early 2000s with a second wave of immigration mostly from African nations and Asia (see figures 1 and 2a, b).

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[15] '"Antiparochi" is a state law that applied to post-war housing and urban development in Greece and encouraged individualised housing provision as opposed to the social housing policy manifested in other countries at the time. Through "antiparochi", small property owners exchanged their land for flat ownership in the new housing unit built by independent developers' (Arampatzi 2017, 2169).

Nowadays Kypseli is arguably one of the most interesting but nonetheless problematic districts of Athens. Its high density in combination with a significant lack in parks and fundamental public spaces, sanitation, and infrastructure created asphyxiating and degraded living conditions for its residents which even deteriorated due to the financial crisis that erupted since 2010. However, its glamorous social history is still apparent among its central streets and the neighbourhood's multicultural character seems to attract what Richard Florida describes as 'the creative class'; namely, offsprings of old Kypseli families who have decided to return to their parents' homes in the past 8 years, fascinated by the old architectural fabric (and the decreased housing prices) and the neighborhood's ambiance of 'old (traditional) Athens'. Along with them, numerous war refugees from Syria, Iraq and Afghanistan have been inhabiting Kypseli either on an ephemeral or permanent basis, in search for better living conditions and social status.
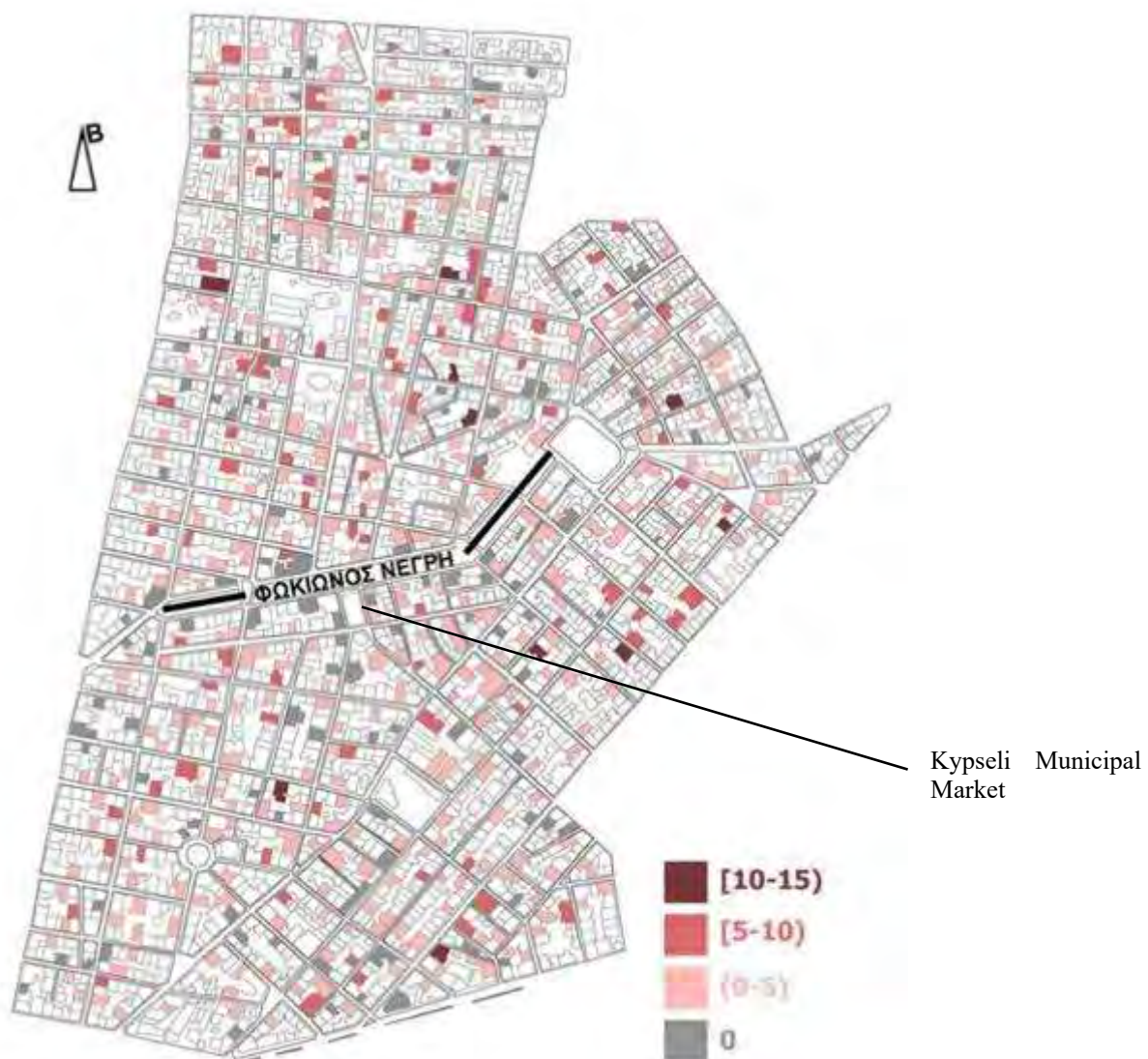

Figure 1: Number of immigrants per condo as for 2011 census. Sampler of 600 apartment buildings and 11.213 flats; 15% of Kypseli's total apartment buildings are inhabited by immigrants (source: Athens Social Atlas, retrieved from http://www.athenssocialatlas.gr/).

