

Social Media Archaeology

from Theory to Practice

Since the first conceptualization of medienarchäologie by Siegfried Zielinski twenty-five years ago, research and scholarship that takes a media archaeology approach has grown considerably and continues to be of immense interest. The development of this emerging subdiscipline of media studies and, more specifically, media archaeology, is so new that there is a substantial lack of scholarly work on social media archaeology.

Social Media Archaeology from Theory to Practice attempts to fill this scholarly gap through a collection of the most current interrogations of the social, political, economic, and cultural impact of social media and the materialities of communication. Prominent researchers contributing to this volume bring substantial expertise of their research experience in Australia, Bangladesh, Canada, China, France, Nigeria, Norway, South Africa, Sweden, Tunisia, Turkey, the UK and the US.

The collection includes a theoretical framework for contextualising the implications and ramifications of social media archaeology activism as cultural production, theory-driven contexts in specific political and transnational situations and environments, and empirical studies to illuminate the diverse praxis of social media archaeology.

Uğur Bakan, Ph.D. is an Associate Professor in the Department of Visual Communication Design, Faculty of Art and Design at Izmir Kâtip Çelebi University, Turkey, where he teaches courses in Interactive Media, Game Design, Visual Communication, and Design Culture. He has more than 15 years of professional experience as a graphics, web, and print designer. Bakan has published extensively on media and digital culture, specifically the role of computer technologies in mediating relational communication in digital environments, social media, game studies, digital media systems, graphics design and visual communication, cultural studies, and alternative journalism.

Lara Martin Lengel, Ph.D. began her research on transnational technology and cultural studies as a Fulbright Research Scholar and American Institute of Maghreb Studies Fellow in Tunisia (1993-1994). Her refereed research appears as lead articles in *Text and Performance Quarterly*, *Journal of Communication Inquiry*, *International Journal of Health Communication*, and *Convergence: International Journal of Research into New Media Technologies*. Her books include *Computer Mediated Communication* (Thurlow, Lengel & Tomi), *Casting Gender* (Lengel & Warren, Eds.), *Intercultural Communication and Creative Practice*, and *Culture and Technology in the New Europe*.

 **MACROWORLD**
 > macroworldpub.com

Macroworld titles are available as ebook editions
 in a range of digital formats



Uğur Bakan
 Lara Martin Lengel



Social Media Archaeology
 from Theory to Practice

Editors

Uğur Bakan

Lara Martin Lengel

Social Media Archaeology

from Theory to Practice

 **MACROWORLD**

Social Media Archaeology

from Theory to Practice

Editors

Uğur Bakan

Izmir Kâtip Çelebi University, Turkey

Lara Martin Lengel

Bowling Green State University, USA

Uğur Bakan, Ph.D.

Associate Professor
Department of Visual Communication Design
Faculty of Art and Design
Izmir Kâtip Çelebi University, Turkey
ugur.bakan@ikc.edu.tr

Lara Martin Lengel, Ph.D.

Professor
School of Media and Communication
and affiliate faculty in ACS, International
Studies, WGSS, and the Honors College
Bowling Green State University, USA
lengell@bgsu.edu

© 2021 by Macro World Publishing

Softcover reprint of the hardcover 1st edition 2021

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reproduced in any form by any electronic or mechanical means (including photocopying, recording, or information storage and retrieval) without permission in writing from the publisher.

Trademark notice: Product or corporate names may be trademarks or registered trademarks, and are used only for identification and explanation without intent to infringe.

No portion of this publication may be reproduced, copied or transmitted save with written permission or in accordance with the provisions of the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act 1988, or under the terms of any license permitting limited copying issued by the Copyright Licensing Agency, Saffron House, 6–10 Kirby Street, London EC1N 8TS.

For information, address Global

Macro World Publishing in the UK is an imprint of Digital Academy of Business Enterprise, Technology And Sustainability registered in England, company number 08159204, of

22 Kings Avenue Muswell Hill
London United Kingdom
N10 1PB

Macro World Publishing registered in Turkey, company number 30939, of
Lider Centrio Mansuroglu Mah.
1593/1 4B 1-5 Bayrakli-Izmir, Turkey

Social Media Archaeology from Theory to Practice

International Standard Book Number-13: 978-625-00-9894-3 (Hardcover)

You can receive future titles in this series as they are published by placing a standing order. Please contact your bookseller or, in case of difficulty, write to us at the address below with your name and address, the title of the series and the ISBN quoted above.

Visit the companion website: www.macroworldpub.com

Contents

Notes on Contributors	vii
Acknowledgements	xv
PART 1: THEORY	
Chapter 1	
Contextualising Social Media Archaeology	
Uğur Bakan and Lara Martin Lengel	1
Chapter 2	
The Ephemeral Artifact: Social Media “Algorithms” Shape a Simulated World	
David I. Tafler	17
Chapter 3	
Religions, Technologies, and Civilisations: Néo-animism of the Internet of Things in Connected Societies	
Fabienne Martin-Juchat	41
Chapter 4	
A Critical Communication Analysis of “The Focused Self” in Social Media Use	
Rob McKenzie	63
PART 2: CONTEXT	
Chapter 5	
World Wide Web as Simulacrum of the Virtual	
Sandra Lemeilleur	83
Chapter 6	
Social Media’s Role as an Enabler of the Public Sphere during Nonviolent Resistance Movements: The Case of Yellow Vests and Facebook	
Solveig Beyza Evenstad and Paul Rasse	95
Chapter 7	
Strategic Development of Social Media Communication Plans	
Yeonsoo Kim	141

Chapter 8

Social Media's Impact on Politics

Kristy Dekat 159

Chapter 9

Social Media and Political Memes: Examining the Presence of Political Discourse in Our Current Online Environment

Jonathan C. Evans 177

PART 3: PRACTICE

Chapter 10

Perverted Uses of Digital Networks by Professional Journalists as a Consequence of the Paradoxical Process of Contemporary Capitalistic Re-Feudalisation

Bertrand Cabedoche 195

Chapter 11

Social Media and the Changing Discourse of Immigration

Serdar Tuncer and Boulou Ebanda De B'béri 225

Chapter 12

The Impact of Social Media Post Characteristics: Exploring the Use of Digital Games

Ufuk Bakan 241

Chapter 13

User Engagement on Social Network Sites: Antecedences of Sharing, Liking, and Commenting Online News

Isabella Glogger and Aaron Kohl 257

Chapter 14

Online Hate: Examining the Use of Outrage Language in Facebook Conversations over Racial Injustice

Bridget Haina 277

Chapter 15

Health Communication via Social Media: How Pharmaceutical Companies Are Using Instagram for Corporate Social Responsibility

Abisoluwa Akinboboye and Susan E. Waters 297

Chapter 16

Streaming Sports on Social Media and Its Impact on Sports Sponsorship

Jim Pokrywczynski and Dave Bohnsack 327

Chapter 17

Online Accountability Disclosure: Social Media Use by Environmental Grassroots Organisations in China

Ming Xie and Chin-Chung Chao

345

Chapter 18

Social Media Archaeology in Bangladesh

Shafiqur Rahman and Zainul Abedin

365

Chapter 19

Social Media Data Paradox: Law and Ethics after Cambridge Analytica

Jeremy Harris Lipschultz

393

Index

409

Notes on Contributors

Uğur Bakan is an Associate Professor in the Department of Visual Communication Design, Faculty of Art and Design at Izmir Kâtip Çelebi University, Turkey, where he teaches courses in Interactive Media, Game Design, Visual Communication, and Design Culture. He has more than 15 years of professional experience as a graphics, web, and print designer. He received his Ph.D. degree in the Department of Journalism, Ege University, Turkey. He has many works published in national and international journals. He has published extensively on media and digital culture. Dr. Bakan's research focuses on the role of computer technologies in mediating communication between friends in digital environments. Game studies, alternative journalism, digital media systems, social media, graphics design, cultural studies, and visual communication are among the areas of his academic interest. He has presented generative art and design research and artwork internationally. His writings have appeared in numerous publications via Peter Lang, and in *Actualidades Pedagógicas*, *Connectist*, *Estudios Sobre el Mensaje Periodístico*, *Turkish Review of Communication Studies*, and *InterMedia*, and he has presented at a variety of national and international design and education conferences.

Lara Martin Lengel is a Professor in the Ph.D.-granting School of Media and Communication at Bowling Green State University. Dr. Lengel began her research on transnational technology and cultural studies when she was a Fulbright Research Scholar and American Institute of Maghreb Studies Fellow in Tunisia (1993-1994). Her refereed research appears as lead articles in *Text and Performance Quarterly*, *Journal of Communication Inquiry*, *International Journal of Health Communication*, and *Convergence: The International Journal of Research into New Media Technologies*, and in *Journal of International and Intercultural Communication*, *Communication Studies*, *Studies in Symbolic Interaction*, *Gender & History*, *International and Intercultural Communication Annual*, *Feminist Media Studies*, *International Journal of Women's Studies*, *International Journal of Communication*, and *Women & Language*. She served as Guest Co-Editor for *Global Media Journal* and *ESSACHESS—Journal for Communication Studies*. Her books include *Computer Mediated Communication* (Thurlow, Lengel & Tomić), *Casting Gender* (Lengel & Warren, Eds.), *Intercultural Communication and Creative Practice*, and *Culture and Technology in the New Europe*.

