Symposium on Public Discourse and Data Science
Sponsored by KEY, SFU’s Big Data Initiative

Friday, October 12, 2018
SFU’s Big Data Hub
Schedule: http://www.sfu.ca/discourse-lab/research/symposium.html
Register: https://www.eventbrite.ca/e/symposium-on-public-discourse-and-data-science-tickets-50284356865

Name: Ahmed Al-Rawi, Professor at SFU’s School of Communication [http://www.sfu.ca/communication/team/faculty/ahmed-alrawi.html]
http://www.sfu.ca/communication.html
Title: Topic modelling & fake news discourses on MSM vs. SNS
Abstract: This study analyzes mainstream media (MSM) coverage of fake news discourse and compares it with social networking sites (SNS) users who reference the term “fakenews” in their tweets. The study employs computational methods by analyzing over 8 million tweets and 1350 news stories using topic modeling. Building on the theory of (networked) gatekeeping and Herman and Chomsky’s propaganda model, the results show that SNS users follow networked gatekeeping practices by mostly associating fake news references to the alleged bias of mainstream media. On the other hand, mainstream media coverage tends to link fake news to SNS’s negative role in spreading misinformation. I argue here that there is a networked flak activity on Twitter which is defined as a collective negative response to mainstream media in order to discipline it, change its tone and editorial stance, or undermine the public’s trust in it.

Name: Alexander Beyer, PhD Student at SFU’s Department of Political Science
http://www.sfu.ca/politics.html
https://www.sfu.ca/politics/graduate/graduate_students/phd_students.html
Title: Convoluted Consultazioni - The impact of Twitter during Italy’s tangled Formation of Government
Abstract: Italy’s national election in March 2018 led to massive gains for the far-right nationalist Lega and the ideologically less defined, highly populist Five-Star Movement (M5S). After a long and convoluted process with late-night negotiations, dramatic walkouts, and repeated calls for snap polls, Lega and M5S formed a previously highly unlikely coalition.

During the run-up to the election and during the more than two months it took to form government both parties made extensive use of social media channels for campaigning, spinning, and a highly personalised style of politics. Both party leaders Matteo Salvini and Luigi Di Maio supplied hundred thousands of their followers with 280-character messages during this process.

This project focuses on the effectiveness of this elite messaging. Over four months of campaigning and consultations we collected over 250 GB of tweets related to Italian politics. With these data we are able to determine if over the course of political compromising between both parties the Twitter-ecospheres of both parties converged as well. We will describe the dynamics over time, and identify the lifecycles of central topics during campaigning and after the election. Most importantly, we evaluate if the structure of social
media interactions changed itself. We ask if the interactions between followers of Lega and M5S were influenced by interactions between party elites.

**Name:** Dave Campbell, Professor at SFU’s Data Science Program  
http://people.stat.sfu.ca/~dac5/Dave_Campbell/Dave_Campbell.html  
https://www.sfu.ca/datascience.html  
**Title:** New Data Science Training Initiatives  
**Abstract:** The Data Science BSc and Honours programs provide a breadth of interdisciplinary tools for quantitatively inclined students. The department of Statistics and Actuarial Science has a new course aimed at providing social science students with quantitative tools in Data Science for acquiring and analyzing time, text, and location data;  
STAT 310 - 2 : Introduction to Data Science for the Social Sciences  
and its co-requisite:  
STAT 311 - 2: Introduction to Data Science for the Social Sciences lab. Our intent is to boost skills but also build collaborations and as such we hope that other departments will offer their own version of the lab co-requisite catering examples to their own domains.

**Name:** Milena Droumeva, Glenfraser Endowed Professor in Sound Studies at SFU & Brady Marks  
https://www.sfu.ca/communication/team/faculty/milena-droumeva.html  
**Title:** Lightning Talk: Listening between the lines: A sonification of #metoo  
**Abstract:** This project is part of my ongoing work in social issue sonification: what types of approaches and what does sonification offer as an alternative, non-visual way of representing incredibly meaningful and nuanced social movements.

**Name:** Rebecca Dowson, Digital Scholarship Librarian  
https://www.lib.sfu.ca/users/rebecca-dowson  
**Title:** Digital Humanities Innovation Lab  
**Abstract:** Description of the infrastructure and projects in the DHIL.

**Name:** Sarah Anne Ganter, Professor at SFU’s School of Communication  
https://reutersinstitute.politics.ox.ac.uk/people/dr-sarah-anne-ganter  
**Title:** Platform logics meet journalistic logics  
**Abstract:** In this short, lightning talk, I am going to speak about a project recently funded via the small SSHRC fund in which we study journalists employed by big, digital platforms to help them govern the contents they distribute. Big platform companies like Google, Facebook, Twitter, and Snapchat influence when, where, and how audiences encounter news contents online, immensely. These platform companies increasingly seek to employ journalist experts to select and structure the news contents. Human content moderation is expected to have long-term effects on professional self-perception, training of journalists, and also the assessment of organizational accountability by policy-makers and regulators. The employment of journalists by these platforms exemplifies how technological companies are transforming into media companies. In this short talk, I will outline the ways in which the project studies the emergence of these new “platform journalists”, who are employed by digital platforms to moderate contents.

