

Senior Scholar Projects for 2024

Grants were awarded to two Senior Scholar research projects for 2023. Each Senior Scholar research project received a grant of \$5,000.

Project #1

Kalyani Chadha, Northwestern University



“Digital Alternative Journalism in India: Analyzing an Emergent Phenomenon and Its Implications for the Indian Public Sphere”

Abstract: The recent growth of the Indian news media sector has given rise to a celebratory discourse claiming that the country has a diverse and vibrant news landscape. But even as this sector has experienced exponential growth, the combination of market imperatives and governmental efforts to restrict the press have significantly inhibited the ability of mainstream news organizations to fulfill the key normative functions associated with the press in a democratic society, namely to provide information that holds the powerful accountable as well as to give voice to marginalized groups and communities. Instead, this role has increasingly been taken on by varied digital alternative journalism outlets.

However, despite their increasingly critical contribution in terms of giving disenfranchised groups their own means of communication, such outlets and their journalism remain underexplored and under-theorized in the Indian context. This project investigates the emergence of these alternative journalism outlets and analyzes the journalistic, social and political implications of their rise. As such, it represents the first effort to undertake a comprehensive and empirically grounded examination of this phenomenon. Employing multiple methods including interviews and analysis of various types of alternative news content, the project seeks to analyze the workings of Dalit and Muslim produced media outlets, various community media/citizen-based media news initiatives as well as India’s only digital, all-women, rural newsroom. More specifically, it explores the manner in which these outlets challenge what they see as the failures of dominant media to adequately report certain issues/communities, offer counter narratives to mainstream coverage while also re-imagining the practice of journalism—developments that powerfully impact the public sphere in India.

Project #2

Renita Coleman, University of Texas at Austin



“Expanding Affective Intelligence Theory: How Voters’ Feelings of Disgust toward the Candidates Affect Voting Intention in 2024”

Abstract: The purpose of the study is to expand the range of emotions understood by Affective Intelligence Theory (AIT) to include disgust, and to compare it to the emotions currently studied in AIT using a custom survey during the 2024 election.

AIT focuses on how emotions shape the public’s political thinking and behavior (Marcus et al., 2000), with the news media being the key way these emotions are conveyed. This line of research shows that anxiety causes people to pay attention and learn more, which results in deeper processing, while anger or aversion causes people to become defensive and refuse to reconsider their beliefs (Mackuen, et al., 2010). However, we do not know how disgust works, nor do existing datasets include it. With the increase in disgust since the 2016 election, it is time to focus on voters’ feelings of disgust and the considerations it engenders that affect voting.

Disgust is not the same as anger or fear, and has been shown to be a distinct emotion (Marcus et al., 2000). Specifically, disgust is different from anger and fear in that one of its functions is to signal moral violations (Bakker et al., 2020). This is theoretically distinct from anger motivating people to become defensive, and fear motivating them to seek more information and rely less on habit. We theorize that people’s voting intentions also depend on how disgust motivates them to consider moral violations, such as lying, cheating, stealing, bribery, etc. This leads to feelings of disgust, which motivates voting behavior aimed at protecting against that threat, that is, voting against the candidate they feel disgust toward, because he or she will lie to the people, engage in illegal behaviors, and bring disgrace to the country. This theorizing will be tested in this study.