Northwestern MTS Guide to the 61st Annual Conference of the International Communication Association
May 26-30, 2011
Student Presentations

**Friday, May 27**

9:00 – 10:15am  Westin Waterfront, Grand Ballroom E

**Brian Keegan (TOP STUDENT PAPER!!)**

**Session:** Social Media and Public Engagement

**Title:** Breaking News, Breaking Planes, and Breaking Hearts: Psycholinguistics and Sensemaking in Collaborative Accounts of Catastrophe

**Division:** Communication and Technology

**Abstract:** Collective intelligence systems coordinate their work and make sense of complex and traumatic breaking news events. Using automated content analysis techniques on a corpus of 127 Wikipedia articles about commercial airline disasters, a multilevel longitudinal content analysis of editors’ contributions examines how internal schema of being emotionally responsive, making causal attributions, interpreting discrepant information, and employing contemporaneous perspectives change following a catastrophic event. By using editors’ contributions as proxies for their internal schema for sensemaking, editors’ coordination practices influence their ability to heedfully interrelate and influence other editors’ schema and the differences between these processes on breaking and non-breaking articles. A breaking article’s age is the primary determinant of changes in sensemaking schema while contributors’ coordination processes mediate non-breaking articles’ evolution. Despite the complex pattern of interactions and interrelating, Wikipedia’s archives of breaking news articles are valuable historiographical tools for understanding fine-grained changes in socially-constructed meaning and cultural memory.

12:00 – 1:15  ICA Virtual Online Conference (Featured)

**Lindsay Young**

**Title:** Government to Citizen Communication in a Networked World: Integrating Network and Communication Theories to Inform Strategic Communication Research and Practice

**Session:** Conceptualizing Audiences and Actors Online

**Division:** Mass Communication

**Abstract:** Changes in the structure of society and technological developments have impacted the communication processes between governments and citizens. Traditional forms of communication that rely heavily on the mass media are losing their effectiveness and become increasingly replaced by more networked forms of contact. Hence, we need to establish a networked-communication framework for strategic communication research and practice that challenges current communication theories and (governmental) assumptions. Based on an analysis of communication theories and an exploratory study among 218 US citizens, we present three dimensions for this framework: (1) the direction and linearity of communication flows; (2) the overall multiplexity of people’s source and channel repertoire and (3) the embeddedness of information flows within a social context.
The empirical component illustrates the complexities in citizen-government interaction and relevance of network research. From this perspective, the communication relationship between institutional actors and citizens should be characterized as multi-directional, multi-plex, and structurally dependent.

3:00 – 4:15 Westin Waterfront, Harbor Ballroom II
**Jeffrey Treem (TOP PAPER & TOP STUDENT PAPER!!)**
Session: Organizational Communication: Top Papers
Title: *Experts at Creating Expertise: Knowledge Performance in a Professional Service Firm*
Division: Organizational Communication

**Abstract:** Conceptualizations of expertise commonly view the construct as the expression of an exclusive knowledge or ability. As such, perspectives on organizations advocate the use of structures designed to codify, extract, store, and support the knowledge of experts. This study offers an alternative communicative-based perspective on expertise in organizations that views the construct as attributed based on situated performances of knowledge judged relative to others. Using ethnographic data from two public relations organizations, this work develops propositions regarding the attribution of expertise in knowledge-intensive firms and then validates those propositions with behavioral data. Findings suggest that expertise in organizations is a dynamic, situated construct that is produced by and a product of communicative acts.