Zainul Abedin is an Assistant Professor of Mass Communication at Mississippi Valley State University. Dr. Abedin's research focuses on social media, social justice, diversity and racial reconciliation, disparities among race, gender, class, and faith, globalization, media management, convergence, history, law, and ethics. He is particularly interested in the mediated discourses implicating sociopolitical and cultural perspectives in both historical and contemporary settings. He taught innovative journalism and media courses at the Press Institute of Bangladesh and worked with both print and broadcast media before and after moving to the U.S. Dr. Abedin teaches courses in news reporting and writing, multi-platform media, media ownership, and management, and converging media and diversity. Abedin has published articles in refereed journals in the U.S. and Bangladesh. He was selected to the 2021 Solutions Journalism HBCU Educator Academy Cohort, professors from twelve Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCU) across the U.S.

Abisoluwa Akinboboye earned her undergraduate degree in Mass Communication at Babcock University in Ilesha-Remo, Ogun State, Nigeria. To expand her knowledge of this field and professional specialisation, she earned a Master of Arts in Brand and Media Strategy in the Department of Media and Communication at East Tennessee State University. Her academic interests are anchored in health communication in the online and digital media landscape, especially how media technologies are being integrated into health marketing campaigns and health policies. She researches the effects of online and digital media interventions on health policy-making processes to assess if these media promote sustainable change or merely elicit discourse by invoking fear, especially in a pandemic era. By exploring models and theories supporting health behavior interventions, her goal is to determine the effect of constant exposure to health messages during the current “infodemic,” particularly the overabundance of mis- and dis-information.

Ufuk Bakan is an Assistant Professor in the Visual Communication Design Department of Izmir Katip Çelebi University. He earned a Ph.D. from the Institute of Social Sciences at Ege Üniversitesi, and a Master’s at the Institute of Social Science and Bachelor’s in Radio-TV and Cinema, both at Atatürk University. His research interests include 3D modeling, Architectural Modeling, 3D Environment, Visual Effects, Motion Graphics, and 2D-3D Game Design and Development. Dr. Bakan teaches graduate and undergraduate level courses in Contemporary Applications in Visual Arts, Design and Visual Culture, History of Animation, and 3D Modeling Techniques. As a visual effect and computer graphics artist, professional designer, and producer for over 15 years, he has served as a design consultant to numerous companies and participated in international exhibitions with 2D and 3D graphics. Dr. Bakan has numerous national and international publications in journals including *Actualidades Pedagógicas* and *Journal of Communication Theory & Research*.

Dave Bohnsack earned his Ph.D. and Master’s degrees from Arizona State University, where he taught quantitative research methods, and his undergraduate degree from the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee. He is Director of Research & Insights at GMR Marketing, New Berlin, Wisconsin, a global event and sports marketing agency. Informed by primary and secondary research, at GMR Dr. Bohnsack provides strategic support and business development guidance to a diverse range of creative and account management teams. He has previously worked in several marketing research positions, including Director of Research at GM Eventworks and GM R*Works at General Motors in Detroit.

Bertrand Cabedoche is a Senior Professor of Information and Communication Sciences, UNESCO Chair of the International Communication at l’Université Grenoble Alpes, Saint-Martin-d’Hères, France. From 2005-2008 he directed the international development of the Groupe de Recherche sur les Enjeux de la Communication (GRESEC), an esteemed French academic research laboratory in the field of information and communication. Since 2009, he has been responsible for the International Development of the Higher Doctorate School of Université Grenoble Alpes. He is member of the Board of Advisors of the European Communication Research and Education Association (ECREA) and served as President of the worldwide network Orbicom UNESCO Chairs in Communication (2012-2017). He has more than 115 scientific publications and prefaces, and 225 oral scientific communication in Brazil, Canada, China, Germany, Lebanon, Madagascar, Romania, Russia, Spain, Tunisia, the United Kingdom, and the United States.

Chin-Chung Chao is a Professor of Communication at the University of Nebraska at Omaha. Her primary research interests span conflict management, leadership, intercultural communication, organisational communication, and media communication. She received her Ph.D. from the School of Media and Communication at Bowling Green State University. Dr. Chao served as President of the Association for Chinese Communication Studies, Chair of the National Communication Association Asian/Pacific American Communication Studies Division, and Guest Editor for *Chinese Media Research* and *Negotiation and Conflict Management Research*. In addition, she has served on editorial boards of *Journal of Intercultural Communication Research*, *Journal of International and Intercultural Communication*, and *Negotiation and Conflict Management Research*. She has published two books, ten book chapters, and twenty peer-reviewed articles in, among others, *Journal of Information, Law & Technology*, *Journal of Intercultural Communication Research*, *Chinese Journal of Communication*, *Journal of Knowledge-Based Innovation in China*, *Chinese Management Studies*, *Journal of Politics and Law*, *Journal of Leadership & Organizational Studies*, *Journal of Science and Technology Policy in China*, and *International Journal of Communication*.

Boulou Ebanda de B'éri is Founding Director of the Audiovisual Media Lab for the Studies of Cultures and Societies (AMLAC&S), and Professor of Media, Communication, and Cultural Studies at the University of Ottawa, Canada. His research is in the areas of media and cultural studies, Black African practices of identity formation identity and oral tradition in multi-cultural nations, “intermediality” in political creations, and cultural representation. He was Visiting Scholar at the University of California — Santa Barbara, Northeastern University in Boston, KwaZulu Natal University in Durban, South Africa, and Deakin University in Melbourne, Australia. His awards include the Ottawa University Faculty of Arts Professor of the Year Award, a Canadian Foundation for Innovation Fund, and the Van Horne Prize. He has published in journals including *Cultural Studies*, *Critical Arts*, and *Journal of International and Intercultural Communication*. His books include *Mapping Alternative Expressions of Blackness in Cinema: A Horizontal Labyrinth of Transgeographical Practices of Identity* and *Au-delà Discours l'Expérience du “Verbe” dans les Cinémas d'Afrique Noire*. [Beyond Discourses: The Experience of the “Verb” in Black African Cinemas]. His current research analyses the 19th century Canadian Black Press, cultural representation, and articulations of identity-politics in audiovisual narratives produced in Africa, the Americas, and Australia, focusing on specific cultures and groups negotiating colonialism.

Kristy Dekat has been a journalism educator for 20 years. She is currently the broadcast journalism adviser at Seaman High School in Kansas. Prior to Seaman, she was an Assistant Professor of Journalism at Emporia State University. At Emporia State, she oversaw the journalism education program, advised the yearbook, and coordinated the Kansas Scholastic Press Association Regional Contest. Dekat has had several articles published. Two of her most recent include “A response to Hazelwood: Kansas advisers helped to create legal support for students” (2019) and “Liberal Arts vs. STEM: Should it be all about the money?” (2018), both published in *Communication: Journalism Education Today Magazine*. During her time in scholastic journalism, Dekat has been involved in KSPA, Kansas Collegiate Media, National Scholastic Press Association, Associated Collegiate Press, and Journalism Education Association. She regularly judges contests for these organisations and others throughout the U.S.

Jonathan Evans obtained his Ph.D. in Rhetoric from Texas Woman's University, his MA in English Literature with a focus on Rhetoric, Writing, and Linguistics from Northwestern State University, and his BA with a major in European History and a minor in Philosophy and Social Science from Northwestern State University. He is currently an Assistant Professor of English at Claflin University. He teaches writing and literature, with a focus on graphic novels, comics, visual mediums, and visual rhetoric. Currently, he is working on a graphic novel about historical events at his university, as well as a book about Superman v. Donald Trump as models for American virtue and behavior. He has spent several years looking at and applying rhetorical analysis to memes and other forms of social media. His publications include serving as co-editor of the proceedings of the 1st Global Conference on the Graphic Novel at the University of Oxford.

Solveig Beyza Evenstad is a Turkish-Norwegian Research Associate at the research unit SIC.Lab Méditerranée, Département Sciences de l'Information et de la Communication, Université Nice Sophia Antipolis, member of l'Université Côte d'Azur. Previously she was an Associate Professor at Innland Norway University of Applied Science, Lillehammer. She obtained her Ph.D. from Département Sciences de l'Information et de la Communication, Université Côte D'Azur, where she taught organisational communication. She also holds a Master of Management, Organization and Leadership, a BA in Management, and a BSc in Informatics. Prior to her academic career, she gained 20 years experience as an ICT professional in global companies. She is currently responsible for the Leadership Development Program, Department of Lifelong Learning, College of Norwegian Correctional Service. Her interdisciplinary research, in ephemeralisation, psychosocial risk factors, leadership development, organisational communication, social media, and interpretive phenomenological analysis, is published in *Journal of Documentation*, *Futures*, *International Journal of Systems and Society*, and *Communication et Organisation*.

