Reimagining our common future through critical scholarship and dialogue on digital culture, technology, and society.

Three New Postdoctoral Fellows and One Visiting Researcher Join CDCS

Jingyi Gu

Jingyi Gu studies issues of identity, relationship, governance, and resistance within digital cultures and platform economies in Chinese and global contexts. With feminist and transnational lenses, her current research centers on the (re)configuration of affect, labor, and subjectivities in platform-mediated cultural production. As a CDCS postdoctoral fellow, she will be working on her book manuscript titled "Scalable Intimacy: Gender, Sexuality, and Labor in Chinese Live Streaming" that examines how live streaming mediates narratives and experiences of gender, sexuality, intimacy, class, and migration at scale in contemporary China. This project looks at the affective-material practices of commercialized intimacy and feminized work across Chinese live streaming's multi-genre ecosystem. She will also work on two articles that attend to media and cultural practices afforded by the global expansion of Chinese digital media, focusing on identities within transnational cultural politics and the discourse on China's role in South-South relations. Gu completed her Ph.D. at the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign's Institute of Communications Research. Her research has been published in Asiascape: Digital Asia and presented at the annual conferences of the International Communication Association, Association of Internet Researchers, and Society for Social Studies of Science, among others.

Sandeep Mertia

Sandeep Mertia is a joint CARGC-CDCS postdoctoral fellow. His research focuses on the socio-technical constitution and mediation of global and planetary digital futures, particularly in postcolonial and global South contexts. At CDCS and CARGC, he will work on his current book project, "Starting-up with the State: Computing, Entrepreneurship, and the Governance of Aspiration in India," which examines the imaginaries, infrastructures, and everyday practices of digital future-making at the intersections of the state and technology start-ups in India. Mertia is an Information and Communication Technology engineer by training and is broadly interested in historical and anthropological research on media technologies, computing, urbanism, and futures. He is a former Research Associate at The Sarai Programme, Centre for the Study of Developing Societies (Sarai-CSDS), New Delhi. He is the editor of Lives of Data: Essays on Computational Cultures from India (Amsterdam: Institute of Network Cultures, 2020). He has served as the Assistant Editor of the journal Public Culture. His work has been published in Economic & Political Weekly, The Fibreculture Journal, Computational Culture, Sarai, LSE Impact, Konrad Adenauer-Stiftung, and DataKind. He completed his Ph.D. in Media, Culture, and Communication at New York University in August 2023. He earned his B.Tech at the Dhirubhai Ambani Institute of Information and Communication Technology in Gujarat.

Mohammed Rashid

Mohammed Rashid's research lies at the intersection of global digital media, South Asian queer media cultures, and enclave media activism. He draws from his academic training in cultural studies, media studies, and queer theory to explore how Bangladeshi LGBTQ+ counter-publics use various digital media to negotiate visibility in extremely queerphobic sociopolitical contexts. He takes a public-humanities approach to make politically charged participatory and interactive digital media projects. His background in socially engaged art and critical making allow for creative renditions of his scholarship. In his dissertation project, "Mediated Sexualities," Rashid investigates the invisible, restricted, and secret media cultures of Bangladeshi queer communities to imagine a decolonial framework for South-Asian queer futures. His research has appeared in the Media Fields Journal and Flow: A Critical Forum on Media and Culture, and is forthcoming in QED: A Journal in GLBTQ Worldmaking. He has presented his research and creative projects in SCMS, HASTAC, PAMLA, and WSCA. He is also the recipient of the HASTAC Scholar's Award 2019. He completed his Ph.D. in Arts, Technology, and Emerging Communication at the University of Texas at Dallas. He holds an M.A. in Cultural Studies and a B.A. in English Literature from Jahangirnagar University, Bangladesh.

Mads Skovgaard

Mads Skovgaard is a Ph.D.-fellow at the Center for Tracking and Society at the Department of Communication, University of Copenhagen in Denmark. His research focuses on socialist and left-wing politics in the United States and investigates how intersections of the digital and the non-digital in the everyday lives of activists influence social movements and contentious politics. Mads has a background in social anthropology and holds bachelor's and master's degrees from the Department of Anthropology at the University of Copenhagen. As part of his visit at the CDCS Mads will conduct qualitative empirical research in Philadelphia and New York City in the Fall.

