Written Seminar Assignments

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Seminar 1 – Theoretical Reflections

Main contributions

Van Dijck's (2013) primary approach is the discussion of social media platforms. Her main focus is on platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, and Wikipedia which are some of the primary social media platforms that have shaped the modern networks. Her book also suggests that networks are shaping how people and society behave.

She bases the descriptions of networks based on the approach of using five larger networks. Her description of a network society would be a centralized point from which the network is constructed.

Van Dijck (2013) also points out the importance of studying both the history and future of the network society. This could then a possibility to study the flow through networks as a cultural construction.

Manuel Castells (2004) however points out networks to be connected nodes rather than a centralized platform. "A network has no center, just nodes" (Castells, 2004, p.3). This statement differs from how van Dijck described the network who instead approached it as a centralized network.

Castells further points out that network society is about flow and communication. This could take on a more traditional approach to how a technical network is constructed. He also points out that networks can change to adapt to different environments, which would suggest networks are dynamic.

The networks are as well built on a binary system based on each node either inclusion or exclusion (Castells, 2004), which could show that some nodes are more powerful than others.

Bruno Latour (2005) discusses the concept of Actor-Network Theory. He makes a difference between the concept of social and society. Social and being part of society is not necessarily the same thing or being measured the same way. Since Latour suggest that what is social is different from each individual he developed, the ANT approach which can help with analyzing the concept of "social".

To understand the social, Latour (2005) also presents uncertainties that he believes is a key element to understanding social relations and the controversies that form the social.

Strength and weaknesses

Van Dijck's arguments capture in a good way both the history and future of social media from the beginning of the web and as well the development of networks. Her practical approach makes it easier to understand networks development and how these are constructed from

The approach of Castells (2004) aims to understand the social studies behind the networks which help to understand the social constructs that build the networks. This approach would then make it useful for understanding the social approaches to the social aspect of networks.

Castells also emphasize the importance of a technical foundation for the development of social networks which could then be used for understanding technical approaches.

In relation to van Dijck (2014) who based her study on a more historical and development approach, her approach would be more useful when studying a network over a long time while castells can be used for examining the social and technical constructs of the network societies.

A weakness with Castell's approach could be how it does not generally focus on the underlying patterns of how a network is working from technical perspectives that are more included in van Dijck and Latour's perspectives.

Latour's (2005) approach emphasizes that technology are actors in the network and that objects have an agency as well. One action from an object could as well form other actions.

Latour's perspective may miss the point of how or why networks are constructed in a certain way, which would be better analyzed using Castell's approach.

Combining two theories

Van Dijck (2014) describes the two theories and discusses how these can be approached the social media from different perspectives which could complement each other. Van Dijck argues that the two theories "operate on different levels" (p.26). She explains that one approach could help with a study on the technological networks and the other approach can study people and the social constructions behind the networks.

The other approach by Castells is however more concentrated on the economic and legal approaches to the studies on the networks.

Van Dijck (2014) suggests combining these two theories to build a better theoretical framework for a study in the network society.

Using perspectives for future studies

Using the three perspectives could be used for my interests in journalism studies, fake news, and alternative facts. Castell's approach could be useful for understanding the connections and communications between different actors in the news media.

Since Castell's approach is an analysis of networks as a "flow of communication" this would make it possible to study how information is shared or why certain information is more visible while others may be less visible. The nodes described can be applied to the different actors in a network and understand why some, such as the fake news accounts become more powerful.

Van Dijck's approach could help with understanding the overall change of fake news over a longer time period if a study would be conducted on alternative facts and news from how these have increased over time.

Feedback for another student - Seminar 1

A good and thorough exploration of the different themes. The text capture in a nice way the different aspects of the different theories with nice discussions that summarizes the theories for the reader.

The text could be concluded or structured differently in some parts to make room for additional text or making it easier to follow for the reader. Since the texts and paragraphs are long in some parts, even more subtitles would make it nice.

Since there are as well two sources of Castell's writings, from both 2004 and 2007, the paper would need to clarify a bit clearer which texts it's referring to. A quote at the end of the second paragraph, the first page is not clear which source it refers to.

The overall referencing could be looked over to make sure there are no loose ends and the quotes that missing a reference.

The strength and weakness chapter could have a little more discussion on the writer's own opinion on the theories.

There is not much else to comment on this paper since it is a very nuanced discussion of the different theories.

Seminar 2 – Political Manipulation

Dangers of manipulation

Xia et. al. (2019) discuss in their article the dangers of manipulation in social media. With social media it supposedly easier than ever to spread disinformation. Traditionally news outlets were mostly in control of gatekeeping and what information reached the audiences. The news outlets were considered a "window" of the world (Ghersetti, 2012). The new social media could then make it possible for anyone to be this "window" of reality.

With the new forms of manipulation, it could make it easier to influence political decisions as mentioned in the article by Xia et. al. (2019). Small political parties could have an easier time increasing the number of voters if they are skilled in using the networks. Information may as well be manipulated easier since anyone could create a fictional profile and promote their own agenda.