**Name:** Aaron M. Hoffman, Professor at SFU’s Department of Political Science  
https://www.sfu.ca/politics/faculty/full-time/aaron_hoffman.html  
https://www.sfu.ca/politics.html  
**Title:** Does bottom-line pressure make terrorism coverage more negative? Evidence from a Twenty Newspaper Panel Study  
**Abstract:** This research examines the relationship between sales and advertising revenues at newspapers and the tone of terrorism coverage. Work on the profit-seeking model of news production suggests that newspaper coverage of subjects like terrorism gets more negative as the ability of newspapers to turn profits declines. Journalists, however, dispute the connection between the sale of news and the coverage of news. We address this debate using a mixture of methods. Using an original panel dataset of roughly 1000 newspaper articles drawn from 20 top circulating U.S. newspapers between 1997 and 2014 in conjunction with computerized content analysis, we find no relationship between the sale of news and the tone of terrorism coverage. Qualitative interviews with journalists from many of these same newspapers confirms this result. Instead, both the quantitative and qualitative results suggest that the tone of terrorism coverage is linked to the incidence of terrorism in the US rather than the pressure on newspapers to generate profits.
Name: Keshav Mukunda, Research Data Librarian
https://www.lib.sfu.ca/users/keshav-mukunda
Title: Research Data Management
Abstract: Description of the services and infrastructure available from the library within the Research Data area.

Name: Mark Pickup, Professor at SFU’s Department of Political Science
https://www.sfu.ca/politics/faculty/full-time/mark_pickup.html
Title: Conventional wisdom holds legislative politics in majoritarian democracies are zero-sum
Abstract: Conventional wisdom holds legislative politics in majoritarian democracies are zero-sum. Once a party secures a parliamentary majority, opposition parties have little chance of influencing the agenda. But researchers rarely have access to committee deliberations, where the bulk of substantive policymaking occurs. In this project, we use machine learning to estimate partisan distinctiveness -- i.e. the degree of polarization -- in a large corpus of committee deliberations and plenary speeches from Canada ($\sim$2 million utterances). We also collect data on 830 bills to ask: Do opposition parties impose legislative “costs” on the government when considering divisive bills in committee? As debate polarizes, we expect government legislation is subject to greater amendment and delay. In short, we determine whether committee deliberation is cheap talk or a way for opposition parties to influence agenda-setting in the Canadian Parliament. In so doing, we speak to broader issues related to the visibility of legislative debate in representative democracy, parliamentary and otherwise.

Name: John Richards, Professor at SFU’s Graduate Public Policy School
http://www.sfu.ca/mpp.html
Title: Research agenda on primary school performance in rural Bangladesh
Abstract: In 2019, we are planning a national Bangladesh survey with a 6,000 student sample. Provided we successfully manage the logistics of a national survey, we hope to conduct ongoing surveys every two-three years until 2030 (terminal date for the UN Social Development Goals).

The rationale for undertaking this project is the very low quality of primary education in Bangladesh - and, unfortunately, in much of South Asia. Use of the ASER protocol permits comparison with large-scale surveys in India and Pakistan. We are working in partnership with NGOs in Pakistan and India, which use the ASER protocol.

The ultimate goal is to generate sufficient public pressure that government education ministries address the underlying causes for weak outcomes. Prominent among the causes is rent-seeking behaviour by governments and teachers’ unions.

Name: Maite Taboada, Professor, Department of Linguistics & Vasundhara Gautam, B.Sc. student, Joint Major in Computing Science and Linguistics
http://www.sfu.ca/~mtaboada/
https://www.sfu.ca/discourse-lab
Title: Content moderation in social media
Abstract: We present work on content moderation, specifically two projects, one on moderating online news comments (moderation.ngrok.io), and one on detecting fake news (fakenews.ngrok.io).

Name: Laurel Weldon, Professor at SFU’s Department of Political Science
https://www.sfu.ca/politics/faculty/full-time/laurel_weldon.html
Title: Project analyzing social media data on social movements, in this case, the Black Lives Matter movement
Abstract: This paper actually does use big data (several million tweets) to explore relationships between different constituencies within social movements, asking how best to build solidarity, specifically, by emphasizing or sublimating difference? The paper suggests that the relationship between BLM and Say her Name (which raised the issue of police violence against Black Women) is instructive, and on-line relationships, at least, suggest that highlighting intra-group difference (what some have criticized and/or dismissed as “identity politics”) can strengthen social movements.