Isabella Glogger is a post-doctoral researcher at the Department of Journalism, Media and Communication at Göteborgs Universitet [the University of Gothenburg], Sweden. In her research, she focuses on (political) news and the long-term effects of media content and its characteristics on the recipients – both online and offline. She earned her Ph.D. in Media and Communication Science from the Universität Koblenz-Landau, Landau Germany, with a dissertation on the journalistic and academic concept of hard and soft news. Isabella has presented her research at, among others, several International Communication Association (ICA) conferences and International Association for Media and Communication Research (IAMCR) conferences. Her scholarly work has been published in journals including *Annals of the International Communication Association*, *Visual Communication*, *Communications – the European Journal of Communication Research*, *Digital Journalism*, *Journal of Political Psychology / Politische Psychologie*, *Journalism Studies*, and *Communication Theory*.

Bridget Haina is an Assistant Professor in Digital Media Production in the Communication Studies Department at SUNY Plattsburgh where she teaches courses in digital media production, web design, interactive journalism and video motion graphics, and where she focuses on instilling mindfulness, truth, and justice in the voices of the next generation of media creators. She holds a M.S. Degree in Multimedia Photography and Design from the S.I. Newhouse School of Public Communications at Syracuse University, where she began her teaching career as a graphic design instructional associate. She holds a B.A. in Fine Art Photography and Photojournalism from the University of Albany where she began pursuing a career in digital media content creation. Her research focuses on studying online hate over issues of racial injustice, outrage language on social media platforms, and media literacy in public education.

Yeonsoo Kim is an Associate Professor in the School of Communication Studies, and a faculty associate of scholarship programs for the Center for Faculty Innovation at James Madison University. She earned her B.A. and M.A. in journalism from Ewha Women's University, Seoul, Korea, and another M.A. and Ph.D. in mass communication with an emphasis on public relations (PR) from the College of Journalism and Communications at the University of Florida. She founded and serves as faculty director of Bluestone Communications, JMU's student-run PR agency, and advises the campus chapter of the Public Relations Student Society of America (PRSSA), and was awarded the 2017-2018 Lambda Pi Eta SCOM Professor of the Year. Her research interests include corporate social responsibility, strategic communication and social media strategies for public relations, and communication campaigns. Her research is published in major public relations and business ethics journals, including *Journal of Public Relations*, *Public Relations Review*, *Journal of Business Ethics*, *Corporate Communication: An International Journal*, *Journal of Promotion Management*, and *Journalism Studies*.

Aaron Kohl graduated from the Universität Koblenz-Landau, Landau, Germany with a bachelor's degree in social and communication sciences. To expand his knowledge in the field of communication sciences, he is currently pursuing a master's degree and works as a Research Assistant at the Institut für Kommunikationspsychologie und Medienpädagogik [Institute for Communication Psychology and Media Education] (IKM) in Landau. He is interested in the effects of media content and information exchange processes on opinion formation and decision-making processes. His current research focuses on political communication and the effects of negativity in media coverage during the federal election campaign in Germany. In particular, he investigates how different forms of negativity influence voting behavior, polarization, and trust in politicians as well as short-term variables such as emotions or attention.

Sandra Lemeilleur is an Associate Researcher with Le MICA (Médiations, Informations, Communication, Arts) Research Group at l'Université Bordeaux Montaigne. She is interested in evolutions and mutations of uses of subjectivity about the treatments of news, politics, and the intimate with the emergence of the web. Her disciplinary approach is a form of anthropology of the web. Lemeilleur is a member of the Sophia, le Réseau Belge des Études de Genre [The Belgian Gender Studies Network]. Her work is published in *Analele Universității Creștine Dimitrie Cantemir, Seria Stiintele Limbii, Literaturii si Didactica Predarii* [Annals of Dimitrie Cantemir Christian University—Linguistics, Literature and Methodology of Teaching], *Genre: L'Essentiel pour Comprendre* [Gender: The Essentials to Understand], and *Revue Médiation et Information*.

Jeremy Harris Lipschultz holds the Peter Kiewit Distinguished Professorship in the UNO Social Media Lab and School of Communication, the University of Nebraska at Omaha. He is Book Review Editor for *Journalism & Mass Communication Educator*. His textbook, *Social Media Communication: Concepts, Practices, Data, Law and Ethics* (Routledge, 3rd ed., forthcoming; 2nd ed., 2018; 1st ed., 2015) integrates theory and practice. Dr. Lipschultz's Rural Futures Institute project with Purdue University and the University of Nebraska-Lincoln is developing best practices for smaller communities to leverage broadband technologies and social media. Lipschultz received the AIM Institute College Tech Educator of the Year award in 2017 and the Omaha Press Club Journalism Educator of the Year in 2016. He has been a *Huffington Post* contributor, and currently blogs on LinkedIn. He is the author of more than 100 publications, and several books, including *Social Media Measurement and Management: Entrepreneurial Digital Analytics* (2020, Routledge) and *Social Media Law and Ethics* (forthcoming, Routledge).

Fabienne Martin-Juchat is Professor in le Département des Sciences de l'information et de la Communication at l'Université Grenoble Alpes, where she is currently project manager of Maison de la Création et de l'Innovation (MaCI). She is developing an anthropology of bodily and emotional communication on technologies and social media. Her publications include her book, *Le Corps et les Médias: La Chair éprouvée par les Médias et les Espaces Sociaux* (De Boeck, 2008), and articles in journals including *Médiation et Information*, *Studies in Media and Communication*, *L'Homme Trace: Perspectives Anthropologiques des Traces Contemporaines*, *Les Enjeux de l'Information et de la Communication*, *Communiquer: Revue de Communication Sociale et Publique*, *Degrés: Revue de Synthèse à Orientation Sémiologique*, *MEI-Médiation et Information*, *Communication et Organization: Revue Scientifique Francophone en Communication Organisationnelle*, *Recherches en Communication*, *Communications Organisationnelles et Management en Contexte Numérique Généralisé*, *Communication Management*, *Communication des Organisations: Recherches Récentes*, *Revue Française des Sciences de l'Information et de la Communication*, and *ESSACHESS–Journal for Communication Studies*.

Rob McKenzie, Ph.D., is a Distinguished Professor, awarded in 2012, and Chairperson of the Department of Communication at the East Stroudsburg University of Pennsylvania, where he also serves as the Department's Graduate Coordinator and as the University Advisor to WESS Radio (a 24/7 Broadcaster, Webcaster, Podcaster). His research interests include international media, journalism, and rhetorical theory and criticism. He earned his B.A. in History from Millersville University of Pennsylvania, and his M.A. and Ph.D. from Penn State University. His research is published in the following journals: *Communication Quarterly*, *Comparative Media Law*, *China Media Research*, *History of European Ideas*, *Derecho Comparado de La Información* [Comparative Media Law Journal], *Technological Horizons in Education*, and *World Communication*.

Jim Pokrywczynski is an Associate Professor in the Diederich College of Communication at Marquette University. His teaching focuses on communication research methods and advertising in the Department of Strategic Communication. His research covers risk communication particularly related to health, sports marketing, and advertising effectiveness. He received his M.S. and B.S. from the University of Illinois and his Ph. D. from the University of Georgia. He has presented at the Academy of Advertising Asia-Pacific Conference in Beijing and the Arab-US Association for Communication Educators Conference in Cairo. He is published in *Journal of Communication Research*, *Journal of Advertising Research*, *Journal of Promotion Management*, *Journal of Brand Strategy*, *Journal of Sports Media*, *Newspaper Research Journal*, *Journal of Digital & Social Media Marketing*, and *Journal of Middle East Media*. His most recent co-authored work, on global COVID-19 informational, transformational, and narrative advertising strategies, is published in the journal *Health Communication*.

Paul Rasse is a Professeur des Universités (Classe Exceptionnelle) (French Full Professor) in Département Sciences de l'Information et de la Communication, l'Université Nice-Sophia-Antipolis, member of l'Université Côte d'Azur. He graduated from l'Université de Bordeaux, Grenoble, and obtained a diploma in advanced studies in sociology from l'École des Hautes Etudes en Sciences Sociales, Paris. He defended his thesis in sociology at the University of Nice Sophia Antipolis. At Université de Nice Sophia Antipolis he founded and directed the diploma of specialized higher studies in mediation and cultural engineering, option current arts and museology, a pioneer in the university sector, which became a professional master's degree in events, mediation, and cultural engineering. He founded and headed the research laboratory I3M, Information, Milieux, Médias,

Médiation, now named SIC.Lab Méditerranée, in Nice. He was elected Vice-President of La Société Française des Sciences de l'Information et de la Communication (SFSIC) for two terms. He has published fifteen books as author or director.

Shafiqur Rahman received his Ph.D. from Simon Fraser University in British Columbia, Canada, and two graduate degrees in sociology and mass communications respectively. He began his career as a television producer in Bangladesh TV. After six years, he joined the academic teaching communication in the sociology department at Chittagong University. He came to the United States in Honolulu, Hawaii's East-West Center Communications Institute to conduct research on Com Policy and Planning. He has taught at Louisiana State University-Baton Rouge, Alcorn State University, Mississippi, and South Carolina State University, Orangeburg for about 30 years. His teaching and research have concentrated on media policy, organisational development and management, public communication, communication in South Asia, and international communication. As a Fulbright Specialist Fellow, Dr. Rahman advised and helped to establish the Radio-TV and Film Studies Department at the University of Dhaka in Bangladesh.