Announcing CDCS's 2023-2024 Doctoral Fellows

Cienna Davis

Dreading the Diaspora: Afro-Femme Haptic Hair Care Technologies

Starting from a place of corporeality within transnational Black femme networks in Berlin, Germany, this research utilizes performance ethnography to consider how Black hair fluency (particularly through a sense of touch) might re-program human relationship to technology an nature engendering alternative methodologies for engaging the increased role of data and algorithmic governance in our lives.

Christiana Dillard

What's It All About?: A Framework For Analyzing Social Media Platform "About Us" Pages Using YouTube

A critical discourse and historical analysis of the various iterations of YouTube's "About Us" pages since the platform's inception, and a resulting framework designed to examine other social media platform companies' "About Us" pages.

Simron Gill

Use the damn pepper spray: A qualitative discursive exploration of the market for womens safety and fear in Philadelphia

Violence against women works within a continuum that underscores a range of abuses, intrusions, and (bodily) threats that present a series of interconnected elements that are mutually reinforcing whereby the mediation of this discourse provides a vocabulary for negotiating the right amount of panic for situating a market demand that capitalises on women's fear; however, the supply side conditions that make, remake and unmake who women should be afraid of is an undersaturated area of study that I hope to explore further.

Liz Hallgren

The Symbiotic Relationship Between Volodymyr Zelensky and Western News: Authenticity and Performance in Ukraine's Fight Against Russia

A discourse analysis of the immediate and extensive feature news coverage trained on Ukraine's President Volodymyr Zelensky following Russia's invasion – a phenomenon enabled by the digitally rendered 24-hour news cycle – raises questions about the value system undergirding Western news and rings alarm bells as to the role and ethics of the "profile piece" in war coverage.

Baird Howland

Measuring the emotions in political discourse

We introduce Natural Language Processing tools to surface narratives and measure their accompanying affect in news articles and social media posts.

Jenny Lee

#NailTok: The Erasure of Marginalized Labor on TikTok

By studying the platform TikTok through the walkthrough method (Light et al., 2016), this project interrogates how TikTok communities like #NailTok fail to promote meaningful expression from and on behalf of marginalized nail laborers by further entrenching their invisibility and precarity.

Brendon Mahoney

Protesting (on) the platform: Comparing Reddit's ideal users with Actually Existing left-wing subreddits

I propose a comparison between the Reddit corporate blog' discursive construction of its userbase and the behavior of actual users in left-wing subreddits as a means of advancing the debate playing out in the study of digital activism as to what kind of subject is created by/on social media platforms.

Adetobi Moses

Community Listening as Memory Practice and Engagement

This project addresses how adults from the Philadelphia area engage with and process the deeply personal dimensions of a Covid-19 oral archive.

Devo Probol

Beyond the Binary: Deconstructing Success and Failure in Digital Social Movements through the Lens of Endurance

This research project aims to shift scholarly discussions around social movement outcomes away from the binary of success and failure and instead towards a lens of endurance.

Valentina Proust

Singing our pain, shaping our fight: the power of feminist protest anthems as digital activism

The project explores how feminist protest anthems shared on social media work as digital mourning rituals that help, through their af ective power, to establish solidarity relationships that allow for the process of the collective pain of gender violence, create community, and drive social change.

Yingchuan Qu

The Life and Death (And the Ghost) Of a Buzzword: the Affective Circulation of "Positive Energy" on the Chinese Internet

Underscoring the convergence of multiple cultural genealogies in popularizing the internet buzzword "positive energy", my research delves into the discursive formation and circulation of positive energy discourse on the Chinese Internet by probing the "happy (therefore, good) subject" ideals promulgated in the dynamic processes of re-adaptation and co-production of positivity.

Lucila Rozas

The Affective Object - An Approximation to the Digital Mediation and Circulation of Feminist Affects in the Ni Una Menos Movement

Using multimodal critical discourse analysis (MCDA) and engaging in other qualitative methods informed by a performative research paradigm, this project investigates how the feminist affects of the Ni Una Menos movement stick to certain "objects" that represent it, how they are digitally mediated, and what enables their circulation through different online/offline means.