Type of trade	Number of shops	Percentage (%)
Alimentation (food supplies)	48	25
Phone services (telecommunications)	46	24
General commerce	30	16
Hair salons	27	14
Services	22	11.5
Restaurants	19	10

Country of origin	Number of shops	Percentage (%)
Africa (Nigeria, Ethiopia, Maghreb etc.)	88	46
Asia (Bangladesh, India, Pakistan etc.)	37	19
Former Soviet Republics	26	14
China	16	8
Middle East	13	7
Non discernible	11	6

Figure 2a: Type and origin of businesses in Kypseli, run by immigrants. 10% of the neighbourhood's traders are immigrants. 56% of these services are primarily referred to immigrants, while 44% refer to a mixed clientele. (source: Athens Social Atlas, adjusted by the author)

ΦΩΚΙΩΝΟΣ ΝΕΓΡΗ

κλειστά
ανοιχτά

Figure 2b: Location of immigrant's businesses in Kypseli (Orange: open, Brown: closed)

(source: Athens Social Atlas)

Kypseli Municipal Market: the epicentre of social life

Kypseli public market was built in 1935 in the fashion of Athenian modernistic architecture while displaying strong influences from neo-classicism. For many years, it was the focal point of the neighbourhood's social and commerce life. Kypseli market was part of a general plan that included the construction of several peripheral public markets in order to better accommodate the growing population and also to decongest Athens' main covered market (Varvakeios). The variety of products (greengrocers, general stores, houseware, fishmongers, spice and herbs shops and more) in combination with the vibrant social life developed in and around the market, rendered it a meaningful landmark in the old Athenian collective memory.

> 'It is a memory that represents all [local] residents. I have been here since 1958, living in Fokionos Negri. To me, the market was part of our daily routine where we were coming with my mom for shopping in various shops that used to exist here'.
>
> Effie Kentrou, archaeologist, Kypseli resident

During 1980s, the market's role degraded as many supermarkets emerged in the neighbourhood and local independent traders could not financially withstand the competition. Up until 2000, the market was underfunctioning and eventually the last shop closed down in 2003 along with the market itself. The municipality attempted to demolish the building in 2005 in order to construct an office complex that would include underground parking and a small-scale shopping centre. Many local citizens, including renowned artists and intellectuals, opposed the scheme and eventually the market was listed by the state.

Photo 1: Kypseli Municipal Market circa 1980 (source: Cultural documentary 'Ta Stekia: Fokionos Negri', ERT WebTV, 2014)

Practices of self-governance and social representation in Kypseli Market

As has been previously mentioned, the notion of informality in the urban context can be interpreted as a subversive as much as a creative force. As informality 'lends itself to a counter

– hegemonic politics' (Evers and Seale 2018, 9-10), Kypseli market has been subject to such politics and stage of informal initiatives as a response to neoliberal policies of polarization and privatization of public urban space. After a short time of dysfunction, a public initiative, mostly comprised of Kypseli residents, aimed to revive the historic building in 2006 in the form of an autonomous, self-organized space. The running committee intended to turn the old market into an inclusive, genuinely public space where cultural activities, fair trade schemes (namely bazaar for products of biological cultivation, fair prices for groceries etc.), charitable actions (free food for low-income groups) and education would co-exist within the scope of solidarity, mutual co-operation and immediate democracy (photos 2, 3). In addition, another significant factor that was part of the market's initiative narrative was the migrant factor.

Photo 2: Kypseli Municipal Market operating as an inclusive public space, 2012 (source: left.gr, retrieved from: https://www.*Facebook*.com/pg/left.gr/photos/?tab=albumandalbum_id=444910635527224)

Photo 3: Kypseli Municipal Market operating as an inclusive public space, 2012 (source: left.gr, retrieved from: https://www.*Facebook*.com/pg/left.gr/photos/?tab=albumandalbum_id=444910635527224)

The migrant factor has also contributed significantly towards Kypseli's density, as nowadays almost 65% of the neighbourhood's population are immigrants. Prominent urban sociologist Robert Park (Robert E. Park et al. 1967) has been approaching cities' large densities as a pathogenic factor of transgression that could limit – if not totally eradicate – practices of social

control by central agencies. Historically, as Richard Sennett demonstrates, 'deviant subcultures be they bohemian, ethnic, or, today, youth and student, survive much longer in dense urban areas than in sparsely populated, easily controlled areas' (1971, 152). In the Greek context, one of the first relevant studies (Psimenos 1995, cited in Mpalampanidis 2015) has described spaces inhabited by immigrants as enclosed ('perifraktikos'), thus socially alienating them from local populations. Such spaces are usually met around rail stations, in old hotels, deserted houses and areas around Omonoia square.

It is beyond questioning that similar images and situations have been part of Kypseli's urban life during the past couple of decades. However, the role of popular media, by overstating such 'antisocial' behaviours, has been displaying a hegemony over public discourses by cultivating a sense of fear about Kypseli, while portraying the immigrant element as a 'social malaise' (Champagne 1999), characterized by transgressive behaviour and anomie. But as Patrick Champagne has eloquently observed, 'the dominated are the least capable of controlling their own representation' (1999, 50). These are perspectives that have been much communicated particularly by older residents of the neighbourhood who still see the migrants as undesirable entities, appropriators of public space and 'abettors' of the neighbourhood's degradation, 'wittingly' denying any kind of integration and socialization. Consequently, issues of representation of the 'otherness' in the public sphere along with practices of citizenship[16] were rendered as matters that demanded immediate response.

In this context, Kypseli market, apart from a public initiative that intended to re-establish the relationship between the citizen and the public sphere (the commons), was also a space that promoted social integration for immigrants, as it was arguably the only space in central Athens that could function as a 'safe' public space for migrant populations; a social space where they could interact with the locals as well as with other immigrants, take Greek lessons[17], participate in cultural events and generally produce their own space of representation that could gradually assist in social integration and public visibility (Cancellieri and Ostanel 2015). At that point the market could be considered a part of an emergent re-appropriation trend of urban space (mostly empty buildings and public spaces; see also Tsavdaroglou 2018) which Athena Arampatzi has later described as 'urban solidarity spaces' (2017, 2156) and whose purpose is the formation of a network 'among grassroots initiatives *in* and *across* (sic) urban space' (ibid)

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[16] According to sociologist Bryan Turner, the notion of 'citizenship' can be conceptualized as 'a bundle of rights and obligations that formally define the legal status of a person within a state' (2001, 11).

