Emerging Scholar Projects for 2024

Project #1

Yee Man Margaret Ng, University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign

"The Twitter Exodus: Negotiating the Transition from Twitter to Mastodon among Journalists"

Abstract: This timely proposed study examines how journalists are grappling with platform migration following Musk's Twitter takeover in October 2022. The resulting "platform exodus" raises profound questions about the intricate relationship between Twitter and its alternative, Mastodon, and sheds light on the challenges journalists encountered while navigating this shifting platform landscape, which directly impacts how people access news and information. Employing a mixed-method approach that combines computational analysis of 900 journalists' activities on Twitter and Mastodon and qualitative interviews of 10-15 active journalists, this study aims to examine (1) the extent to which journalists have exhibited different forms of Twitter disengagement (e.g., non-use, migration, or reverting to previous use) after Musk's Twitter takeover. It seeks to determine whether journalists have predominantly abandoned Twitter for Mastodon or other platforms. This study also explores (2) how journalists managed their online presence across platforms, examining the challenges and strategies employed during the migration and uncovering the motivating and discouraging factors influencing their move. This study contributes significantly to our understanding of the complex behaviors exhibited by journalists as they navigate the evolving landscape of platform changes. These inquiries enrich the literature of innovation post-adoption behavior. They shed light on the dynamics among push-pull-mooring factors that drive platform migration. Practically, the new knowledge helps journalists assess the risks and benefits of platform changes, facilitating smoother transitions and audience maintenance in the future.

Project #2

Benjamin Toff, University of Minnesota

"Evaluating Differences in Trust Toward Audio- versus Text-based Modes of News"

Abstract: This proposal will support data collection for a research project examining how different news modes (audio, text, etc.) may help to foster, or in some cases undermine, trust in news among differing segments of the public. Using a unique experimental design in which study participants either listen to or read versions of the same news stories produced by a public media organization (Minnesota Public Radio), this study will test both how hearing versus reading news can impact attitudes about those stories' trustworthiness and credibility while also considering how journalists' specific identities, including their gender and race, may interact with differences in news delivery mode. Non-text-based formats of news foreground journalists' specific backgrounds and demographics in ways that may increase a sense of connection and commonality among some audiences. However, for audiences who hold strong preconceptions or prejudices – groups that tend to be most distrusting of news in the US already – these identity cues may prompt further distrust toward the individual journalists reporting the information. Using a large, diverse sample of Americans recruited on the platform Prolific, this study will randomly assign respondents to hear or read the same stories delivered by different voices, holding constant the actual information being reported. Doing so allows the study to assess both the effect of news mode on trust but also the context-specific ways reporter's identities are perceived by the public. These findings will guide future research on news audiences, trust in news, and diversity, equity, and inclusion in newsrooms. At the same time, the study will offer practical insights for newsrooms to consider as they determine how best to deliver news to the communities they seek to serve and any unintended side effects around how they communicate to the public who they are and what they do.