David I. Tafler is a Professor in Media and Communication and Film Studies at Muhlenberg College. He received his Ph.D. and M.F.A. from Columbia University, where his doctoral dissertation, *The Electronic Megatext: A Theory of Tele-Reception and Re-Formation*, examined the historic introduction of interactive video art. His areas of interest include community media, media reception, and alternative media that expands the individual experience of time, space, and environment. His scholarship on interactive media, camcorder activism, avant-garde cinema, electronic art, and community media is published in *Journal of Film and Video*, *Media Information Australia*, *Pacific Journalism Review*, *Journal of Australian Aboriginal Studies*, *Quarterly Review of Film Studies*, *Convergence*, *Afterimage*, *Cinematograph*, *Wide Angle*, *Continuum*, *Kunstforum*, *Millennium Film Journal*, *Interactivity & Intervention*, and *International Journal of Art and Technology*. His co-authored and co-edited books, with Peter d'Agostino, include *World-Wide-Walks: Crossing Natural-Cultural-Virtual Frontiers and Transmission: Toward A Post-Television Culture*.

Serdar Tunçer holds a Ph.D. in Communications and Public Relations from the University of Istanbul. His thesis mobilises storytelling methodology and discourse analysis of crisis communication. He is currently a Research Associate at the University of Ottawa's Audiovisual Media Lab for the study of Cultures and Societies (AMLAC&S) as well as a Research Assistant for Imagining Canada's Digital Twin (ICDT) project at Carleton University. His study, *Reinterpreting Crisis Communications in the Post-Truth Era*, is published in the journal, *Moment Dergi - Journal of Cultural Studies*. His current research consists of three fields and the interconnectivity between them: First, human mobility, social media and the spread of misinformation, second, decision-making for complex systems, and, third, trust and storytelling in Artificial Intelligence.

Susan Waters is an Associate Professor in the Department of Media and Communication at East Tennessee State University, she is the Coordinator for the Brand and Media Strategy Graduate Program. She earned her Ph.D. in Communication and Media Studies at the University of Kansas, her M.A. in Mass Communication at Pittsburg State University, and her Bachelor of Arts in Mass Communication at Missouri Southern State University. Previously, Susan taught at Auburn University and Missouri State University. Her awards include the Auburn University College of Liberal Arts Teaching Excellence Award and several top paper awards from the National Communication Association and the Central

States Communication Association. She has published in the areas of social media, politics, and public relations in the *Journal of Communication and Media Research*, *Journal of Community Engagement and Higher Education*, *Case Studies in Strategic Communication*, and *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication*.

Ming Xie is an Assistant Professor of public administration and emergency management administration at West Texas A&M University. Ming earned her Ph.D. in Public Administration from the University of Nebraska at Omaha where her dissertation examined the social construction of accountability by Chinese environmental nonprofit organisations. She earned another Ph.D. in Cultural Anthropology from the Graduate School of Chinese Academy of Social Sciences in Beijing, China. She is particularly interested in nonprofit organisation management and communication, social media, emergency management and social vulnerability, nonprofit accountability, and intercultural communication. Dr. Xie has published peer-reviewed journal articles and book chapters in the field of public administration, emergency management, and intercultural communication, in journals including *Journal of Nonprofit Education and Leadership*, *Journalism & Mass Communication Educator*, and *China Media Research*.

Acknowledgments

First and foremost, we express our sincere gratitude to the team of peer reviewers who volunteered their extensive time and methodological expertise to guide the studies within this volume to excellence. Reviewing is always an arduous task, even more so during a global pandemic and, thus, we cannot adequately express our appreciation.

We are tremendously grateful for the opportunity to work with all the contributors to this scholarly volume. They are established media researchers, scholars, and practitioners in many of Europe's most well-renowned institutions, most notably in France and Sweden, in Asia, and Canada and the United States, who has published extensively in many of the top refereed journals in the interdisciplinary range of work represented in this volume. They are engaging in cutting-edge scholarship and are some of the most unsurpassed researchers in the area of social media studies.

We are grateful to the London-based publishing team at Macro World, in particular Professor Ezendu Ariwa, for their patience with us during the unprecedented challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic, and their care and professionalism in preparing and publishing this book and making it widely accessible to a worldwide audience.

Finally, we give heartfelt thanks to our families and friends. In particular, for Ugur, his special thank goes to Prof. Feray Bakan Misirlioglu, Prof. Burc Misirlioglu, and Prof. Meltem Sezen, who read this book from an engineering point of view and critiqued it from different perspectives. He would also like to thank his brother Dr. Ufuk Bakan, who is known to carry out all his affairs meticulously, for carefully reviewing this book. Lara has undying gratitude to her spouse, Dr. Scott Martin, and their respective children and stepchildren. The life journey of daughter Daniella, and sons, Alexander, Nathaniel, and Ross, occurred during tremendous advances in theorising and practicing media.

Lara reflects fondly on the Sunday evening in April 1999, alone in her office at the American university in London, as she put the final touches on her first scholarly volume, *Culture and Technology in New Europe*. The following day, newborn Daniella entered a world on the cusp of the Third Millennium, a time of unprecedented attention to mediated communication and information technology, full of anticipatory fears and joys of the possibilities technology might bring to the 21st century. As we were completing this book 22 years later, Lara and Scott presented Daniella her Honors diploma, live-streamed so that family and friends from Alaska to North Macedonia could celebrate in real-time.

Perhaps the most tremendous development, since the turn of the millennium two decades ago, is the immeasurable collaborative possibility of digital media and communication. The capacity of digital collaboration certainly made this collection happen, by bringing together a group of esteemed scholars spanning the geophysical distance of many thousands of miles, most of whom have never met “f2f IRL.” We are thankful for these collaborative possibilities and look forward to many more in the future.

Uğur Bakan
and
Lara Martin Lengel

CHAPTER 17

Online Accountability Disclosure: Social Media Use by Environmental Grassroots Organisations in China

Ming Xie and Chin-Chung Chao

Abstract This chapter focuses on the social media use by environmental grassroots organisations in China, to discuss the role of social media in accountability building in the nonprofit sector. Through two months of online observation of three environmental grassroots organisations' social media activities, this research finds that these organisations have used social media to disclose organisations' information such as financial performance and events. They also have used social media innovatively to engage with various stakeholders and promote the organisations' visibility and advocacy work. Their online accountability building has focused on both information sharing and stakeholder engagement. Although some of the organisations face challenges such as lack of funding and professional staff, social media allowed them to build communities with donors and volunteers as well as engage with them through meaningful activities. Within the authoritarian context of China, when channels of political participation and advocacy are limited, social media have played a supplementary role for these organisations to promote environmental protection and justice.

Ming Xie

Department of Political Science and Criminal Justice, West Texas A&M University, USA
e-mail: mxie@wtamu.edu

Chin-Chung Chao

School of Communication, University of Nebraska at Omaha, USA
e-mail: chinchuchao@unomaha.edu

Introduction

Currently, most nonprofit organisations, no matter their size, mission, and type, all have a social media presence. However, it does not mean that they are using social media at the same level and for the same purposes. Social media has been praised as a technology of participation with the potential to bridge citizens and politics, to increase citizen participation in the legislative process, and to respond to the perceived crisis in a representative democracy (Ranchordás, 2017; Wright, 2016). For grassroots nonprofit organisations, diverse social media activities, and platforms allow them to convey their transparency and accountability to their stakeholders. Social media has been viewed as the primary means of civic engagement for grassroots organisations because of the feature of free and open access to information sharing, equal participation, and deliberate decision-making (Kruse et al., 2018; Zhou & Pan, 2016). Nonprofit scholars have started the discussion of the impact of information technology on accountability and conceptualised virtual accountability (Dumont, 2013) and web-based accountability (Dainelli, Manetti, & Sibilio, 2013; Saxton & Guo, 2011; Slatten et al., 2016). However, the extent to which social media positively impacts civil engagement is difficult to measure. The proliferation of social media prompts a question regarding whether social media is able to revitalise Habermas' (1974) idea of the public sphere. With the development of globalisation and information technology, opportunities and challenges co-exist for the development of democratic civil society.

Environmental grassroots organisations in China have been active social actors for environmental advocacy, social change, and community improvement. With the increasing requirement for these organisations to receive funding and facilitate collaborations with international organisations, accountability has been one of the main aspects for them to demonstrate their professionalisation and performance. Also, demonstrating accountability has been a challenge for many grassroots organisations. Focuses on three specific environmental grassroots organisations in China, this research provides a valuable perspective for the existing literature on online and virtual accountability of grassroots organisations in the digital age.

This research is important in both theoretical and empirical aspects. The purpose of this research is to capture grassroots civic engagement practices through social media. Specifically, this investigation seeks to better understand the role social media play in situating grassroots organisations in the public sphere. This research integrates the online presence of grassroots organisations into the examination of civic engagement. This chapter aims to discuss the role and impact of social media from the aspects of online

accountability, to understand social media's potential to engage people in communicative action to realise a publish sphere and participatory democracy.