Taylor Smith

Remixed Modalities: Hip-Hop, Memory, and the Public Sphere

Working at the intersections of Hip-Hop Studies, Digital Studies, and Memory Studies and grounded in theorizations of the public sphere, this autoethnographic project explores how digital hip-hop archives on Instagram and the memory negotiation processes that occur on them are an essential part of hip-hop culture's quest to maintain a connection with its counterpublic origins.

Ryan Tsapatsaris

Rotten Roots, Spoiled Fruits: Revisiting Early Internet Studies

This project revisits the roots of Internet Studies, and in the context of theory critique, reimagines a new, more socially just orientation for the field

Ran Wang

Cyber Nomads: Migration and Preservation of Early Fandom Communities in China

This project explores the difficulties and lessons learned from the preservation of early online fandom communities that migrate across various digital settlements in the process of platformization and censorship intensification in China.

UPCOMING EVENTS

CDCS Colloquium: Mohammed Rashid

Title: Queering Deshi Blogging Networks: Legal Rights, Religion, and the Politics of Blog Publics in Bangladeshi LGBTQ+ Activism

Monday, October 2nd, 12:15-1:30 pm EST

LGBTQ+ media activism in Bangladesh is a comparatively less explored avenue in critical media studies and queer Asia studies. Although academic and socio-political conversations around *hijra* and transgender communities in Bangladesh (Hossain, 2017, 2018, 2020; Ibrahim, 2019) are more often foregrounded, scholarly discussions around LGBTQ+ cultures and experiences are rarely pursued. This is partly due to the networked hate and brutal treatment gay, lesbian, and bi-sexual subjects and allies experience in the Bangladeshi nation-state where both socio-cultural ideology and legislative regulation are dominated by extreme religious doctrines and colonial-time legislature. This talk, however, will establish that queer and decolonial counter-public formation around specific alternative Bangladeshi blogs and archival websites have opened new avenues for a more sustained LGBTQ+ world-making.

This talk explores queer media activism in Bangladesh, firstly, through a genealogical account of LGBTQ+ community organizing, along with critically analyzing how adopting a Western framework of queer activism, primarily based on visibility and coming-out strategies, presented itself with extreme existential challenges for gay, lesbian, and bi-sexual individuals. Secondly, the talk is critical of the liberal narratives around progressive digital activism in Bangladeshi blogging networks (Haq, 2013) and explores how secular platforms like *Somewhere in…* and *Sachalayatan,* fail to advocate for LGBTQ+ rights. This examination observes that so-called secular blogging communities in Bangladesh is only selectively progressive, and that conservative and religious doctrines continue to undergird its discursive and affective logics. Finally, the talk analyzes *Mondro* (2019), an enclave digital archive and alternative blogging platform to explore the potentials of more tactical modes of queer digital media activism in Bangladesh.
Register for the in-person event **here**

CDCS Colloquium: Jingyi Gu

Title: *Gendered Labor and Scalable Intimacy in Live Streaming*

Monday, October 9th, 12:15-1:30 pm EST.

This talk draws on the narratives and practices of live streaming to understand how it becomes a form of cultural and economic production in which gender and sexuality become central to digitally-mediated and scale-making communications. It also discusses the intersecting politics of technology, labor, and gender that live streaming's prevalence in contemporary China and its global expansion informs us about.

Register for the in-person event **here**

CDCS Colloquium: Tisha Dejmanee

Title: Asian Australians' digital identity performance on TikTok

Monday, October 23rd, 12:15-1:30 pm EST.

Asian Australians comprise a growing population in Australia whose experiences remain largely absent in mainstream Australian media, resulting in a lack of understanding of this hybrid cultural identity. In response, second-generation Asian Australians have widely deployed digital and social media as a tool for self-representation and community-building. In this talk, I present on the ways that Asian Australians perform and generate dialogue around their everyday practices of negotiating racial, ethnic and national identities. I present the findings of quantitative and qualitative analysis of TikTok content tagged as #AsianAustralian to explore the actors and accounts participating in this content creation, and the emergent themes and discourses that arise through these videos and their accompanying comments. I suggest that TikTok offers a crucial space for young Asian Australians to create counternarratives that centre the unique experiences of this community – particularly around everyday racism and racial stereotypes – and to affectively repurpose these experiences through humour, shock and absurdity through the creative use of TikTok affordances. These findings offer an understanding of the significance of everyday digital media practices in fashioning creative understandings of hybrid Asian Australian cultural identity.