[17] During that period, over 500 young immigrants from more than 40 different countries were participating in informal language lessons (run voluntarily by 38 teachers), promoting thus intercommunication with the language as a tool (source: https://left.gr/news/o-xenios-dias-episkeptetai-mia-diaforetiki-agora)

and the negotiation of common space. However, in August 2012 the municipality, accompanied by the riot police, forced the squatters out of the building using as a pretext the supposedly redevelopment of the building. In response to such autonomous projects of emancipation (Stavrides 2014, Tsavdaroglou 2018, Arampatzi 2017), local municipality wanted a 'sterile' and easily controlled environment that could repress public initiatives and homogenise urban space instead.

The Market's revival: Impact Hub, social entrepreneurship and cultural representations

In 2016 the market was renovated and a call for proposals was proclaimed by Vice Mayoral office and SynAthina[18]. The basic guidelines for the market's revitalisation were the creation of a collective space with social attributes, accessible to all citizens of Athens that would support public collectives and co-operations while promoting Kypseli's local community. In June 2016 an open competition to non-profit organisations and creative bodies took place which gathered 17 proposals in total. The submission with the most relevant manifesto to the competition's guidelines was the creative body of Impact Hub who eventually won the competition and became the official administrator of the market.

According to Vice Mayor Amalia Zepou, 'the new Market is a pioneering model of co-operation, implementing the notions of culture, education, social innovation, entrepreneurship and the boost of local economy as normative guidelines […] The Market's function is being supervised by a committee, designated by the Mayoral office and this new, non-profit model of co-administration is being implemented for the first time in a public building.'[19] This statement can of course be confirmed by members of Impact Hub whose envisions of the market have been gradually meeting their goals. Since January 2017, when Impact Hub officially took on the building's re-opening, the market has regained its public character while reflecting on the notion of social entrepreneurship and co-operation, which has been one of the major guidelines for Impact Hub since the competition's proclamation.

> 'Our goal was the revitalization of a historical building through practices of social entrepreneurship and the impact that this attempt will have upon [both local and the Athenian] society'
>
> Andreas Michos, Impact Hub

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[18] SynAthina is an initiative of the City of Athens. It was created in July 2013 and today comes under the Vice Mayoral Office for Civil Society and Innovation. See more at https://www.synathina.gr/en/

[19] Source: http://www.athina984.gr/2018/03/13/dimotiki-agora-kypselis-anaziti-tous-neous-enikous-tis/

Photo 4: The renovated interior of the market, 2017 (photo by the author)

Apart from cultural provisions (exhibitions, music lessons run by El Sistema collective[20] and photography workshops) that are accessible to every citizen, Impact Hub has proclaimed an open competition to collectives and innovative bodies in order to re-establish the 'commercial' character of the market, adjusted to the project's social character and in accordance with practices of mutual co-operation, social entrepreneurship and ethical trade. From the total of 30 submitted proposals, Impact Hub accepted eight to use designated spaces within the market. All of the participants are collectives of social entrepreneurship (koin.se.p)[21], each specialized in a different field (provision of local products, social flower shop, products of biological cultivation etc.). Furthermore, the market attracts the general public as it is a safe and inviting environment that functions not only as a communal space for discussions, bazaars or exhibitions but also as a transitional space.

> 'A stranger (ksenos) is someone you don't know. By claiming our own space in the market, we desire to open up [to Greek society] so that you get to know us better through our actions'
>
> Loretta Macauley, 'United African Women' Organization[22]

Regarding the migrant factor, Impact Hub has created a space that both first and second generation immigrants can use as a space of cultural representation and interaction with the

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[20] http://elsistemagreece.com/

[21] http://koinsep.org/%CF%84%CE%B9-%CE%B5%CE%AF%CE%BD%CE%B1%CE%B9-%CE%BF%CE%B9-%CE%BA%CE%BF%CE%B9%CE%BD-%CF%83-%CE%B5%CF%80/

Part of these collectives' policy is to employ members of vulnerable or underprivileged social groups, like unemployed, people with mental disabilities or mobility limitations, former drug addicts etc.

[22] Source: http://www.athensvoice.gr/culture/331363_mia-volta-apo-tin-ananeomeni-agora-kypselis

locals, thus bringing to the forefront issues of 'cultural citizenship' as a means for social integration and participation in the commons. As Jan Pakulski has argued 'cultural "citizenship" should be viewed in terms of satisfying demands for full inclusion into the social community' (1997, 80). Since exclusion from cultural citizenship entails exclusion from full society membership (Stevenson 1997), establishing minorities' cultural rights can ensure their 'claims for unhindered representation, recognition without marginalisation, acceptance and integration without "normalizing" distortion' (Pakulski 1997, 80). And that would be another expression of the 'right to the city' and sociocultural representation which is implemented by the market through workshops and exhibitions especially adjusted for immigrants and/or their children who are most willing to participate, learn and entertain themselves alongside their local friends. Music and art workshops in particular are two cultural aspects of the market's provisions that attract the largest number of children (photos 5, 6). Furthermore, members of ethnic minorities have the opportunity to publicly represent their ethnic and cultural backgrounds through culinary events (ethnic cuisine, photo 7), exhibitions of local products and informative events about specific traditions and customs while promoting practices of mutual co-operation and cosmopolitanism. As it becomes apparent, the new market has all the potentials to produce a lived space that can oppose instability and exclusion of Kypseli's citizens (especially those who have been misrepresented in the public sphere) by reintroducing communal practices as a 'coming together in community action along the old lines of common endeavour and a sharing of similarity' (Sennett 1971, 153).