Literature Review

The literature review section summarises the literature and main discussions regarding grassroots nonprofit organisations' accountability building and social media use. The section begins within a contextual understanding of environmental grassroots organisations. It is followed by a summary of the literature on accountability mechanisms through social media for grassroots organisations. Next, a review of the debates on social media as a public sphere is presented.

Grassroots Organisations

Grassroots organisation is a contextually contingent concept that cannot be generally understood across country contexts. Smith (2000) defines the grassroots organisation as "locally based, significantly autonomous, volunteer-run, formal nonprofit (i.e., voluntary) groups that manifest substantial voluntary altruism as groups and use the associational form of organization" (p. 7). He suggested that grassroots organisations have formal membership of volunteers and there is no clear line between grassroots organisations and paid-staff voluntary groups. Based on shared values and beliefs, solidarity, mutuality, and voluntary altruism, grassroots organisations are positioned as a bottom-up approach of empowerment and participation in contrast to the elitist and top-down approach of social change (Glover, 2004; Nygreen, 2017; Smith, 2000). In the context of China, the relationship with the government is the most important component to understand grassroots organisations. Thus, grassroots organisations are defined as organisations that self-identified themselves as the opposite of mainstream (Zhou & Han, 2018), "with few or no ties to the government and closer ties to grassroots communities and their concerns"(Shieh, 2017, p. 1790), and "privately operated, bottom-up nonprofits that were established and managed by individuals rather than government agencies" (Lu, Deng, Huang, & Chen, 2018, p. 540).

Understanding the concept of grassroots organisations needs to be based on historical and cultural backgrounds, legal frameworks, and political institutions. Especially in countries with hostile environments toward civil society organisations, citizens take the initiatives to build informal associations and coalitions for public service delivery and community development. As Roelofs (1987) noted, "Sometimes it is necessary to

create ‘grassroots’ organizations to generate adequate political pressure for reforms—or to overpower competing versions of reform” (p. 34). Bothwell (2002) also suggested that grassroots organisations “are the bedrock of the theory of citizen participation in a democratic society” (p. 383). The bottom-up grassroots organisations take an active role to represent marginalised communities, propose and disseminate alternative policies, and create and maintain a vibrant civil society and public space for participatory democracy.

Based on the Communist Party’s ideology and the primary purpose to stabilise the monopoly power of the party, grassroots organisations in China have had the opportunities to develop with limited autonomy. With the slow emergence of civil society and the public sphere, China is a unique example in contemporary society regarding the power relations between the government and grassroots organisations and the future development of the civil society sector. Specifically, bottom-up grassroots organisations reflect the tension between autocratic ideology and the development of civil society on the one hand; on the other hand, they might be a direction for the ongoing development of civil society toward democracy.

Online Accountability and Social Media

Accountability is a crucial component of deliberative democracy (Williams & Taylor, 2013) and civil society organisations’ legitimacy (Edwards & Hulme, 1996). Online accountability is defined as “the provision of inclusive and transparent organizational practices that serve to demonstrate or enhance accountability on the Web” (Lee & Joseph, 2012, p. 170). With the developments of information technology, especially social media, grassroots organisations have had various tools to disclose organisational information, engage with stakeholders, and address accountability issues.

Before we look at the accountability mechanisms, it is necessary to have a clear definition of social media. Scholars have used different terms such as social media, social networking sites, social media networks to describe the Internet-based information sharing and communication platforms. The terms are used interchangeably or simultaneously (Evers et al., 2013; Kane et al., 2014). Some scholars also argued that social media emphasises the media function of information dissemination and broadcasting, while social network focuses on the ties and connections among individuals, groups, organisations, and societies (Coiera, 2013). For example, Ellison and Boyd (2013) described social networking sites as a distinct type of social media. However, with the rapidly evolving technology with new features, it might be hard to differentiate various types of social media technologies that solely focus on specific types of functions. Therefore, this research uses social

media as a broader concept and focuses on its function in information sharing and as a channel of communication. More importantly, this research focuses on social media's potential to make political communication more accessible and responsive to the public by enhancing public sphere participation.

Information Disclosure

The nonprofit literature emphasises the primary purposes of organisational-level social media use: information dissemination, dialogue, community building, and action (Jansen et al., 2009; Kent et al., 2003; Lovejoy & Saxton, 2012; Saxton & Waters, 2014). Information dissemination refers to the sharing of the organisations' news, updates, and activities so that "people feel connected" (Lewis, Hamel, & Richardson, 2001, p. 18) to the organisation. Information sharing through social media promotes the legitimacy and accountability of grassroots organisations. Studies have documented nonprofits most often leverage social media for one-way communication in the form of disseminating information (Campbell et al., 2014; Lovejoy & Saxton, 2012; Nah & Saxton, 2013; Shi, 2017; Waters & Jamal, 2011). For example, Campbell et al. (2014) find that nonprofit organisations are using social media mostly for marketing and promoting organisational activities and to "remain up to date in the eyes of key constituencies" (p. 659). Scholars have discussed stakeholder engagement as a two-way and relational communication strategy that involves and benefits all parties of interests through improved understandings between organisations and various stakeholders (Heath, 2006). The link between stakeholders and the organisation is essential because it may induce more organisational commitment and cohesiveness (Ohana, Meyer, & Swaton, 2013). However, the research to date has demonstrated nonprofits predominantly use social media to engage in one-way communication, rather than generating dialogue and interaction and fully leveraging social media, given one of social media's main features is its function of generating real-time interaction.

Responsiveness to Stakeholders

Scholars have acknowledged that nonprofit stakeholders are unique because their motivations in the engagement with nonprofit organisations are usually driven by non-economic benefits such as feeling good or pride. Bruce and Shelley (2010) defined stakeholder engagement as "the interaction between an organization and those individuals and groups that are impacted by, or influence, the organization" (p. 30). Literature on strategic management and nonprofit accountability (Ospina, Diaz, & O'Sullivan, 2002; Saxton & Guo, 2011; Saxton, Guo, & Brown, 2007) highlight the need for nonprofit

organisations to strategically communicate with a variety of stakeholders to promote the organisation; to garner continued support, and to identify and assess stakeholder preferences and perspectives. Social media has the potential to increase dialogic communication with stakeholders in a low-cost, public arena and to provide communication platforms for nonprofits to reach large numbers of stakeholders quickly, efficiently, and publicly. With inherent two-way, interactive, communal, and relational features, social media has provided great opportunities for organisations to engage their stakeholders and build long-term relationships with them (Saxton & Waters, 2014; Veldeman, Van Praet, & Mechant, 2017), and to redefine stakeholders' expectations (Manetti et al., 2017).

As Kearns (1996) states, "the range of people and institutions to whom the public and nonprofit organizations must account includes not only higher authorities in the institutional chain of command, but also the general public, the news media, peer agencies, donors and many other stakeholders" (p. 9). Therefore, Kearns (1996) argues that to be responsive to various stakeholders, nonprofit managers must practice "negotiated accountability" whereby they manage accountability expectations from diverse and sometimes conflicting stakeholders. Ospina et al. (2002) take Kearns work to the next level by describing two broad categories of stakeholders: upward pulls and downward pulls. Upward pulls come from stakeholders whom the organisation depends on for resources and support, including board members, major donors, government regulators, and other authorities; downward pulls come from stakeholders who rely on the organisation, including partner organisations, clients, staff, volunteers, and organisational supporters (Ospina et al., 2002). These competing pulls require nonprofit managers to develop different ways to communicate with stakeholders. The challenge for nonprofit organisations is how to enhance communication channels with a diverse set of stakeholders and how to produce targeted social media content for both upward and downward pulls stakeholders. Compared to conventional mechanisms of communication with stakeholders such as face-to-face meetings, phone calls, and newsletters, information technology, and social media, in particular, offer unique opportunities to engage with many different stakeholders simultaneously.

Social Media as a Public Sphere

Habermas' (1974) concept of the public sphere emphasises the social institution encouraging participation of "all citizens" (p. 49) in the process of public opinion formation. The public sphere is a "communication structure that refers neither to the function nor to the contents of everyday communication

but the social space generated in communicative action” (Habermas, 1996, p. 360). In the public sphere, private individuals gather together, discuss public affairs, and achieve consensus. Public participation is emphasised as the core and essential element of a democratic society. Habermas (1974) stressed the role of mass media in the public sphere where “mediated political communication” is thus “carried on by an elite” (Habermas, 2006, p. 416). Due to the one-way and mass-oriented communicative feature of mass media, the public sphere did not encourage broad public participation but rather controlled by “a minority of speakers” (Rasmussen, 2014, p. 1316).

With the proliferation of information technology and social media, the discussion of the public sphere has been expanded from mass media to social media. Discussions have been around whether technologies can create a new environment for democratic institutions that are more participatory and citizen-centric. Chun and Luna Reyes (2012) stated that “social media use in government is considered a technological innovation and a transforming agent in generating citizen engagement from campaigns and grassroots-activism to shared governance promoting democracy” (p. 442). Questions are raised regarding whether social media platforms such as Twitter and Facebook are alternative structures of public spheres by encouraging broader participation.

Several studies have identified the function of information technology and social media to initiate dialogues and interactions between organisations and their constituents and therefore to foster openness, trustworthiness, and. For example, Loader and Mercea (2011) stated that social media is able to revitalise the public sphere by allowing people “to challenge discourses, share alternative perspectives and publish their own opinions” (p. 760).