Sunday, May 29

10:30 – 11:45 Westin Waterfront, Commonwealth Ballroom A
**Lauren Scissors**
Session: Managing Relationships Online and Offline
Title: *We Like Each Other, Now What? Examining Initial E-Mail Messages From Speed-Date Matches*
Division: Communication and Technology

**Abstract:** This paper explores the nature of email messages sent in attempts to procure a (romantic) date. Individuals participated in a speed-dating event and “matches” were given the opportunity to communicate via an email messaging system. Emails were examined at two levels: (1) message characteristics and strategies employed by gender, and (2) characteristics of messages associated with the likelihood of future face-to-face interaction. Results indicate that men and women craft their emails differently. Women used more indirect strategies such as tentative language and emoticons, while men used more direct strategies such as using the woman’s name, asking her for additional contact information, and saying that they enjoyed the date. However, successful strategies for setting up future face-to-face interaction were similar across gender and included using the recipient’s name, suggesting general plans, and referencing aspects of the pair’s previous interaction. Implications for gender role behaviors and language in computer-mediated communication are discussed.
Eugenia Mitchelstein (with Pablo Boczkowski)

Session: Citizens as Prosumers: Examining User-Generated Content

Title: The Prosumption Practices of Monitorial Citizens: Accounting for the Most Commented Stories on Leading Online News Sites During and After the U.S. 2008 Presidential Election

Division: Journalism Studies

Abstract: This study examines the content of the stories that receive the most comments from audience members in three leading American news sites both during a period of relatively routine political activity and at a time of heightened political activity (the 2008 U.S. presidential campaign). It compares the most commented articles with the thematic composition of the news presented on the homepages of these sites. Results of the analysis indicate that (a) during the campaign, consumers at the sites analyzed were more likely to comment on stories about politics, economics, business and international topics (or “public affairs” news) than during the time of routine political activity, (b) there were a greater proportion of stories about public affairs matters among the most commented articles than on the homepages at the three sites during the campaign, and on two of the sites during the time of routine political activity, and (c) in the 2008 sample, consumers’ propensity to comment on public affairs news increased as Election Day neared. On the basis of these findings, the paper concludes by suggesting theoretical contributions at the intersection of digital media and political communication.

Patrick Hsieh (with Eszter Hargittai)

Session: Social Support, Social Capital, and the Internet

Title: Communication Multiplexity: An Alternative Theoretical Approach to the Relationship Between Social Capital and Internet Use

Division: Communication and Technology

Abstract: Literature that investigates the Internet’s implications for maintaining social relationships tends to consider social capital as an outcome of Internet use rather than seeing it as antecedent to differentiated online behavior. We argue that it is necessary to examine whether people’s existing social capital may explain differentiated media use patterns and whether this then has implications for digital inequality. We propose a contact mode typology that captures the usage combination of various communication methods rather than simply contrasting all offline interactions with online communications. To test the utility of our approach, we analyze a survey data of a diverse group of young adults finding that both social capital and digital skills help explain differences in which contact modes people use to contact with their friends. The results suggest that it is useful to see Internet use as just one part of communication multiplexity in the context of social interaction.

Keywords: social capital, digital skills, communication multiplexity, Internet use, ICT use, digital inequality.
Ericka Menchen-Trevino
Session: Citizens as Prosumers: Examining User-Generated Content
Title: Social Public Measures of News: Users as Gatekeepers on Digg.com
Division: Journalism Studies
Abstract: In many online contexts, a new form of news gatekeeping has emerged. Lists of ‘most popular’ stories appear on many news homepages, and some news sites are edited only using such user feedback. These popularity measures aggregate information to make news gatekeeping decisions. When commentators and scholars describe the difference between this form of gatekeeping and previous forms they often emphasize the non-professional status of the decision makers. However, Internet users are not simply stepping into roles that professional editors once occupied. The structure of this type of decision-making is quite different. This study investigates Michael’s Iron Law of Oligarchy in the context of a website that uses voting as its primary editorial mechanism (Digg.com) using quantitative and qualitative analysis of the site’s content during the U.S. Democratic Party primary contest of 2008.

