KOM Public Seminars

LUND UNIVERSITY | DEPARTMENT OF COMMUNICATION AND MEDIA
SPRING 2019
# KOM Public Seminars

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Under the blue lights:  
The rise of the culture of microcelebrity

JANUARY 23 | 1-3 PM | SOL CENTRE A214 | GUEST RESEARCH SEMINAR

Social media have opened up way for two trends in celebrity culture: celebrities from ‘traditional’ spheres embraced social media to create direct relationships with audiences; and ordinary users have conquered visibility deploying microcelebrity, who are increasingly acknowledged as social media influencers (Jerslev & Mortensen, 2018). Celebrities and influencers use blogs and vlogs, in combination with other social media, to narrate their everyday lives in order to create an authentic persona to their audiences (Senft, 2013; Abidin, 2015), which is seen as part of self-branding inherent to neoliberalist culture (Khamis, Ang, & Welling, 2017). Social media have attracted cultural producers without contesting the inequality of the wider postfordist economy, while their functioning within an attention economy continued and accentuated the emotional labor necessary to attract and maintain audiences that was known to celebrity culture (Duffy, 2015).

In order to reflect on the role of the rise of social media influencers among youth culture in (post)austerity, I will present the analysis of the case of a Portuguese telecommunication company – WTF – use of brand ambassadors among a first generation of teenage vloggers. I explore the celebrification process (Turner, 2010) the young vloggers went through, looking at the discursive aspects involved in their creation of personae as authentic, ordinary and close to young audiences, yet - in different ways - extraordinary and attention-worthy young people. Moreover, I examine the ways in which microcelebrity logic worked to promote the sponsor telecom and cultural industries’ products to the young audiences. Furthermore, I critically discuss the myth of the do-it-yourself (DIY) celebrity inherent to YouTube (Burgess & Green, 2009) and the particular model of participation in youth digital culture promoted by WTF’s partnership with the young youtubers, and the role played by these ambassadors in a wider celebritization process (Driessens, 2012; Jerslev, 2016), whereby young users are invited to attempt their microcelebrity as well, although most internet users are not producers of content.

Ana Jorge is Assistant Professor at the Catholic University of Portugal and a researcher at CECC (Communication and Culture Research Centre). She holds a PhD in Communication Sciences from University NOVA of Lisbon (2012), with a dissertation on Young audiences of celebrity culture, and conducted postdoctoral research on Media education (2013-15). She has studied different aspects of the relationship between children, youth and media: as media audiences, as objects of representation in the media, and as content producers. She has participated in international research networks on audience studies and digital literacy: COST IS0906 Transforming Audiences, Transforming Societies (2010-14), Media Literacy Policies (2013-14), AHRC Consortium on Emerging Directions in Audience Research (2014-17), and currently COST IS1410 DigiLitEY and IS1401 European Literacy Network; and in international and national projects on the use and production of digital media by children and young people EU Kids Online, RadioActive101.
Engaging with gamification?
Persuasive technologies meet media studies

Gamification, widely defined as the use of game thinking and game design techniques in non-gaming contexts has been widely implemented in digital services as an attempt to attract and increase user engagement. This type of persuasive technology focuses on tracking, quantifying, and individualizing behavior, placing the user at the center of the experience by providing tools for self-reflection, and exploiting the motivational aspects of games to drive action.

The idealistic reasoning behind the application of gamification in web-based systems or mobile apps is to enhance engagement, grant choices, reaffirm progression, and provoke social habit. The gamification of everything trend, as advocated by several champions is often proposed as the panacea that is meant to solve engagement problems in all fronts. This rhetoric is often accompanied by a celebratory, over-optimistic vibes. However, several voices have started to offer a more critical look into gamification in terms of surveillance, free labor, and control. Organizations, by coupling their activities with playful rhetoric aim to justify and legitimize certain expected behaviors.