Castells (2004) describes a network as being connected by small nodes, each one representing one actor. This theory could form a basis that in the new social media some nodes become more powerful while others could have less power. Depending on who is using the network, the skills they have in using a network or if they manipulate their profile could mean that some actors become more powerful. In relation to manipulation, this could then be used to one node is a node of disinformation that hold strong power to spread information in that network, while other nodes might be more vulnerable.

Xia et. al. (2019) emphasize with their article how the Russian IRA created the fake profile of Jenna Adams. With easier access to anonymity on the internet, it would be easier for anyone to present themselves as an expert or creating a fake profile. They could then pretend to be an expert in an area and presenting their own manipulated information about a subject area.

Castells also mention that social movements have developed to reach a global arena and not just being confined to a certain physical space. This would make online manipulation more dangerous since it would then affect and reach more individual people. The fake news and disinformation would then not be limited to one city but could be spread all over the world.

Pre-digital forms of manipulation

Before the social media era and the digital flow, newspapers may have had a more powerful effect over what information was presented. People would have relied on receiving the news

in the morning from the local paper. The news people received was produced by journalists. Journalism has for a long time undergone a professionalization with ideals that form the news flow (Wiik & Djerf-Pierre, 2012). This would then be more undermined by new social movements discussed by Castells.

Drawing on Castell's (2004) suggestions, today it would be much easier to spread disinformation to more places than the city a person is located in. Before social media, the disinformation that was created would be more limited to a confined area.

Theoretical approaches using Van Dijck

By using Van Dijck's (2013) theoretical framework a research focus could both be about the history and the future of the networks. She also emphasizes the approach of networks as a cultural institution. "Buttons that impose "sharing" and "following" as social values have effects in cultural practices and legal far beyond platforms proper" (Van Dijck, 2013, p.20). This could suggest that a sharing function or the retweet options on twitter can be used for analyzing how disinformation is easier to spread with new technical options on social platforms.

Van Dijck's approach could generally help with understanding the new social media cultures in how they spread disinformation from both a technical and cultural perspective. Popularity and the necessity of wanting attention through likes and comments could as well influence how constructing celebrity profiles by receiving more interactions with the profile.

By first constructing a celebrity profile, this can be popularized and promoted. It would then make it easier to receive interactions from followers that promote disinformation and fake news by having them shared and liked. The actor would then be a more powerful node in Castell's theory.

Feedback for another student - Seminar 2

The paper has a good summary of the assigned paper which covers some of the most important topics. The first section contains some interesting discussions with interesting independent comments regarding the article. The quotes to Castells are highly relevant.

Part two covers a general description of how modern media increases manipulation, with some relevant examples. The subchapter has interesting independent thoughts from the writer.

Some of these examples could be clarified a bit differently. What do you mean with traditional gatekeepers and what is it to be traditional? Does this refer to journalists at newspapers, tv and radio stations? An example to use could be how it was 15 years ago when Facebook was introduced, 25 years ago when the World Wide Web was born, or 50 years ago when the internet was young.

The final part is summarized well with a concrete application to the Twitter community which also makes use of some good examples of how the framework of van Dijck can be applied in research.

Overall the paper presents interesting independent thoughts from the writer that discuss the concepts of modern media manipulation.

Seminar 3 – Entrepreneurial Media Worker

Journalism in many countries has changed due to a different media landscape and consumption of news (Cohen, 2015; Örnebring, 2015). With a new digital landscape, journalism has new challenges of media organizations shrinking in size and limited economy (Wiik & Nygren, 2016). Instead of permanent staff, there are now more entrepreneurial journalists working in the new media landscape.

In this paper, I interviewed a Swedish journalist working on these conditions and how he uses networks in his job. The interview focused on the usage of social media as a network and how this influences the private life. In this paper, to keep the anonymity of the interviewed person, he is referred to as AR. AR works on a temporary basis (*Vikariat*) for his employer.

Cohen (2015) describes an entrepreneurial journalist as "an enterprising individual who does not rely on traditional media organizations and who can chart her own path to success" (p. 517). AR's job is however somewhat connected to an employer although the job contains the ability to search for own news, AR explains.

All forms of media or journalistic work are very competitive, and many actors are competing for attention in the news flow (Cohen, 2015). AR shares this view, "It is very often you feel competition in how you use social media, you need to be quick in both finding news, producing and publishing it."

The importance of using social media is something AR points out as the main source of modern journalism. By using social media, it is easier to tailor a news flow that suits the aim of the media organization. "I use social media multiple times, both when searching news and publishing", AR explains.

Journalism today requires more technical skills than it previously did (Örnebring, 2015). The journalistic contents that need to be produced have more requirements than before, such as being customized to suit social media and the modern media outlets (Deuze, 2004). AR does not see this as an obstacle but rather a possibility of reaching a wider audience with more flexible content.

When asked about the balance between working and private life, AR answers that his boundaries between work and personal issues are fewer today. Much of entrepreneurial work requires constant access to the internet and the work to keep up with the news flow. These issues make a private life intertwined with the working life. As Cohen (2015) explains:

"Individual journalists are now tasked with solving problems caused by structural forces." (p.526). There are now new issues for the individual producer.

