



Shadow Economies of the Internet: Follower Factories and Markets of Influence in Asia and Beyond

Kungstegen, Aula Magna, Stockholm University
1–4 p.m., January 25, 2019

The event is part of the project "Shadow Economies of the Internet: An Ethnography of Click Farming," which is run by Johan Lindquist and Patrick Vonderau and funded by the Swedish Research Council.

Space is limited for the event. To register please contact lina.lorentz@socant.su.se. For further information, contact johan.lindquist@socant.su.se.

Digital media has radically transformed public culture. Politicians, celebrities, media, companies, and influencers around the world are struggling to address and capitalize on a dizzying array of publics. While the digital like or follower economy on social media has assumed that judgments are voluntarily provided by normal users, it has become evident that this economy is increasingly compromised. It is now common knowledge that politicians have paid for millions of Twitter followers, that Facebook likes are regularly purchased, and that private data brokers and analysts use social media data to monitor and manipulate voter constituencies. With the rise of "fake news," manipulated online communication has moved to the center of politics and public life.

This seminar brings together scholars who have conducted empirical work on these issues, specifically political disinformation campaigns and influencers in the Philippines and the market for followers and likes on Facebook and Instagram in Indonesia and Germany. In a series of presentations, they will present preliminary results of this research and open for discussion with the audience.

Participants

Johan Lindquist, Professor, Department of Social Anthropology and Director of the Forum for Asian Studies, Stockholm University, Sweden

Follower Factories in Indonesia and Beyond: Automation and Labor in a Transnational Market

This presentation will describe the market for Instagram followers in Indonesia from the perspective of the sellers. Indonesians are among the world leaders in time spent on social media. Based on interviews with and observations of

more than 30 sellers in Indonesia, the presentation will describe a market that depends both on the development of processes of automation and on manual labor, and is organized through transnational chains of producers, sellers, and resellers.

Jonathan Corpus Ong, Associate Professor of Global Digital Media, University of Massachusetts Amherst, USA

Behind the Scenes of "Fake News" Factories: Professionalism and Precarity in the Philippines' Political Trolling Industry

This presentation takes a production studies approach to digital disinformation research as it asks: Who exactly are the people who operate fake accounts for political clients? What are the work arrangements of paid trolls? And what are their moral justifications for the work that they do? With unprecedented access to the digital strategists and influencers behind clandestine political operations in the Philippines, this study identifies the vulnerabilities in the creative and digital industries and broader political culture that normalize and incentivize "fake news" production.

Patrick Vonderau, Professor in Media and Communication Studies at University of Halle-Wittenberg, Germany

Clicks, Likes, and Arms Trade: Exploring Germany's "Like Economy"

This presentation explores the downside of the German "influencer industry," and more specifically, how various actors engage in de/valuing brand reputation on platforms such as Facebook or Instagram by trading likes or followers via unsanctioned platform connections. Platforms have been praised as new technoeconomical configurations that use automation to turn social networks into markets. Yet for many actors, the promise of building a reputation algorithmically has remained unfulfilled, requiring an ancillary (rather than shadow) economy of services to fill the gap. Taking its cue from economic sociology, this paper disentangles the interests and practices involved in the German like and follower trade.

Discussant

Antonio Casilli, Associate Professor of Digital Humanities (HDR) at Télécom ParisTech, France

Department of Social Anthropology
Forum for Asian Studies

www.socant.su.se www.asianstudies.su.se



Stockholm
University