In this talk I present a study addressing four ways in which news organizations have incorporated gamification in their news organizations. Through an assessment of the game-system deployed and 56 interviews with journalists from The Guardian, Bleacher Report, Times of India, and Al Jazeera, I discuss how the institutional logics of journalism and gamification convergence in four different types of gamified journalism.

Raul Ferrer-Conill is a lecturer and researcher in media and communications at Karlstad University. His doctoral dissertation investigated the use of gamification in digital news production. His research interests cover journalism, digital forms of engagement, and processes of datafication. He has published his work in journals such as Television and New Media, Journalism Studies, and Digital Journalism.

Photo: Fredrik Miegel
In the weeks surrounding Netflix’s landing in the Italian market, many different media outlets have presented the new platform as a revolution, a game-changer, a threat for established broadcasters. After a long wait, with an hype increased and multiplied by the news coming from the US, the arrival in other European markets and the strength of the first branded productions, since October 22, 2015, also the Italian television audience has been able to access to Netflix’s rich library and original series. On the one hand, Netflix collected the results of its effort to establish and increase a long-term promotional discourse in the destination country. On the other one, however, at the same time Netflix’s late arrival was inserted into an already rich complex media scenario, in constant transformation. A rhetoric of revolution and disintermediation was carefully constructed in the exact moment a powerful global intermediary figure was entering the Italian market, hiding its (future, planned) gatekeeping role.

Mainly adopting a media industries and production studies approach, the lecture reconstructs Netflix’s arrival in the Italian media scenario, focusing both on the promotional discourse and its rhetoric and on the technical and industrial challenges for the service. It intends to give a more deep and complex view of the Netflix phenomenon in the Italian media and television system, highlighting the hype and praise, while also revealing how such expectations has constituted a big challenge and a risk for the service. It will reconstruct the first steps of the service in Italy, including the main promotional campaigns and the first original productions, and compare it with the different path taken by its competitor Amazon Prime Video. And it will show how, in more than three years of presence in the country, the promotional rhetoric established right from the beginning constitutes both a strength and a contradictory constraint.

Luca Barra is senior assistant professor at Università di Bologna, where he teaches Radio and Television History and Digital Media. His research mainly focuses on television production and distribution cultures, comedy and humour TV genres, the international circulation of media products (and their national mediations), the history of Italian television, and the evolution of the contemporary media landscape. He is the author of the books Palinsesto (Laterza, Roma-Bari 2015) and Risate in scatola (Vita e Pensiero, Milan 2012), co-editor of Taboo Comedy (with C. Bucaria, Palgrave, Basingstoke 2015), Backstage (with T. Bonini and S. Splendore, Unicopli, Milan 2015) and Tutta un’altra fiction (with M. Scaglioni, Carocci, Roma 2013), and has written several essays in edited volumes and journals. He is an editorial consultant for Italian TV studies journal Link. Idee per la televisione and the co-editor of the TV studies book collection “SuperTele” published by minimum fax.
The Talent Industry:
Television, Cultural Intermediaries and New Digital Pathways

MARCH 13 | 2-4 PM | SOL CENTRE H140 | GUEST RESEARCH SEMINAR

The concept of ‘talent’ has emerged within creative industry policy discussions as central to unlocking economic success within the creative economy. This seminar will explore how digital multiplatform delivery is affecting the role performed by cultural intermediaries responsible for talent identification and development such as broadcasters, commissioning editors, producers, platform operators, programme-makers, talent agencies and public relations firms and whether the process of digitization can offer new pathways to capture and nurture a diverse talent base within the UK television industry.

This talk will examine:

How has the term ‘talent’ has historically been interpreted and understood across comparative fields, such as light entertainment and news and current affairs within the UK television industry by the BBC and commercial PSB’s such as ITV and Channel 4?

Who are the traditional gatekeepers of talent in television and what role are cultural intermediaries, such broadcasters, commissioning editors, producers, platform operators, programme-makers, talent agencies and public relations firms playing in managing and promoting both contemporary on and off-screen talent?

To what extent has the transition to a digital media environment diminished entry barriers, reshaped frameworks of support for emerging talent, and created new pathways that overcome earlier blockages which may have affected the development of talent?