Photo 5: El Sistema Greece in concert, Kypseli Municipal Market, 2018. Photo by Angel Ballesteros, retrieved from the market's *Facebook* page (https://www.*Facebook*.com/agorakypselis/)

Photo 6: Painting workshops, arranged by CityLab and students of the School of Fine Arts, 2017 photo retrieved from the market's *Facebook* page (https://www.*Facebook*.com/agorakypselis/)

Photo 7: Street Food Party with the participation of ethnic cuisines, 2017. Retrieved from the market's *Facebook* page (https://www.*Facebook*.com/agorakypselis/)

Closing remarks

While public markets have been historically established in Western contexts as an important factor of urban growth and financial development, their role in the era of hyper commercialization and dietary habits that are adjusted to everyday urban rhythms has been diminished to a touristic attraction and/or a nostalgic attempt of reconnection with authenticity (Watson and Wells 2005; Degen 2008). This perspective both leads to and derives from conflicting interests (i.e. private developments against public initiatives) that 'aspire to profit from the strategic qualities of marketplaces' (Janssens 2013, 169). There are several examples

in European context where historical market buildings have been transformed into hip consumeristic spaces of bohemic (or, from a more polemic view, pseudo-authentic) ambiance (as indicative cases see Lisbon's Time Out Market, Mackie Mayor in Manchester or even Barcelona's La Boqueria).

This paper has demonstrated that there are also cases where a historic market, meaningful for the citizens and their lived experiences, can retain its public and social character when effectively utilized and run in a fashion that respects and promotes a culture of co-operation, away from profitable policies. Kypseli municipal market has been a much contested urban public space, and subject to public debates on how a democratic space should function. Despite the attempts that have been envisioning such a space as a 'sterile', homogenized, easy to control and profitable, local residents in co-operation with initiatives from all around the Athenian capital have proven that the production of space is a social construct that derives from proper interpretation of temporal sociospatial and financial challenges. And it can only be actualised through participatory and democratic practices of inclusiveness that can respond to such challenges.

Is, then, Kypseli market a social movement? The answer is yes and no. If we adopt Manuel Castells' sociological dialectic that understands social movements as 'symptoms of our societies' who impact on social structures and act as 'meaningful signs […] of social resistance' (2004, 73-4) then definitely it is. On the other hand, when considered within the Greek context, it cannot be regarded as a social movement since it is the only project with such attributes and its scope is topical, albeit of a pilot character. However, it can be considered as part of a general international trend that promotes solidarity and social diligence through participatory urbanism. We have witnessed that in Vienna with Brunnenpassage, in Madrid with Mercado de San Fernandez and plaza de la Cebada (Barley Square) or in Detroit with the Eastern Market. Eventually, what we know for certain is that our societies need more public initiatives and institutions that can be both democratic and protected from the excesses of the free market.

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Interview with Professor Nico Carpentier, Uppsala University

AURORA PATERA, Canterbury Christ Church University

After his keynote speech 'Culture as an integral part of the discursive-material knot' presented on 5th July 2018 at the MeCCSA Postgraduate Network conference, Aurora Patera interviewed Prof. Nico Carpentier to explore deeper into the ideas and arguments he presented on this topic.

[AP] You talk about your theoretical contribution, the Discursive-Material Knot, as a triptych and you have produced several audio-visual works and a more recent photo exhibition in Brasilia, "*Iconoclastic Controversies*". How do you think the combination of theoretical research and the production of visual work can be useful for a researcher, and how did it influence your academic work?

[NC] There are multiple answers to this one question. I think, first of all, my more artistic-creative experiments are deeply grounded in theoretical reflections. They are, of course, rooted in the theoretical work in nationalism, or agonism, or participation, but, maybe more importantly, they are grounded in reflections on how to communicate academic research. And that is also a theoretical debate: Thinking through what knowledge is, how we can actually produce knowledge, how the lived, embodied experiences of researchers are also part of the generation of knowledge. Some of the audio-visual work and the exhibition work that I have done is framed by what is called arts-based research — ABR — which is driven by these theoretical questions about the role of creativity and its interconnection with knowledge production. To put it all in simple terms: One of the most fascinating aspects in these projects is that through the creation of theoretically and empirical research-driven installations, for instance, you can actually produce new knowledge. It is not a mere communicational dimension that matters there, it also has an epistemological dimension, at the same time. And of course, for me, the science communication part is important, but one of the things I found most satisfying and promising in ABR is its epistemological dimension, the knowledge production component. So, that is one part, which is very much an academic-artistic-activist practice — what I call the "triple A" hybrid identity — that is part of ongoing debates on knowledge production, but that is only one part of the answer, I am afraid.