However, through empirical studies, scholars have also found that social media has not realised its potential as a Habermasian public sphere for deliberation and participation (Bonsón, Torres, Royo, & Flores, 2012; Johannessen, Sæbø, & Flak, 2016; Kruse, Norris, & Flinchum, 2018; McAllister-Spooner & Kent, 2009). These studies have found that communication through social media is not inclusive and equal to all stakeholder groups. For example, Kruse, Norris, and Flinchum (2018) argued that the current discussion of social media to revitalise the public sphere still stays at the theoretical level and that social media is not revitalising the public sphere because of the absence of requisites such as civil and political discourses. Also, Johannessen et al. (2016) found that stakeholders with low power but high urgency to organisations are more likely to communicate and promote their interests through social media than other stakeholders. They argued that only when social media becomes a “true public sphere” and a part of the formal decision-making process, the stakeholders with high power are possible participate in social media communication (p. 233).

Through the above literature, a question remains, beyond the function of information disclosure, whether social media can be an instrument for grassroots organisations to effectively engage with stakeholders, foster an online community, and promote participatory engagement? Especially in countries such as China, online environmental advocacy needs to be understood from a context-specific perspective. More importantly, the proliferation of social media prompts a question of how grassroots organisations establish and maintain relationships with social actors in the digital age. This examination will help to gain a better understanding regarding what extent neoliberalism has been put into practice. It will also help to explore how to facilitate the endeavor of community-based democratic participation, which allows people affected by decisions to engage in the ongoing process of issue framing, planning, decision-making, implementation, and evaluation (Stout, 2018).

Methodology

To address the above question, this research conducted online observation for three selected environmental grassroots organisations. In China, grassroots organisations are “privately operated, bottom-up nonprofits that were established and managed by individuals rather than government agencies” (Lu, Deng, Huang, & Chen, 2018, p. 540). The word grassroots [*caogen*] in Chinese means that the organisations are led by individuals and nongovernmental actors instead of governmental entities. Therefore, even some national-level organisations with much full-time staff, such as Friends of Nature and Shanshui Nature Protection Center, call themselves grassroots organisations (Ma, 2005).

While grassroots organisations defined by Smith (2000) identify the key grassroots organisational criteria of being volunteer-led and staffed, this research includes organisations that have formal or even paid employees. Allowing these kinds of grassroots organisations into the research sample is a choice that aims to illuminate contextual differences between the western theoretical framework and the socio-political context of China. Qualitative research seeks to identify nuanced differences across contexts and to carefully explore a social phenomenon and expand current theoretical understandings of grassroots organisations; thus, the research design needs to be responsive to emerging challenges when examining non-western case studies. Finally, three organisations were selected through purposeful and strategic sampling, Friends of Nature, Green Earth Volunteers, and E. P. Jing. All three cases are bottom-up organisations that are founded and managed by individual citizens rather than governmental entities.

Online observation of these three organisations’ social media activities

was conducted from 1st October to 30 November 2019. The two-month period of time allowed the authors to obtain sufficient information about multiple types of messages and was in line with previous research about social media use by nonprofit organisations (e.g., Saxton & Guo, 2011). The social media platforms included Sina-Weibo, WeChat, and the organisations' websites. Sina-Weibo and WeChat have been the most popular social media platforms in China. Besides the publicly available social media information, the authors contacted the organisations' leaders to ask for permission to join their social media groups. All three Cases have WeChat accounts, while only Friends of Nature and Green Earth Volunteers have websites and Sina-Weibo accounts. The researcher was also able to join several group chats of Friends of Nature and Green Earth Volunteers. The online observation focused on what kind of individuals and organisations the research participants interacted with and what type of content they shared. All organisational information published on Sina-Weibo and WeChat during the two months was downloaded for content analysis. The online observation focused on what kind of individuals and organisations these three organisations interacted with and what type of content was shared.

Data analysis consisted of content analysis based on the data collected from the online observation. Based on Lune and Berg's (2017) suggestion, the data analysis was conducted in three stages: data display to identify the themes and patterns from research participants' responses; data verification to map out the relationship between themes; and final data analysis. Based on the categorical data analysis, this research adopted a critical perspective to analyse how the discourses related to one another or have power over one another to understand the concept of power relations in the organisation better.

Research Findings

Over the past forty years, Chinese society has witnessed the resurgence of civil society and grassroots initiatives in various social aspects, such as environmental protection, education equity, and migrant workers' service. Through online observation, this research finds that social media has enabled these three organisations to increase their visibility through information sharing, to build an active and engaged online discourse community, and to promote individuals and communities' change through awareness-raising and calling for action. Regarding social media as a public sphere, this research finds that the social media activities by environmental grassroots organisations in China mainly focus on environmental education or less politically sensitive activities rather than environmental justice and rights

advocacy. Through the cooperation with the central government to monitor local governments' regulations and local situations, these organisations' civic engagement activities oscillated between incorporation and provocation, constantly testing the state's boundary.

Information Disclosure

As grassroots organisations with very limited social and financial resources, all of these three organisations have relied on low-cost communication technologies to share information regarding the organisations' information, projects, activities, and events. Compared to nonprofit organisations that were operated and affiliated with governmental agencies, these organisations have much more structural, financial, and operational limitations from the governmental regulatory bodies. For example, a lot of grassroots organisations could not afford the cost to build their websites. Therefore, social media have been important platforms for them. Also, since these three organisations were all founded by social elites in China, such as university professors, journalists, and former government officials, they were aware of the usefulness of information technology and social media for the organisations' development. They tried to establish a visible online presence through regular information sharing. For example, Friends of Nature's social media content included the presence of the general director at those events and the board meetings. For example, the protection of the Green Peacock has been the main activity of Friends of Nature in 2019. Its posts on Sina-Weibo shared collaborative activities such as an art exhibition and performance with Beijing Modern Music Institute, domestic foundations, and other nonprofit organisations. Also, the General Director's involvement in the activities was highlighted on their social media platforms. On another main social media platform, the Sina-Weibo account of Friends of Nature had 291,108 followers and 11,591 posts as of November 2019. Within the online observation period, there were 54 posts, which included information about the volunteer recruitment, the organisation's events and activities, such as the event of Green Peacock Protection and environmental public interest litigations, as well as the discussion of current environmental issues. There was one post about the board meeting in November, introducing the work reporting by the general director to the board. Among the posts, stakeholders such as the domestic foundations, the general director, the project teams, the volunteers, and partner organisations were mentioned.

Green Earth Volunteers, which was founded by a famous journalist in China, published weekly news coverage summaries in relation to environmental protection issues and policies and shared the weekly summary through their

WeChat account. All subscribers of their accounts have the access to these weekly summaries. The organisation also publishes its registration information as well as the volunteers' information. E.P.Jing focuses on the community's trash sorting and management in rural communities and organises monthly affairs at a local village. On its WeChat account, the organisation publishes the time and location of the affairs and shares the photos with the audience. During the online observation period, E. P. Jing's WeChat account sent out ten posts, mostly focusing on the village fairs, workshops, and the invited environmental protection experts.

Besides the general discussion on broader topics, two types of information were specifically shared within the group. The first was the information of financial and donation disclosure. The accountant of the Green Earth Volunteers shared the received money donations within the group. Also, the collected clothing and books were distributed to the local communities. The organisation's volunteers took photos when distributing the donations and shared the photos in the group chat. The second type of the content was also from the local communities. The farmers from various places were able to sell their products such as apples and crops through the group chat.

Generally speaking, both the websites and social media platforms have been a place for organisations to store and share archived documents such as the main events, newsletters, and annual reports. As the literature review suggested, information disclosure has been one of the main accountability mechanisms for environmental nonprofit organisations in China. All three organisations have disclosed their financial information through their annual reports, websites, and WeChat, focusing on funders and donors. The information disclosure includes both mandatory disclosure and discretionary disclosure. However, the emphasis on financial performance and organisations' performance demonstrates a neoliberal mechanism of accountability rather than accountability focusing on democratic participation and public empowerment.

Stakeholder Engagement

As scholars have discussed, one of the main features of social media is its two-way communication and online community building. Besides the regular information sharing and disclosure, these organisations have used social media to actively engage with various stakeholders, mainly focusing on individual donors and volunteers. Based on the existing literature of nonprofit stakeholder engagement that categorises upward and downward stakeholders, these organisations have used social media to engage with both the upward and downward stakeholders.

As grassroots organisations, volunteers have been the main workforce for their daily operation, strategic planning, as well as events facilitation. Social media engagement has been an effective strategy for them to mobilise volunteer and community resources. On these organisations' WeChat accounts, the information regarding volunteer recruitment is on the main page. The information includes the volunteer registration form, volunteer events, and volunteers' stories. During the registration, volunteers will be asked whether they would be interested in volunteer training. Currently, Friends of Nature has 30 volunteers' stories on its WeChat account. The volunteers from various industries, including teachers, journalists, financial businesses, artists, and lawyers, became active volunteers of this organisation, dedicating to environmental protection. Volunteers are also able to post their own stories on the organisation's public WeChat account.