How have recent transformative changes in the technology of television distribution affected the role played by cultural intermediaries in developing, managing, promoting and valuing talent?

Raymond Boyle is Professor of Communications at the Centre for Cultural Policy Research at the University of Glasgow.

Recent research projects have included a study of the UK television industry, the UK Film Council; media rights and sport and a study of sports journalism and social media usage. His new book looking at talent agents and the UK television industry, The Talent Industry: Television, Cultural Intermediaries and New Digital Pathways, was published by Palgrave in September 2018. He sits on the Editorial Board of Media, Culture and Society and since January 2018 has been Co-Managing Editor of the Journal.

His profile across academic, funded research and consultancy includes work within the broad areas of cultural and media policy. He has developed an international reputation for media and sport research, which has included work on various aspects related to media policy (such as the relationship between new media and sports content) as well as the relationship between sport and its wider cultural and economic impact on society. He has acted as an academic advisor to the Department of Business Innovation and Skills (BIS) on media and entrepreneurship issues and with the Department of Children, Schools and Families/DCMS. He has been involved in various research and consultancy projects around media issues. He is currently working with the European governing body of football, UEFA and the University of Lausanne in the delivery of their Certificate in Football Management (CFM).
Mixed modes of storytelling abound in the contemporary media landscape. There are mixed genres, such as political comedy or docudrama, that mine the generic elements of information and entertainment to create storytelling based on real events. There are mixed modes of production and distribution, such as webisodes, or cross media content in scripted reality, attracting audiences from dispersed sites of reception. And there are the inter-generic spaces of media content, such as crime documentaries or podcasts, that draw upon the real world spaces of true life, the dramatised spaces of reconstructions, and the created for media spaces of studios, social media and live events. The inter-generic spaces of media signal the various pathways to engagement and disengagement with factual and fictional content, and the practices of audiences, users and producers as they criss-cross the media landscape. This international symposium critically examines media mixing, addressing both mixed modes of storytelling across genre and representation, transmedia narrative and aesthetics, and mixed modes of production, distribution and reception in the media landscape.

We invited contributions to this symposium on media mixing that address the theme from empirical and theoretical perspectives. The symposium seeks to debate the mixing of generic content within information and entertainment, and how this is connected to dispersed sites of production, distribution and reception contexts. Contributions ought to address the following areas of enquiry: media and democracy, news, fake news and political engagement, social activism, mimetic and visual cultures, cultural citizenship and popular culture, genre and representation, transmedia storytelling, media assemblage, media audiences, media and creative industries, distribution and piracy, amateur media, amongst other areas of inquiry.

The research questions include:

How can we critically examine mixed modes of storytelling across news, radio and television, film, digital and social media?

In what ways can we understand the inter-generic spaces of content in the contemporary media landscape?

How can we research the opportunities and challenges of mixed modes of media production, distribution and reception?

Different approaches to research on media mixing can include media, communication and cultural studies, political communication, sociology and anthropology, cultural geography, media history, film studies, memory studies, amongst others.

Confirmed speakers include Simon Dawes (Université de Versailles Saint-Quentin-en-Yvelines, France) Joke Hermes (InHolland University, Netherlands), Annette Hill (Lund University, Sweden), Kristian Mller (IT University, Denmark), Anna Reading (King’s College London, UK), Jane Roscoe (University of West of England, UK).

For further information please consult our website www.kom.lu.se/en/research/mkv/.
For inquiries to join the symposium, please contact mediamixing@kom.lu.se
There is a registration fee of 800 SEK (85 Euros) that covers food and drink for the day and an evening buffet.
Celebrity, Capital and the Cultural Industries

APRIL 3 | 1-3 PM | SOL CENTRE L207 | GUEST RESEARCH SEMINAR

The phenomenon of celebrity, for all of its complexity, contradictions, categories, and modes of engagement, is fundamentally economic and promotional, shaped by the conditions of capitalist modernity. It has been essential to the growth of the cultural industries from their inception and it has gone hand-in-hand with the industrialisation of the media. Celebrity has an almost unique ability to fuse aesthetic concerns to economic ones, and for this reason has been a vital element in the business models of organisations across the gamut of the cultural industries.