Ignacio Siles
Session: Communication and Technology Division Interactive Poster Session
Title: The Merging of Diaries, Journals and Weblogs: On How Blogs Became a Web “Format”
Division: Communication and Technology
Abstract: This paper investigates the process of the transformation of blogs from online “filters” into a “format” for sharing content on the Web. This study draws on a mixed-methods research design and combines scholarship in STS and communication studies. The article analyzes how different communities of users created three types of websites at the end of the 1990s: online diaries, personal publishing journals, and weblogs. The paper explores next three dynamics involved in the process of technological stabilization of weblogs as a format. First, users appropriated weblogs by expanding its original content. Second, a software program (Blogger) helped the weblog stabilize as a website suitable for the purposes of these communities. Third, as the creation of templates standardized blogs, software developers and users worked to redefine them as the Web’s “native format.” This paper thus shows that the analysis of technological stabilization requires considering how artifacts and content are variously articulated.
Eden Litt (with Eszter Hargittai)

Session: Social Media as News Sources: Empirical Evidence From Four Countries
Title: Tweets for All? The Relationship Between Prior News Interest and Social Media Adoption

Division: Political Communication

Abstract: There is much enthusiasm about social media’s ability to engage people with the news in ways not possible through traditional media. However, we have little sense for the extent to which these services are being widely adopted by the general Internet user population and who exactly decides to use these services in the first place. Since data about social media uses such as Twitter often come from the sites’ users, investigations end up ignoring those who are non-adopters. Who is most likely to become user of the service? What motivates people to start using Twitter? Can we identify any systematic patterns of adoption or is embracing the service randomly distributed among Internet users? Drawing on unique longitudinal data (2009, 2010) surveying over 500 diverse young American adults about their Internet uses and news interests at two points in time, this paper looks at what explains uptake of Twitter in the year when the site’s use went mainstream. First, we look at whether demographic background explains site adoption. Then, we consider the relationship of prior interest in different types of content (2009 data) and the take-up of Twitter (change from 2009 to 2010). Findings suggest that women and African American students were much more likely to adopt Twitter than others while Hispanic students were much less likely to start using the service. We also find a relationship between parental education (our proxy for socioeconomic status) and Twitter use with those from more privileged backgrounds using the service more. Additionally, results suggest that interest in celebrity and entertainment news, religion/spirituality, arts and crafts, sports, career advice and doing well in school are related to Twitter adoption while an interest in local/national news, international news and politics are not. This suggests that looking at the types of content of interest to people is important when considering the implications of social media use on news consumption.

Rachel Plotnick

Session: Wired Histories: Technology in Social Context
Title: Push to Talk: A History of Pushbutton Devices as Early Communication and Control Technologies

Division: Communication History

Abstract: Pushbutton devices in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, alongside the telephone and telegraph, served as facilitators for communication on both a utilitarian and cultural level. This paper probes discourse surrounding the pushbutton to understand how historical actors imagined the place of buttons in their technological landscape, particularly exploring the devices’ disciplinary functions. By studying the pushbutton as an historical, social and cultural artifact, this paper makes a case for the button as a critical material object that illuminates issues around control and communication in everyday life.
Monday May 30

10:30 – 11:45 am         Westin Waterfront, Harbor Ballroom II
**William Barley & Alan Clark (with Paul Leonardi)**
Session: ICTs: Theory and Practice
Title: *Emerging Technologies-in-Practice: A Communication Framework of Convergence of Technologies-in-Use*
Division: Organizational Communication

Abstract: Collective agreement on technology use within a group is an important precondition for organizational change. Theorists, however, have not substantively examined how such agreement is achieved. Our goal in this paper is to explore the processes by which members of a group come to appropriate the features of a technology in the same way and use those features to achieve similar goals. We begin by claiming that, upon implementation, people are more likely to appropriate the features of novel technologies in divergent as opposed to convergent ways. We suggest that various personal, organizational, and technological factors promote divergence in appropriations. We term these person-specific uses technologies-in-use. Next we draw upon communication research to theorize the processes by which various technologies-in-use become a shared technology-in-practice. Our exploration of these processes suggests that different social mechanisms result in different technologies-in-practice and thus hold explanatory power for organizational change.
Faculty Presentations