Besides engagement information for the general public, these organisations also use social media for internal communication through group chats. The group members with the same interests were able to exchange and share information on a closed platform. For example, Friends of Nature has a group chat just open to journalists and the organisation's staff. The purpose of this group chat is to make close connections with media for publicising and marketing. Also, Green Earth Volunteers engages with its donors through group chat. Its accountant shared the received money donations within the group chat. Also, when the organisation distributed collected clothing and books to local communities, the leader and volunteers took photos of the kids who received the donation in the group chat. The organisation's leader explained that it is an effective way to satisfy the donors when they could see the happy faces of the kids in rural and remote communities through social media. All the group chats have remained a relatively active discussion among members. Members were able to share and receive the information they were interested in. Although most of the content was not directly related to the organisations themselves, the group chats provided equal opportunities for the members to communicate with each other.

Environmental Policy Advocacy

In the context of China, on the one hand, the Chinese government is placing tight control on civil society; on the other hand, because of the deteriorating environmental issues, the Chinese government has recognised the value of nonprofit organisations in environmental protection and released a series of favorable policies regarding environmental nonprofit organisations. For example, the Environmental Law was amended by the National People's Congress, which is China's legislature, in 2014. The law allows for nonprofit

organisations to be the complainants of public interest litigations. During the observation period, Friends of Nature had several Sina-Weibo posts were about the success of an environmental litigation case and the accepted cases of several environmental litigations.

Although these organisations are all grassroots organisations with no affiliations with the government, they have been actively advocated for policy changes and social changes in the area of environmental protection. Regarding all the three organisations' missions, all of them mentioned policy advocacy. Green Earth Volunteers has launched several ten-year campaigns, focusing on the environmental issues and local governments' misconduct in remote and rural areas. These campaigns demonstrated that environmental grassroots organisations are able to effectively participate in policy advocacy in the authoritarian regime of China. Through social media activities, they were able to collect public opinions on environmental issues, provide channels for the public to directly participate in environmental policymaking, and enhance relationships with other organisations and policy-makers. For E. P. Jing that focuses on a trash sorting system in rural communities, it has successfully established collaborative relationships with the local government and local community. In its WeChat account, there were a lot of stories about the local businesses which have participated in the village fair, including local restaurants, artistry and craft stores, and thrift stores. Through the sharing, the organisation was able to demonstrate its contribution to the local community as well as to encourage more participation. The texts and photos provided vivid examples regarding the participants' experiences of Case 3's activities and environmental protection practices. Because of the advocacy of this organisation, the local village was the first village in the city of Beijing that adopted a systematic trash sorting system, and later became an exemplar case recognised and promoted by the Chinese government at the national level.

In summary, social media platforms have been a place for organisations to store and share archived documents such as the main events, newsletters, and annual reports. The social media platforms that were open for the general public lacked engagement activities. For example, the Sina-Weibo posts of both Friends of Nature and the Green Earth Volunteers had very low numbers of retweets, comments, and likes, especially when comparing with the alleged large number of volunteers by these two organisations. Also, the reading times of the WeChat subscription accounts of these three organisations were not very high. In contrast, the WeChat group chats have been more engaged platforms for the members to communicate and share information. With increased engagement by environmental civil society organisations, the environmental governance and policy-making process is becoming more

open. Therefore, the development of civil society and democracy relies on the ability of civil society organisations to negotiate with the party-state entities and to mobilise citizen participation.

Discussion and Conclusion

In China, civic engagement is confronting a paradox situation because of the different attitudes toward civic engagement. With the governmental acknowledgment of the importance of nonprofit organisations, civic engagement exists in various aspects of social life and policy-making processes (Fu & Lin, 2014; Wu, Li, Liu, Huang, & Liu, 2019). Social media provide opportunities for environmental nonprofit organisations to gather and disseminate information, mobilise online conversations, and discuss public events (Dong et al., 2017). More importantly, the practices identified by this research demonstrates that the examination of civil society is necessary to explore the “toleration, respect, cooperation, and interest in the common good, autonomy, communicative and deliberative competence, knowledge, industriousness, public-spiritedness,” and governmental effectiveness that are attained through civic engagement (Chambers & Kopstein, 2001, p. 854). It needs to take into account how the nation-state and institutions create “an accessible and efficacious public sphere” based on a broader perspective of social equity and political and socioeconomic context (Chambers & Kopstein, 2001, p. 857).

Echoing the existing literature, this research finds that social media has been a powerful tool for environmental grassroots organisations to address limited resource issues and to promote their organisations’ legitimacy, accountability, and advocacy work. Although the Chinese government has launched strict control and censorship on both grassroots organisations and social media platforms, there is still space for these organisations to solicit and represent public opinions and to urge the communities and individuals’ behavioral change for environmental protection. Through their social media engagement activities, these organisations were able to bridge the gap between the policy-makers and the local communities in remote and countryside areas of China. Their social media activities also encouraged and motivated individual donors and volunteers to join the online discourse communities and to promote social changes.

There are several implications of this research. First, for scholars of neoliberalism and civil society, this research will offer a better understanding regarding what extent neoliberalism has been put into practice in the authoritarian regime of China, as well as the relationship between neoliberalism and civil society within various contexts. Second,

from a contextual and institutional perspective, it is helpful to understand the grassroots organisations and their activities to educate citizens, promote environmental justice, and influence environmental policymaking. For practitioners, they need to understand the organisations' accountability and their role in civil society. Third, the case studies will explore the possibility of collaboration between grassroots organisations and other social actions such as governmental and private sectors as well as cross-country collaboration to address the environmental issues globally.

There will be two directions for further research. First, grassroots organisations include both service organisations and advocacy organisations. Although the challenge remains regarding sufficient data collection of some specific types of organisations in different countries, the qualitative approach will be necessary to collect intensive and detailed data case by case, to accumulate our knowledge of the whole landscape of grassroots organisations in different countries. Second, in order to map the global phenomenon of grassroots organisation development, cross-country comparison of the social construction of accountability, and the extent to promote participatory democracy by civil society organisations, the research can be expanded to more countries that represent different types of civil society regimes.

Nonprofit stakeholder theories emphasise that nonprofit organisations' accountability and effectiveness are closely related to the assessment and perceptions of different and often diverse stakeholders. To maintain their legitimacy and accountability toward the central government, the three organisations have formulated their statements of visions, missions, and values to respond to the government's needs. Currently, many nonprofit organisations still see social media as a supplemental part of their communicative strategy. Most nonprofits use social media to get the word out or to let more people know who they are and what they are doing, instead of using social media as an active channel for stakeholder engagement. This paper argues that the potential of social media as a public sphere can only be realised based upon the broad understanding of nonprofits' power relations with other social actors, taking into account social, cultural, and political influence.

More than 10 years ago, G. Yang and Calhoun (2007) discussed the rising of a green public sphere in China, which was composed of non-state actors such as citizens, environmental organisations, and various platforms of media and information technology. Indeed, environmental nonprofit organisations such as Friends of Nature and Green Earth Volunteers have played a critical role in the construction of a green public sphere. The environmental nonprofit organisations in China have extensively used various platforms and channels, including traditional media, websites, social media, publications, workshops, exhibits, and salons, to establish and expand networks, create discourses,

foster discussions, and attract public attention to specific environmental issues. During this process, social media can play an important role to create channels and platforms for public dialogue with the policymakers and other opportunities for policy and social changes.

References

- Bonsón, E., Torres, L., Royo, S., & Flores, F. (2012). Local e-government 2.0: Social media and corporate transparency in municipalities. *Government Information Quarterly*, 29(2), 123–132.
- Bothwell, R. O. (2002). Foundation funding of grassroots organizations. *International Journal of Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Marketing*, 7(4), 382–392.
- Bruce, P., & Shelley, R. (2010). Assessing stakeholder engagement. *Communication Journal of New Zealand*, 11(2), 30–48.
- Campbell, D. A., Lambright, K. T., & Wells, C. J. (2014). Looking for friends, fans, and followers? Social media use in public and nonprofit human services. *Public Administration Review*, 74(5), 655–663.
- Chun, S. A., & Luna Reyes, L. F. (2012). Social media in government. *Government Information Quarterly*, 29(4), 441–445.
- Coiera, E. (2013). Social networks, social media, and social diseases. *BMJ*, 346, f3007. <https://doi.org/10.1136/bmj.f3007>
- Curtis, L., Edwards, C., Fraser, K. L., Gudelsky, S., Holmquist, J., Thornton, K., & Sweetser, K. D. (2010). Adoption of social media for public relations by nonprofit organizations. *Public Relations Review*, 36(1), 90–92.
- Dainelli, F., Manetti, G., & Sibilio, B. (2013). Web-based accountability practices in non-profit organizations: The case of national museums. *Voluntas: International Journal of Voluntary & Nonprofit Organizations*, 24(3), 649–665.
- Dong, T., Liang, C., & He, X. (2017). Social media and internet public events. *Telematics and Informatics*, 34(3), 726–739.
- Dumont, G. E. (2013). Transparency or accountability? The purpose of online technologies for nonprofits. *International Review of Public Administration*, 18(3), 7–30.
- Ellison, N. B., & Boyd, D. (2013). Sociality through social network sites. In W. H. Dutton (Ed.), *The Oxford Handbook of Internet Studies* (pp. 151–172). Oxford University Press.
- Evers, C. W., Albury, K., Byron, P., & Crawford, K. (2013). Young people, social media, social network sites and sexual health communication in Australia: “This is funny, you should watch it.” *International Journal of Communication*, 7(1), 263–280.
- Glover, T. D. (2004). Narrative inquiry and the study of grassroots associations. *Voluntas: International Journal of Voluntary and Nonprofit Organizations*, 15(1), 47–69.
- Guo, C., & Saxton, G. D. (2014). Tweeting social change: How social media are changing nonprofit advocacy. *Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Quarterly*, 43(1), 57–79.