What I am also trying to do is very connected to the discursive-material knot model: trying to translate and condense abstract theory into artistic material practice. One of the big challenges,

for instance, of the installation I created for the "*Participation Matters*" exhibition at the "*Respublika!*" festival, which was called "*The Mirror Palace of Democracy*", one of these core complexities, challenges and objectives — all in one (smiles) — was the idea that a theoretical reflection on democracy could be transformed into an art installation that would not only allow the visitor to experience the complexities and the contingencies of democracy but would also allow me to communicate my theoretical position. So, there is a moment of translation present, that is, I think, extremely important: It is a translation from theory to installation. It is still a theory-driven enterprise, with all its complexities, because it requires a moment of translation that is not a copy. It is not simply putting a book on a display table, saying: "Look, here is the materialisation of my theoretical reflections". It is not an artistic practice that is totally isolated from the theoretical reflections: It is very much an assemblage in itself. This is about combining the discursive and the material, but in a different way than the ways that we are used to doing this. It is not the book or the article (which are, of course, also forms of material output), but it is the installation that allows you to see, experience, physically enter the contingencies of democracy, and in some cases bang your nose against one of the glass walls of the mirror palace, as actually one of the coordinators of the art centre did. It wasn't very funny or pleasant, but symbolically it was actually quite interesting. This is also what embodiment means, it is these little and detailed, but ever so important, practices of visitors, curators, directors of art institutes, … that then become part of the production of knowledge. Even an at first sight very banal event — somebody hurting herself because she didn't see the glass wall was there — raises theoretical issues: What does the limit of democracy mean? When do you leave and how painful is it to actually leave democracy? Which is a very contemporary discussion. It might sound banal, but in the present conjuncture, it is (again) an extremely important question, referring to deeply problematic political configurations – look, for instance, at Brazil and some other countries in the world that are sliding down a slippery slope and literally bumping into the walls of non-democracy.

[AP] In your work you mention the importance of high theory. What do you think of the relationship between high theory and empirical work? Is there a gap to bridge? What is the position of your theoretical contribution in regards to this?

[NC] The relationship between high theory and empirical work could be mediated in a wide variety of ways and I'd hate to be the one that defends one particular model as the ultimate solution to all problems. It is a very complicated relationship and there is not one answer, there are many different paradigmatically driven answers to this question. What I do think is that we should not discredit either of them. Still, my preferred choice, and the model that I would like to defend, is the radicalisation of both. I do think we need radical theory, in the meaning of

high theory — reaching high levels of abstraction — but also radical as in radically critical. We also need radical research, and again, in both meanings. We need the radical confrontation of our thoughts and perspectives, misunderstandings and assumptions, with social practice and its complexities and its contingencies. But we also need critical research; radical research in that second meaning. We need to find ways of reconciling both, without creating hierarchies, without arguing that theory is necessarily superior to empirical research or that empirical research is superior to theory, which is something that doesn't always happen in academic practice. We need a very balanced approach that respects both of them and that allows both of them to exist in their radical versions. That is the key starting point for me, but at the same time, I think it is very important to emphasise that this is only one perspective, and this is not a discussion where there has to be only one dominant perspective.

Diversity, in the different ways of handling these relationships between high theory and empirical research, is crucial to acknowledge, but this does not undo that the radicalisation of theory and empirical research is an equally important starting point for me. I think you can see how I work in, for instance, The Discursive-Material Knot, with the use of the different platforms. The idea behind using different platforms is to create different entry points into one publication, not privileging a linear reading that goes from A to Z. And if you look at the platforms of that book — there are three of them — they have different levels of abstraction: The first, in particular, is a very abstract discussion of that relationship between the discursive and the material, but if you look at the third platform, then you'll find a very concrete research practice, which is a case study of a Cypriot community media organisation, CCMC, and its radio station, which is called MYCYradio. That third platform is very much empirical research based. Having a platform structure deployed means that you can start anywhere, you can enter the book at the more abstract level, or you can enter the book at the more concrete level. Both choices are perfectly fine: The platforms are written in such a way that you can get the more significant meanings and interpretations (at least how I see them) at each of these entry points. Of course, ideally, a reader takes note of all three platforms, but it is perfectly fine for me that the reader sticks to one platform or chooses a different order of platforms to read. And I think that is, in a way, a materialisation of the way I think about the relationship between high theory and empirical research, where there is no privileging of one over the other.

[AP] Is this what you mean when you write about a horizontal approach?

[NC] It tries to be, in the way of entering the book using the different platforms. Of course, it is not my idea, this is the *Mille Plateaux* by Deleuze and Guattari and their way of thinking. While the joke that I endlessly repeat is that I tried to be a bit more modest, not having a

thousand platforms but three platforms only, horizontality also plays a second role in thinking through the relationship between the discursive and the material itself, because they are the two starting points that I use, Laclau and Mouffe's discourse theory, but also new materialism. Even if I think that I try to deal with both traditions in the most respectful way — and they deserve exactly that — I also sense, when reading the subtext of these approaches, that there is still an attitude of privileging of their own approach and a paying lip service to what is important for the other approach. So, discourse theory acknowledges the importance of the material, but it does not develop it sufficiently, and new materialism acknowledges the importance of the discursive, but would not really develop it that much either. Horizontality, for me, is also the creation of a non-hierarchical approach between these two, that actually tries not to replicate these hierarchies, not to create this distinction, but to look at the assemblage and the entanglement and see how it plays out in social practice and how it is played out in theory, again, without creating the kind of hierarchy that suggests that, at the end — or in the last instance, to use a famous formulation — one is more important than the other.

[AP] Your Discursive-Material Knot ties together and re-reads many theoretical concepts, and tries to bring together two different dimensions: the material and the discursive. How could your work, as a theoretical framework, be used to change our interpretation of reality by the researchers who choose to employ it?