AR says: "It is easy to lose track of what is private or working related at sometimes". One of the main reasons why AR thinks the balance works is the enjoyment in working with the journalistic practice. However as suggested by Wiik and Djerf-Pierre (2012) it is important to consider the issues of freelancing journalism, for instance, what the interests are of the new journalists. The legitimacy of journalism can be reduced if there are personal conflicting interests.

Feedback for another student - Seminar 3

The paper contains the interesting topic of the ongoing protests of Hong Kong. As a journalist myself I found it interesting to read about the experience of active journalists in the conflict and how they manage their work. The background and introduction are described properly and gives the reader an introduction to who the interviewed subject is.

Some of the references used are journalistic articles, especially Chiu (2019) which could have been criticized more during the text and not used as a primary reference. Are there any personal interests of this writer or political interests of the media organization behind the article that may have affected what the article claims? Are there other sides to the story? Even better would be to support the journalist's argument by a scientific peer-reviewed article of similar issues (see, for instance, Ting (2019) *Everyday Networked Activism in Hong Kong's Umbrella Movement: Expanding on Contemporary Practice Theory to Understand Activist Digital Media Usages*).

The findings are well presented and structured which makes it easy to follow. The findings have good and relevant references back to Cohen's article. The quotes used from the interviewed subject are good and relevant which follows and supports the structure of the paper and the assigned research.

The ibid referencing is used in some situations where it may make it difficult for the reader to follow which source is used, especially when switching to a new subchapter.

Generally, the paper was very interesting and discussed the issues of entrepreneurial journalism in a highly topical issue, which presents an interesting connection between activism and networking.

Seminar 4 – ANT in European media and culture

Groups and group formations

Latour's (2005) first uncertainty mentions that there are no groups. Instead there are group formations. What matters in groups or what each goal is could be different from each formation, which is why Latour (2005) may believe there are no groups and instead points out the group formations. To identify groups, an organization first needs to understand what could oppose the groups.

The policy documents created by the European Commission acknowledge the opposing group formations that may threaten the already know formations in the European Union. People or organizations that threaten the cultural heritage needs to be controlled. The policies from the European could as such, be a group formation in how these counter other group formations.

As Latour (2005) also mentions, groups are being formed and can be reformed at any time. Groups would then not be a static object.

The European commission imagines different types of formations within the groups, these are, for instance, individual formations, states, or organizations. There are other types of formations such as the culture and media formations which are two groups of its own, which show that groups are not static things.

Action

No one is alone in creating action (Latour, 2005). The action could, in Latour's sense, form the network as well. Actions could not happen without previous actions. "action is not done under the full control of consciousness; action should rather be felt as a node" (Latour, 2005, p.44)

Policies or other regulations created by the Commission could be forms of an action that the European union employ to control the other actions of the culture and media. These actions in the culture and creative industries are as such influenced by political actions. Each Action is a node to further action.

Agency

Latour (2005) points out the importance of non-humans in his Actor-network theory. With non-humans he means that "objects too have agency" (p.63). On the European Union websites there

are many suggestions of objects having an agency for creatives. These could be everything from inspiration for produces to resource that can be used. The policy documents could as well be objects that have an agency. The policy documents are an action that could form other actions by the human actors, the creators in the cultural sector.

What Latour could mean is how there are relations in a Network between how actors operate. Not only humans, the creators in this case have an agency, which is a final goal. Objects, the inspirations or resources, could as well form a source of agency that the creators need to embrace.

Matters of concern

There are different actions taking place in the European union to promote and protect the culture of the included countries. Policies employed to protect culture and media from external or internal threats that may destroy the cultural policies.

As Latour (2004) mentions, there are "matters of concern" in the networks. "A thing is, in one sense, an object out there and, in another sense, an issue very much in there, at any rate, a gathering" (Latour, 2004, p.233). The entire pages of the EU are these "gatherings" Latour mentions. It exists both as an object and as well an issue.

Feedback for another student - Seminar 4

The paper has a nice and clear structure of four aspects of Latour's Actor-Network Theory in relation to the media and cultural policies of the European Union. The text is easy to follow, and the structure makes it easy to follow the writer's arguments.

In the first part of the paper, you mention "contradictory group formations". Which are these contradictions in Latour's words? This could fit in the text with a brief explanation of the contradictions. The text could also include some short comments as well regarding the uncertainties mentioned in Latour's book. This would make an even nicer flow to the text and a better understanding of what Latour explains.

A brief sentence of what the intermediaries and mediators are in Latour's word would have been good since these are used as a theoretical foundation for the discussion of the European policies. These concepts are however included and contextualized in a good way that further explains the group formations.

There are very good individual reflections which felt very interesting reading. I enjoyed reading about the discussion of how the text and European policies are contextualized with the writings of Latour. A good example is how the text mentions the European Commission as a recruiter to the different group formations.

The contextualization of Latour in the European policies throughout the paper is very well presented.

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