- Habermas, J. (1974). The public sphere: An encyclopedia article (1964). *New German Critique*, 3, 49–55.
- Habermas, J. (1996). *Between facts and norms: Contributions to a discourse theory of law and democracy*. John Wiley & Sons.
- Habermas, J. (2006). Political communication in media society: Does democracy still enjoy an epistemic dimension? The impact of normative theory on empirical research. *Communication Theory*, 16(4), 411–426.
- Heath, R. L. (2006). Onward into more fog: Thoughts on public relations' research directions. *Journal of Public Relations Research*, 18(2), 93–114.
- Jansen, B. J., Zhang, M., Sobel, K., & Chowdury, A. (2009). Twitter power: Tweets as electronic word of mouth. *Journal of the American Society for Information Science and Technology*, 60(11), 2169–2188.
- Johannessen, M. R., Sæbø, Ø., & Flak, L. S. (2016). Social media as public sphere: a stakeholder perspective. *Transforming Government: People, Process and Policy; Bradford*, 10(2), 212–238.
- Kane, G. C., Alavi, M., Labianca, G., & Borgatti, S. P. (2014). What's different about social media networks? A framework and research agenda. *MIS Quarterly*, 38(1), 275–304.
- Kearns, K. P. (1996). *Managing for accountability: Preserving the public trust in public and nonprofit organizations*. Wiley.
- Kent, M. L., Taylor, M., & White, W. J. (2003). The relationship between Web site design and organizational responsiveness to stakeholders. *Public Relations Review*, 29(1), 63–77.
- Kim, D., Chun, H., Kwak, Y., & Nam, Y. (2014). The employment of dialogic principles in website, Facebook, and Twitter platforms of environmental nonprofit organizations. *Social Science Computer Review*, 32(5), 590–605.
- Kruse, L. M., Norris, D. R., & Flinchum, J. R. (2018). Social media as a public sphere? Politics on social media. *The Sociological Quarterly*, 59(1), 62–84.
- Lee, R. L., & Joseph, R. C. (2012). Survival of the fittest: Online accountability in complex organizational populations. Presented at the Proceedings of the Southern Association for Information Systems Conference, Atlanta, GA.
- Lewis, L. K., Hamel, S. A., & Richardson, B. K. (2001). Communicating change to nonprofit stakeholders. *Management Communication Quarterly*, 15(1), 5–41.
- Loader, B. D., & Mercea, D. (2011). Networking democracy? Social media innovations and participatory politics. *Information, Communication & Society*, 14(6), 757–769.
- Lovejoy, K., & Saxton, G. D. (2012). Information, community, and action: How nonprofit organizations use social media. *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication*, 17(3), 337–353.
- Lu, S., Deng, G., Huang, C.-C., & Chen, M. (2018). External environmental change and transparency in grassroots organizations in China. *Nonprofit Management and Leadership*, 28(4), 539–552.
- Lune, H., & Berg, B. L. (2017). *Qualitative research methods for the social sciences* (9th edition). Pearson.

- Ma, Q. (2005). *Non-governmental organizations in contemporary China: Paving the way to civil society?* Routledge.
- Manetti, G., Bellucci, M., & Bagnoli, L. (2017). Stakeholder engagement and public information through social media: A study of Canadian and American public transportation agencies. *The American Review of Public Administration, 47*(8), 991–1009.
- Maxwell, S. P., & Carboni, J. L. (2016). Social media management: Exploring Facebook engagement among high-asset foundations. *Nonprofit Management & Leadership, 27*(2), 251–260.
- McAllister-Spooner, S. M., & Kent, M. L. (2009). Dialogic public relations and resource dependency: New Jersey community colleges as models for web site effectiveness. *Atlantic Journal of Communication, 17*(4), 220–239.
- Nah, S., & Saxton, G. D. (2013). Modeling the adoption and use of social media by nonprofit organizations. *New Media & Society, 15*(2), 294–313.
- Nygreen, K. (2017). Negotiating tensions: Grassroots organizing, school reform, and the paradox of neoliberal democracy. *Anthropology & Education Quarterly, 48*(1), 42–60.
- Ohana, M., Meyer, M., & Swaton, S. (2013). Decision-making in social enterprises: Exploring the link between employee participation and organizational commitment. *Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Quarterly, 42*(6), 1092–1110.
- Ospina, S., Diaz, W., & O’Sullivan, J. F. (2002). Negotiating accountability: Managerial lessons from identity-based nonprofit organizations. *Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Quarterly, 31*(1), 5–31.
- Ramanadhan, S., Mendez, S. R., Rao, M., & Viswanath, K. (2013). Social media use by community-based organizations conducting health promotion: a content analysis. *BMC Public Health, 13*(1), 2–10. doi:10.1186/1471-2458-13-1129
- Ranchordás, S. (2017). Digital agoras: democratic legitimacy, online participation and the case of Uber-petitions. *Theory & Practice of Legislation, 5*(1), 31–54.
- Rasmussen, T. (2014). Internet and the political public sphere. *Sociology Compass, 8*(12), 1315–1329.
- Roelofs, J. (1987). Foundations and social change organizations: The mask of pluralism. *Insurgent Sociologist, 14*(3), 31–72.
- Saxton, G. D., Guo, S. C., & Brown, W. A. (2007). New dimensions of nonprofit responsiveness: The application and promise of Internet-based technologies. *Public Performance & Management Review, 31*(2), 144–173.
- Saxton, G. D., & Guo, C. (2011). Accountability online: Understanding the web-based accountability practices of nonprofit organizations. *Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Quarterly, 40*(2), 270–295.
- Saxton, G. D., & Waters, R. D. (2014). What do stakeholders like on Facebook? Examining public reactions to nonprofit organizations’ informational, promotional, and community-building messages. *Journal of Public Relations Research, 26*(3), 280–299.

- Shi, W. (2017). Social media and stakeholders' relationship in nonprofit organizations. Unpublished Doctoral Dissertation, University of Central Florida. <https://stars.library.ucf.edu/etd/5417/>
- Shieh, S. (2017). Same bed, different dreams? The divergent pathways of foundations and grassroots NGOs in China. *VOLUNTAS: International Journal of Voluntary and Nonprofit Organizations*, 28(4), 1785–1811.
- Slatten, L. A. D., Guidry Hollier, B. N., Stevens, D. P., Austin, W., & Carson, P. P. (2016). Web-based accountability in the nonprofit sector: A closer look at arts, culture, and humanities organizations. *Journal of Arts Management, Law & Society*, 46(5), 213–230.
- Smith, D. H. (2000). *Grassroots associations*. SAGE.
- Stout, M. (2018). Pursuing community change through radically democratic practice. In A. M. Eikenberry, R. M. Mirabella, & B. Sandberg (Eds.), *Reframing nonprofit organizations: Democracy, inclusion, and social change* (pp. 106–123). Melvin & Leigh.
- Sun, R., & Asencio, H. D. (2018). Using social media to increase nonprofit organizational capacity. *International Journal of Public Administration*, 42(5), 392–404. doi:10.1080/01900692.2018.1465955
- Veldeman, C., Van Praet, E., & Mechant, P. (2017). Social media adoption in business-to-business: IT and industrial companies compared. *International Journal of Business Communication*, 54(3), 283–305.
- Waters, R. D., & Jamal, J. Y. (2011). Tweet, tweet, tweet: A content analysis of nonprofit organizations' Twitter updates. *Public Relations Review*, 37(3), 321–324.
- Waters, R. D., & Lo, K. D. (2012). Exploring the impact of culture in the social media sphere: A content analysis of nonprofit organizations' use of Facebook. *Journal of Intercultural Communication Research*, 41(3), 297–319.
- Wright, S. (2016). 'Success' and online political participation: The case of Downing Street E-petitions. *Information, Communication & Society*, 19(6), 843–857.
- Yang, G., & Calhoun, C. (2007). Media, civil society, and the rise of a green public sphere in China. *China Information*, 21(2), 211–236.
- Zhou, H., & Han, L. E. (2018). Striving to be pure: Constructing the idea of grassroots philanthropy in Chinese cyberspace. *VOLUNTAS: International Journal of Voluntary and Nonprofit Organizations*.
- Zhou, H., & Pan, Q. (2016). Information, community, and action on Sina-Weibo: How Chinese philanthropic NGOs use social media. *VOLUNTAS: International Journal of Voluntary and Nonprofit Organizations*, 27(5), 2433–2457.