[NC] One way in which the combination of these two components, the material and the discursive, really matters, is that it makes researchers sensitive to the one component which is not very significantly present in their field. Take, for instance, the study of nationalism: If you start looking at, say, the non-primordialist approaches towards nationalism, they put a lot of emphasis on the discursive, and there I would argue that the material actually needs more attention. It is almost like a deconstruction, where you also choose the other side, where you identify the binary oppositions and where you try to see how to overcome the dualistic approach. I would argue that having this other-side-that-is-often-quite-absent in mind, is significant in enriching analyses of a wide variety of social domains. One example is the ongoing discussion about algorithms, where we tend to look at a very material component: How particular algorithms produce particular content, which basically refers to which text we are offered on our screens. But behind all this, there is also a hugely important discursive reality, where particular subject positions, for instance the subject positions of the creator, the programmer, the user, the player or the gamer (depending on the particular reality we are looking at) has an enormous impact on how algorithmic culture is developing. It is this sensitivity that matters to me. Don't forget that my work on the discursive-material knot is still driven by post-structuralist approaches, which means that you have to keep in mind that context

matters, that whatever research question we deal with, whatever social reality we are investigating, we should also acknowledge its specificity and we should not use one-answer-to-all solutions. Of course, different themes, different fields, will have their own answers, but this sensitivity, I think, is quite important. Another example is conflict studies, which I found surprisingly focussed on the material. But then there is this discursive construction of the enemy, which plays a vital role in conflicts, and which is, in a lot of academic publications still too absent. Of course, some scholars, including communication and media studies scholars, have argued that conflicts studies, as a whole, has not really come to terms with this discursive component, and these colleagues are trying to remedy this problem. From my perspective, a discursive-material knot, a theory of entanglement, might make us much more sensitive to this too absent component in our research, and allow us to deal better with this problem.

[AP] You mention that your framework can be used for the study of communication and media, but also has an interdisciplinary vocation. To which other disciplines do you think it can be applied?

[NC] First of all, I am structurally but also emotionally grounded in media and communication studies. That is my tribe (smiles). This is one of the locations of knowledge production where I situate myself. This is my imagined community and that really matters more than we often like to admit or even communicate. Quite a lot of my research looks at media content in its organisational contexts, at discourses about media organisations or key media actors, or at communicational processes and processes of mediation, and that really, definitively matters to me. At the same time, I am also equally interested in conflict studies, which has always been part of my work. But also discourse studies, of course, is an area where I would find interest in. Hopefully, some of the studies that I have been doing provoke some sort of an interest in these academic fields too. Another field of academic inquiry that I should not forget to mention is political studies, and more in particular the field of democratic theory. My work is fascinated by the redistribution of power. Yes, I tend to look at communicational practices and environments of mediation, but at the same time, I think my fascination for power moves way beyond these fields. I think that the family as a location of power is intensively fascinating, I think that the workplace, university, school, … are just as fascinating as media organisations are, from this perspective. Especially the study of participation, linked to how I have been working with participation (as the redistribution of power) and linked to the discursive-material knot, opens the doors into so many different areas, that the research options become virtually endless. I am actually deeply grateful for that because it implies that the world, from a researcher's perspective, remains an incredibly fascinating place, as every social practice has these dimensions of power. And every social practice has these potential dimensions of the

redistribution, equalisation and democratisation of these relations. And that is a very luxurious position to have, to be fascinated by processes that are present in virtually every academic field.

[AP] Your study highlights the connection between participation and peacebuilding. Do you think the study of assemblages like the one you propose in your study can be used for social transformations? How?

[NC] Yes, one of the important outcomes of the CCMC case study is that there is an almost natural connection between participation and peacebuilding. They strengthen each other. In that particular case study, it becomes very, very visible. At the same time, it incorporates a warning: This connection between participation and peacebuilding is not an automatic connection. No connection, no articulation, is automatic. We can't assume that participation will lead to agonism and the other way around. At this point in time, I am working with a colleague — Hillel Nossek — on an article that analyses a number of Israeli community television groups. These groups are not broadcasters, because the Israeli media field is differently organised, they are production groups. In many cases, there, the automatic link that is very present in the Cypriot case study is not present at all, for a number of reasons, one of them being a much more closed definition of the community. These are organisations that serve the community by allowing the community to represent itself and to take charge, control, over their communicational practices. That is the basic idea, but if you define the community in a very strict way and do not articulate that community with other communities, the peacebuilding logics do not work that well. So there are interesting cases where this connection is not as automatic as it was (and is) in the Cypriot case. There's hope on the one hand, that the participatory logic can strengthen peacebuilding, but there are also some counter-cases that I very consciously identified, where this connection is not as automatic, so we should be careful not to assume automatic links.

At the same time, participation in its articulation with peacebuilding offers opportunities for social change. I think that, for a wide variety of reasons, the logic of participation and peacebuilding map onto each other. That allows for the creation of more just, fair, and peaceful societies. There is a potential there, but at the same time there is also a grim warning. As a concept, social change is often used to refer to more just, balanced, societies, where individuals are empowered and, to put it in simple terms, happier. But social change can also go into different directions. We hardly ever use the term "social change" in that more negative sense, but social change can also refer to the creation of harsher societies, where people tend, for instance, to destroy each other. Currently, that negative type of social change seems to be on the winning hand, at the global level. There are serious reasons for concern, that we are moving into a direction that actually decreases empowerment, fairness, and peace. That we are moving

towards a much harsher, crueller world. And that is also a process of social change, that some even seem to support and prefer. I would not consider myself to be one amongst them, but there is a clear push into a direction of social change that I would define as undesirable.

And here we shouldn't forget that participation, at least in its more formal version, can be used to support these less beneficial, less just, more violent forms. And there, there is a very strong need to further develop what I would call participatory ethics: To develop ethical sensibilities that prevent the abuse of participation for non-democratic means. Trolling is one example, troll farms, flaming, all these different social practices that are destructive and that we've seen become very visible over the past years. They are connected to procedures that are only participatory in form. The problem is that these procedures empower small groups, and that they bring out very antagonistic voices, which then silence the voices of others. In some cases, these procedures are actually conducive to the destruction of the voices of others. We need to think much more about participatory ethics that protect us from having the formal procedures of participation being used against participation and democracy itself. I think that is one of the big challenges. To sum up what I was trying to say: On the one hand yes, there is hope that participation, peacebuilding, social justice, empowerment can become aligned and part of one benevolent assemblage, but we can also go into different directions, into much darker times.