This paper will argue that celebrity expands and develops for economic reasons, not as a result of audience demand, or because of the rise of ‘democratainment’ as is often claimed. From the end of the 19th century to the present day, celebrity content has tended to grow and spread at specific moments when certain conditions prevail – an increased in the commercialisation of culture, the rise of new technologies that destabilise old business models, and the growth and expansion of competition. This paper will suggest that these conditions shaped the arrival of the internet in the late 1990s and early 2000s and are important to understanding the huge rise in celebrity content at this time. The growth of celebrity content online has only accelerated in the first two decades of the 21st century, with its core promotional function to the fore – it is a central structural force in social media, vlogging, online news etc. This paper will consider how the ‘technologies of freedom’ have become the technologies of promotional culture and will ask questions about the wider consequences for contemporary culture and society.
The Mahatma and the Media:
M.K. Gandhi, Empire and the Art of Political Communication

April 10 | 1-3 PM | Sol Centre A214 | Guest Research Seminar

M.K. Gandhi, the political icon, is arguably the most recognisable Indian export of the modern age. The computer giant Apple recently featured him in its ‘Dare to be Different’ global advertising campaign! Marking the 150th anniversary of his birth in 2019 (October), my lecture will assess the development of Gandhi’s relationship with and use of the media in a variety of international as well as domestic contexts. The talk will highlight both the medium and the message and consider the role of the press, news agencies and radio broadcasting. Gandhi’s public communication strategies will be analysed to help understand the nature of political influence in the mediated environment of the twentieth century and to reflect on what lessons this might hold for our current age.

Dr Chandrika Kaul is Reader in Modern History at the University of St Andrews, Scotland. With a doctorate from the University of Oxford, Dr Kaul is founding co-editor of the book series, Palgrave Studies in the History of the Media. Her monographs include Reporting the Raj, the British Press and India (2003) and Communications, Media and the Imperial Experience: Britain and India in the Twentieth Century. (2014/2017) She has edited or co-edited several books including Media and the British Empire; Exploitations in Modern Indian History and the Media; International Communications and Global News Networks: Historical Perspectives; News of the World and the British Press 1843–2011; and Media and the Portuguese Empire.

The digital research process

24 April | 1-3 PM | Sol Centre A214 | Guest Research Seminar

Software process data differently than scholars in the humanities are used to. Detailed interpretations of individual cases are often replaced by large-scale data modelling, favouring predictions (and what-questions) rather than traditional analysis (and why-questions). This is something to be critical towards – and something to embrace. Digital research methods can be experimental and creative and usually works fine in combination with qualitative close readings. You learn a lot about your data set just from tinkering with the algorithms. In this presentation, I will talk about my own experiences from a few digital projects. In what ways are digital research processes different? What are the difficulties and possibilities?

Johan Jarbrink is associate professor in media history and senior lecturer in media and communication studies at Umeå University. In previous projects, he has explored issues in media history based on digital text analysis. He is also part of Welfare State Analytics, a digital project soon to be launched, focused on media, politics and culture in Sweden, 1945–89.

Photo: Fredrik Miegel
Nostalgia is a complex mood, able to activate starting from specific and well-defined signs anchored in the past, as well as from situations, smells, ways of doing working as a time simulacrum that no longer exists. Its evocative (and melancholic) and - at the same time - projective (and sometimes optimistic) power, is increasingly used in media productions (Loock 2017; Tsapovsky and Frosh 2015; Garner 2016).

