Special Issue of Chinese Journal of Communication (CJC)

CALL FOR PAPERS

The Platformization of Chinese Society

Extended Abstract Submission Deadline: July 1, 2017
Full Paper Submission deadline: February 28, 2018

Guest Editors

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The general aims and focus of the Special Issue

Social media like Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube, as well as platforms for collaborative consumption such as Airbnb and Uber, are emerging as new power players that challenge older institutions and disrupt economic sectors like news, hospitality, and transport. While online platforms are celebrated as vehicles of the 'participatory society' and the 'sharing economy', these platforms often prove less progressive than they appear at first sight. Rather than simply stimulating citizen participation and entrepreneurialism, they enable the 'datafication' and 'commodification' of all social relations: collecting, algorithmically processing, circulating and selling user data (Couldry 2015; van Dijck & Poell 2013; Fuchs 2013; Turow 2012). Furthermore, platform corporations skillfully circumvent national labor laws and trade unions, intensifying labor precarization, and undermining existing businesses and institutions, such as newspapers, hotels, and taxi companies, which operate within established regulatory frameworks (Scholz, 2016).

To mitigate the negative consequences of these developments, José van Dijck recently called upon governments and other regulatory bodies to more actively intervene in the emerging platform society and not leave this development to the dynamic of the market (van Dijck, 2016). While this call for more regulation is particular welcome in the US, it appears rather problematic in the Chinese context. We are currently witnessing an equally fast, if not faster, process of platformization of Chinese society. Yet, in the light of omnipresent government regulation and intervention, the platformization of Chinese society presents us with a very different set of

problems and questions than in the West. In the same way, we need to critically interrogate the seemingly 'natural' connection between the platform society and 'global capitalism', which has been theorized through the notion of 'platform capitalism' (Smicek, 2016). Again China presents an odd case, as it is hard to read China as a capitalist society (Nonini, 2008). Against this background, the aim of this special issue is to critically engage with the platformization of Chinese society, using China as a *method* (cf. Chen, 2010) to interrogate, complicate, and complement current research on the global rise of the platform society. We thus ask in this special issue: *what does the platform society mean for China, but also, what does China mean for our thinking about the platform society?*

This special issue aims to empirically scrutinize different platforms that are currently popular in China. The Chinese process of platformization appears to differ on at least three crucial dimensions with developments in the US and Europe. First, there are vital differences in the *political economy* of platforms: the ownership structure and business models of Chinese platforms are different from those in the US. This also has implications for the ownership of data, raising issues of surveillance, control and marketing of data (Couldry & Hepp, 2017; Dyer-Witheford, 2014). Second, vital differences need to be taken into account in terms of the *architectures and affordances* of platforms: user and programming interfaces (and its semiotics), algorithms (what is made visible and invisible), and infrastructures (how are third parties plugged into the platform ecosystem) (Hookway, 2014; McVeigh-Schultz & Baym, 2015; Plantin et al., 2016). Finally, Chinese online platforms appear to be characterized by particular types of *user practices and cultures*, which differ from those in other parts of the worlds (Poell, de Kloet & Zeng 2014; Qiu, 2016). Given that the societal impact of new technologies is for an important part shaped by how these technologies are integrated in social practice, these differences greatly matter.

The contributions we solicit for this special issue will each focus on one specific *type* of platform, following a typology based on a preliminary inventory (see below). We envision contributions that analyze a particular platform and its role in societal relations through the three dimensions sketched above. These contributions are expected to build on the fields of media and cultural studies, software studies and/or platform studies, in their investigation of one of the following types of platforms:

1. Public social media (e.g. *weibo* and *douban*)
2. Private social media (e.g. *weixin*).
3. News and search platforms (e.g. *baidu*)
4. E-commerce services (e.g. *taobao*)
5. Media sharing platforms (e.g. *youku* and *tudou*)
6. Transport platforms (e.g. *taxi didi* and *mobike*)
7. Food services (e.g. *meituan* and *eleme*)
8. Dating platforms (e.g. *tamtam* and *blue'd*)

Evidently, we will welcome strong paper proposals, focused other types of platforms as well.

Timeline

1200-word extended abstracts should be submitted by mail to Jeroen de Kloet (b.j.dekloet@uva.nl) and Thomas Poell (Poell@uva.nl) by July 1, 2017. The abstract should articulate: 1) the issue or research question to be discussed, 2) the methodological or critical framework used, and 3) indicate the expected findings or conclusions. Decisions will be communicated to the authors by July 15, 2017.

Full papers of the selected abstracts should be submitted by February 28, 2018. All submitted manuscripts will be subject to a rigorous blind peer-review process. All accepted manuscripts will be published online first. The planned printed publication date is an issue of CJC in 2019.

Submissions should conform to the editorial guidelines of the Chinese Journal of Communication found at http://www.informaworld.com/cjoc under "Instructions for Authors."