[AP] What is in your opinion the role of discourse theory, as revisited in your theoretical work, in a society that seems to be more and more confrontational and conflict-oriented even in the absence of actual conflicts?

[NC] One of the most important contributions of discourse theory is that it emphasizes the importance of conflict in social relations. With this emphasis, discourse theory disconnected conflict from being articulated as *necessarily* negative and violent. What discourse theory has done, is to look at politics as inherently conflictious, but at the same time, it raised the issue of how we deal with conflict in ways that are democratically acceptable. I think that this is where I deeply connect with discourse theory, because the way that I see the world, my ontology, is very much aligned with it. I see nothing but these confrontations, I see nothing but differences. I think that even if we look at fairly homogeneous communities, we should not become blind to what divides these apparently homogeneous communities, to the many, many different layers of contradictions that we sometimes want to very gently skim over and ignore. I must confess that I am fascinated by these differences that also produce conflict, by these different interests, different identities, different positionalities, different subjectivities. Yet, we still manage to create some kind of coherence and unity in that incredibly conflictious world. The point that discourse theory raises, is that we can do that in different ways. We can reconcile these differences in more peaceful and agonistic ways, where we acknowledge the other as an

adversary with whom we disagree, but where we definitely acknowledge the right of that other voice to exist. On the other hand, of course, there are more violent ways of dealing with the other: In some cases this concerns symbolic violence, linguistic violence, … but in other cases this is very material violence, for instance, the killing of the other voice. What discourse theory has done, I think, is put conflict on the agenda as a key ontological principle, and at the same time it raised the question: What kind of conflicts are democratic and what kind of conflicts are waged in non-democratic ways.

Discourse theory, in that sense, is very normative, it privileges agonism over antagonism, it defends that agonistic dimension of dealing with the other. It is a very strong voice in accepting conflict as an ontological condition, but at the same time in not accepting that violence is the only way out, accepting that we can engage in the political struggle with each other on an endless basis and still stay within the realm of democracy. It is a very normative but also a very hopeful approach, that is typical, I think, for discourse theory. Obviously, the idea that we can peacefully disagree does not exclusively belong to discourse theory. There is, for instance, a very long tradition in philosophy dealing with the concept of freedom of speech that acknowledges the adversary, so I do not want to claim that discourse theory has ownership of this idea. Still, discourse theory has strongly thematised it, not only looking at individual voices but also at the confrontation of different discursive orders, moving away from an exclusive focus on the individual, from the one person that engages in disagreement with another person, and entering into an analysis that looks at discourses, at ideas, in the way that they confront with each other and engage in political struggle.

[AP] You analysed the case CCMC/MYCYradio in Cyprus, using your theoretical framework, which other contemporary conflicts do you think could (or should) be analysed through this framework?

[NC] There are a couple of areas that I think should be looked at, and I think that the Israeli case study brought me to an incredibly significant part of the world, with a conflict that matters in its own right, but that also drives a substantial part of the global conflicts. I do think that is one of the areas to look into and it is also part of my research agenda. At the same time, partially because of the "*Iconoclastic Controversies*" photo exhibitions, nationalism moved up on my research agenda. It is a fascinating problem and I, of course, have been very much exposed to it, as I grew up in Belgium. I do think we need to start thinking about nationalist voices in combination with populist voices in Europe (and beyond) much more than before. I am obviously not the first to say this. But looking at nationalism from a discursive-material knot perspective is very necessary, which includes looking at how nationalism is very much related to the body, related to space, related to blood — there is the famous German expression "Blut

und Boden", blood and soil, … All this is deeply material. I think these logics of alterity, that are driven by populism, nationalism and racism are one of the areas that we urgently need to look into. This is important from a democratic perspective as well, not only because of a general, more abstract, research interest. In the European context, we do not have that much time left. What we are now doing in Europe is preparing for another violent confrontation. We are sowing the seeds of war. It might take ten or twenty years, but this implies that there is an urgent need to look at other ways of dealing with the Other, there is a need for the permanent critique of more antagonistic practices, and there is a need to emphasize those social practices that use a more agonistic approach towards the other. This, of course, implies interventionist research, getting your feet wet, it implies defending some of the core principles that are dear to us. This maybe pushes us sometimes to the edges of what might be comfortable to do, but I think it is high time. From my perspective, as a researcher, I think this is a very important domain to explore.

[AP] To what extent the current affairs have influenced your theoretical research?

[NC] I had a wonderful discussion, some time ago, with Henry Jenkins in the journal Convergence. One of the conclusions that we came up with was that for Henry Jenkins the glass is often half full. I was then supposed to say "for me, it is half empty". Instead I added that probably both of us wanted to have different, better glasses. This is half a joke, but I think that that desire for a better world, also looking at practices that have that promise of benevolent social change, is something that binds us together. Maybe we have different levels of optimism, but this fascination for people that create a better world today is very important to the both of us. And maybe I am the one that tends to add some of Hakim Bey's reflections to this equation, reminding us that maximalist participatory democratic practices are often temporary autonomous zones, showing how vulnerable these practices actually are, how quickly they disappear, and how vulnerable they are to external forces that can destroy them. In that sense, the context of violent conflict, the endless wars, is equally important to me. Unfortunately, it is hard to find a phase in my career (and life) where I have not been dealing with these dark sides, simply because there have been so many. We have not managed to reach peace, to put it mildly. This endless succession of extremely violent practices has played a very important role in my own work, as they have led me to trying to think through ways that would help to avoid of this kind of bloodshed. And also, of course, being aware of the global dimensions, not only focussing on Europe, but also taking our colonial past into consideration — remember, I am Belgian — but also taking global responsibilities into consideration, and seeing how Western

countries continue to wreak havoc throughout the world. That sense of responsibility, combined with a sense of hope, is structurally important for me.