Tisha Dejmanee is a Senior Lecturer and Head of Discipline of Digital and Social Media at the University of Technology Sydney. Her recent work examines the construction and performance of gender and race

on various platforms and digital cultures. Her book monograph, titled [Postfeminism, Postrace and Digital Politics in Asian American Food Blogs](#), was published in 2023. Her work has also been published in journals including Television & New Media; International Journal of Communication; Feminist Media Studies; and, European Journal of Cultural Studies.

Register for the in-person event **[here](#)**

Mark your calendar for CARGC-CDCS Symposium

October 16th-17th, 2023

Turning Points: The Long 1990s in Internet History project

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Call for Abstracts: 2024 CDCS Symposium - Everyday Forms of Digital Activism and Resistance

Submissions should explore everyday forms of digital activism and resistance around the world. Please submit your 800-word abstract to **cdcs@asc.upenn.edu** before October 15, 2023. Notification of acceptance will be sent by November 15, 2023. The symposium will he held on April 18-19, 2024. For more infomation, please visit the **[CDCS's website](#)**.

NEWS UPDATES

CDCS co-sponsored ASA Preconference on Platform Economies on August 17, 2023 during the annual meeting of the American Sociological Association.

CDCS doctoral fellows **Devon Probol, Zoe Zhao, Brendan Mahoney**, and **Alejandra Regla-Vargas** presented a paper on "Beyond the Binary: Deconstructing Success and Failure in Digital Social Movements through the Lens of Endurance" at the ASA Preconference on Collective Behavior and Social Movements on August 17, 2023.

CDCS doctoral fellow **Alejandra Regla-Vargas** presented a paper on "Tracing Cultural Dynamics of Anti-Asian Racism During COVID-19 Using Twitter" at the ASA annual meeting.

CDCS's WORKING GROUPS

Theory Lab

Theory Lab is a collaborative, workshop-style space that interrogates how to incorporate theory in communication research in meaningful and critical ways.

Theory Lab is a collaborative space for critical engagement with cultural communication theory. It aims to reflexively interrogate what we are "doing" with theory as academics and to experiment with different ways of engaging theory in our teaching, writing, and multimodal projects, so it can feel useful and concrete. In biweekly meetings, members share works from the field(s) that expand on the role of theory in cultural communication, our (digital) society, and academia in general. Members also share their own work with each other to think through sticky theoretical questions and applications. Fellows aim to support each other in both understanding theory and deploying theory with discretion and care.

So far, Theory Lab has hosted sessions on topics including Baudrillard's hyper-reality, digital memory, cultural translation and performance, and post-critique. Sessions have also attempted to map the universe of theories commonly used in cultural communication. Future projects may include a Theory Lab podcast, which would bring our workshop discussions to a larger audience, workshops on theory and multimodality, and collaborations with other research centers and working groups.

Digital Activism and Data Justice (DADJ)

The Digital Activism and Data Justice (DADJ working group engages in a collaborative research agenda that aims to bridge the gap between social movement theory and digital activism research. As a collective, fellows meet biweekly to advance ongoing DAD research projects, discuss new and emerging research related to the field of digital activism, share and receive feedback on individual research endeavors, and construct symposiums, colloquiums, and workshops that create spaces to interrogate and further the field of research inquiry. Our group members include scholars and activists across various disciplines, including (but not limited to) communication, sociology, anthropology, and political science. If you are interested in participating, please reach out to Devo Probol for further information.

Working Group Meeting updates

Theory Lab will meet biweekly on Thursdays at Annenberg room 300 from 10:30 - 11:30 am. Please get in touch with <u>Liz Hallgren</u> and <u>Lucila Rozas Urrunaga</u> about the next meeting on Thursday, September 7th.

Digital Activism and Data Justice (DADJ) will meet biweekly on Mondays at Annenberg room 300 from 1:30 - 2:30 pm (tentative). Please get in touch with <u>Devo Probol</u> about the next meeting on next Thursday, September 7th.