In this proposal I will deal particularly with some recent TV series where nostalgic aspects seem to prevail. Mad Men (AMC, 2007 - 2015), The Americans (FX, 2013 -), Stranger Things (Netflix, 2016 -) and also 13 Reasons Why (Netflix, 2017 -) tell in several ways stories that designate nostalgia as an important point of reference. These narratives address a past which is represented and staged, through such dynamics and production aspects affecting the emotional effects caused in the audience. These are texts whose stylistic features must be included in Jason Mittell’s (2015) “complex” television production: something capable of enclosing, in a single whole, many variations of seriality not granted by a traditional format. Several elements linked to nostalgia appear in those texts: in the details shown on the stage, and generally in a context which is formed by a kind of past constantly winking at the present.

My study will develop in two directions: first, assuming the textual analysis of the series that make up our reference corpus. Each of them is concerned on nostalgia, but in a singular way, keeping historical periods more or less close, anchoring the idea of the past to objects, clothes, relational dynamics, but also to musical pieces, events, characters referring to specific “cultural biographies” (Kopitoff 1986). Objects and contexts speak about the taste regimes too. They are used in the television representations as precise nostalgic interpretations concerning sedimented meanings over time, used both retrospectively and with an eye towards the present and the future (Appadurai 1996). The narration focuses on settings and details deposited in the collective memory, calling into question tropes and shared cultural figures. Nostalgia is therefore used in a creative way, adding to the text a series of enhancements affecting the discourses of the audience.

The second part of my analysis takes into account some online environments inhabited by the audiences. Starting from forums, to Facebook and Instagram pages, various are the spaces where the audiences express their affection to the TV series and the nostalgic aspects there existing. These environments are observed through ethnographic techniques and analyzed with qualitative methodologies (Hine 2015). Television narratives in many cases determine a feeling of nostalgia working as a mechanism to talk about themselves and to reaffirm their sense of belonging to a generation, real or imaginary community (Boym 2001).

In this context, nostalgic longing is often defined by the original object of desire, and by its spatial and temporal displacement. We are interested in investigating the way nostalgia passing through television narratives, affects the interpretations of personal stories, past and present of the audience. And how much the world represented on the screen compose a credible imaginary - or far - from reality.
Images-substitutes and visual fake history: Historical images of atrocity of the Ukrainian famine 1932-1933 on social media

This paper is concerned with how pre-Internet historical images of atrocity are used on social media in the era of post-truth, fake news, and right-wing ideologies. Combining scholarship in cultural sociology, media studies and communication, and history, two concepts are introduced – image-substitute and visual fake history. Image-substitute is an image of a historical event from a particular period of time and place which is used to represent a tragedy from a different decade and geographical location. Visual fake history is a misrepresentation of past events through reliance on historical images as images-substitutes and accompanying them right-wing narratives within social media logic. These concepts are developed empirically on images representing the Ukrainian famine of 1932-1933 circulated on Instagram under #holodomor between 2012–2018. It is shown that the Ukrainian famine was visualised through images of Soviet and South Asian famines and Holocaust which were embedded in anti-communist and anti-Semitic narratives.

Ekaterina Zhukova is a postdoctoral researcher (2018-2020) in a research project “Images of Conflict, Conflicting Images” at the Department of Media, Cognition, and Communication, University of Copenhagen. She looks at how images from historical events shape visual representation of contemporary conflicts and how, in turn, digital images produced today change our knowledge about the past. She holds PhD in Political Science from Aarhus University (2012-2015) where she focused on conflicting media representations of responsibility for managing the aftermath of a nuclear disaster. She was also a postdoctoral researcher in Gender Studies at Lund University (2017-2018) where she investigated the role of gender in humanitarian programmes for disaster survivors.

Photo: Zaki Habibi
The KOM seminar series is an international and multidisciplinary forum for research in the Communication and Media Department at Lund University. The seminar series features scholars from within the University and around the world, presenting academic research in the social sciences and humanities.

Our aim is to share ideas and dialogue on the theories and practices of communication and media, including journalism studies, media and communication studies, media history, and rhetoric.

For further information please contact seminar coordinator Tommy Bruhn at tommy.bruhn@kom.lu.se. You can also see our website:
http://www.kom.lu.se/forskning/konferenser-och-natverkstraffar/

Cover photo: Zaki Habibi