[AP] Which do you think are the biggest theoretical challenges for communication and media researchers today?

[NC] It is up to the individual researcher and research schools to come up with different ways of dealing with this complexity (smiles). My own position is based and grounded in the acknowledgement that we are part of society, that we are not outside society, that we are not standing at the sidelines of the playing field, observing, but that we are deeply entrenched in society. Especially if you do research on participation, it is very hard to position yourself outside of these ideological struggles. Every definition of participation that you use, brings in a particular, ideological position, that you might consciously or unconsciously defend. So we are part of this ideological struggle if we do participation studies, simply because the definitions that we accept and defend are intimately connected with this political struggle over the redistribution of power. And that is only one instance. I would argue that, in general, we are not outside this playing field and that we are intrinsically connected to it. I think that one very important way of dealing with that position, is to acknowledge it. A lot has to be said on ideological self-positioning. Of course, again, this is not new: Our colleagues in anthropology have been dealing with these issues for a very long time and I do think that there's much more to learn from them, on how to deal with the need for academic honesty through explicit self-positioning.

The second area that matters to me is that of intervention. Driven by critical analyses, we can also organise particular kinds of interventions that are more than just settings that generate new research. I think that, on the basis of our knowledge, going back to what I was talking about at the very beginning of our conversation, we can produce not only new ways of thinking, but we can also produce new experiences that actually have an additional social impact. I do not want to imply a segregation between experience and knowledge here, knowledge also creates impact — ideas are powerful — but we can also create experiences on the basis of the knowledge that we have. We can translate knowledge into social practices that can also contribute to having impact. An interventionist agenda is quite important to me. That has been translated in a lot of the artistic work that I have been doing, creating experiences — embodied knowledge, so to speak — much more than exclusively textual representations of that knowledge. I do think that interventionist research opens up theoretical problems, such as the complexities of hybrid identities, where we are in some cases a critical scholar, but in other cases actually moving into being something that is about being more than a scholar, namely about being an artist or an

activist. There, we see different kinds of subjectivities that combine different subject positions. This is what I mean with the AAA model, the hybrid articulation of the academic, the artist, and the activist. We can come up with combinations of subject positions that push us beyond the borders of being mere academics, but in other cases, we can actually bring diverse practices in one particular identity, where we simply expand being an academic, or expand being an artist, or expand being an activist. And these are issues where we, in Communication and Media studies, need to think more about, and experiment more with.

The Dark Side of Social Media (Review)

Salo, J., Mäntymäki, M. and Islam, A.K.M.N. (eds) (2018) 'The Dark Side of Social Media' [Special Issue], *Internet Research*, 28(5).

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As its title suggests, the articles that make up the contents of this special collection are not focused upon the various ways in which new media has enriched people's lives. Instead, this special issue seeks to interrogate a wide variety of potential risks and problems that social media presents, whether that be on the national level, as occurs with Brett G. Johnson's analysis into managing and tolerating extreme speech on social media, or even on the personal level as occurs with Laura Francis Bright and Kelty's Logan's research into the effects of advertising and social media fatigue on both consumers and brands.

As such a broad range of articles would imply, and indeed as was stated by the special issue's editors in the introduction, the findings that occur across the course of these eight articles reveal that the various negatives that can occur in social media exist within a broad spectrum. This ranges from larger issues that are widely publicised through various news organisations to smaller, more mundane stories, that whilst not as widely known, can still result in negative experiences for the social media consumer.

In *When social media traumatises teens: the roles of online risk exposure, coping and post-traumatic stress*, the authors have utilised a web-based diary methodology in order to examine the impact of negative online risk experiences on adolescents. Their aim was to ascertain the extent that negative online risk experiences cause post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) symptoms in adolescents. The authors' research has revealed that explicit content and exposure to cyberbullying and sexual solicitations do indeed evoke the symptoms of PTSD. However, the research also indicated that teens took active measures to cope with the online risks soon after they felt threatened. This can help to enhance their resilience and these coping measures can help reduce long-term negative effects. The authors then argue that if these coping measures can be detected, the social media platforms could possibly embed interventions into their framework to support these coping processes. Such interventions include teaching teenagers how to report abusive online behaviours to the authorities, instead of teaching them to disengage from social media altogether.

As a result of the various research practices employed in this special issue, Jari Salo, Matti Mäntymäki, and A.K.M Najmul Islam, the editors of this collection, present an

argument that there are three areas of social media research which would benefit from increased focus in the future. Firstly, that there is a need for research on how social media functions within a workplace context (Mäntymäki and Riemer, 2016), particularly as various forms of social media are now prolific in many workplaces. Secondly, they argue that there is currently a gap in the understanding of how the various characteristics of social media platforms may help contribute to negative consequences for the individual. Thirdly, they argue that in order to account for the potential social desirability bias (Fisher, 1993) that relates to people's own negative social media actions (e.g. cyberbullying and trolling), future research would benefit from utilising a greater variety of research designs considering data from multiple sources.

Overall, this edited collection presents a wide variety of exciting research into social media, and presents a welcome addition into this rapidly growing field of research. All of these articles present an original contribution to the field, whilst also provoking questions which would benefit from being developed further as the various problems and concerns that social media raises for the individual and for wider society are identified and understood. Everyone with an interest in this field, whether they be a student or postgraduate would benefit from studying these chapters' findings as these papers are contextualised well, and are laid out in an engaging and clear manner. Overall, these papers are a useful resource for understanding the various negatives that can occur within social media, whilst also providing potential solutions to those same issues.

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