Friday, May 27

10:30 – 11:45am
Westin Waterfront, Paine

James Ettema
Session: Journalism in 20th Century American History
Title: Liturgy of Blood Sacrifice: Broadcast Journalism Rallies the Nation to War
Division: Communication History

Abstract: War as blood sacrifice that ritually renews nationhood provides the interpretive lens for analyzing network news documentaries produced during the run-up to war in Vietnam. While that war was doomed to an ignominious conclusion, broadcast journalism gave it a ceremonially proper start with a reading of the liturgy for the most solemn of all mass-mediated rituals. But instead of socially foundational and culturally essential was this celebration of the newly dead actually an example of “the myth of the mediated center?”

12:00 – 1:15pm
Eszter Hargittai (with former MTS student Chris Karr)
Session: New Technologies, New Methodologies: The Internet and Beyond
Title: Text Messaging as a Method of Data Collection
Division: Communication and Technology

Abstract: Text-messaging has taken off considerably in the past few years with the majority of adults and teens in many countries communicating through text messages regularly. Is there a way for social scientists to benefit from the proliferation of this technology? Can such short messages help us better understand human behavior? We have conducted studies using text messaging to collect time-diary data from respondents about their whereabouts and everyday media use patterns. While it may seem that 140 characters – the length limit of many text messages – can hardly capture the level of nuance necessary for valuable data, our experiences suggest that much can be gleaned in real time about user practices even in just a few characters. We will discuss the great opportunities offered by this new method of data collection, but will also reflect on the pitfalls and challenges it poses.
Saturday, May 28

10:30 – 11:15am  Westin Waterfront, Grand Ballroom D

**Eszter Hargittai**

Session: Audience and User Perceptions of Media Old and New
Title: *Taming the Information Tide: Americans’ Thoughts on Information Overload, Polarization, and Social Media*
Division: Mass Communication

*Abstract:* This study reports on new media adopters’ perceptions of and reactions to the shift from push broadcasting and headlines to the pull dynamics of online search. From a series of focus groups with adults from around the U.S. we find three dominant themes: 1) most feel empowered and enthusiastic, not overloaded; 2) evolving forms of social networking represent a new manifestation of the two-step flow of communication; 3) although critical of partisan ‘yellers’ in the media, individuals do not report cocooning with the like-minded nor avoiding the voices of those with whom they disagree. We also find that skills in using digital media matter when it comes to people’s attitudes and uses of the new opportunities afforded by them.

3:00 – 4:15pm  Westin Waterfront, Alcott

**Ellen Wartella (with Alexis Lauricella)**

Session: The Role of Parents in the Media Lives of Young Children
Title: *Parents’ Views on Media and Young Children as a Function of Ethnicity, Education, and Income*
Division: Children Adolescents and Media

*Abstract:* Parents of children under age 6 were split evenly in their views of whether TV helps, hurts, or has no effect on children’s learning (Rideout & Hamel, 2006). However, we don’t know how parents’ views on their children’s media use differ as a function of basic demographic variables. Parents (N=312) completed a survey of their families’ media use and their views on media. The sample was predominately Latino, low income, and with fewer years of education. Media use and views about media use differ by parent’s ethnicity, level of education, and income. More Black parents reported that TV mostly helps children’s learning compared to of White and Hispanic parents. More very low income parents and parents with less education reported that TV hurts children’s learning compared to parents with higher incomes and education. Parents’ views of media are not universal, but instead are influenced by their culture and experiences.
**Sunday, May 29**

**12:00 – 1:15pm**  
Westin Waterfront, Commonwealth Ballroom B  
**James Webster (with MTS alumnus Tom Ksiazek)**  
Session: Pluralism and Diversity in Media Content and Consumption  
Title: *Beyond the Long Tail: Audience Fragmentation in an Age of Digital Media*  
Division: Mass Communication  
*Abstract:* Audience fragmentation is often taken as evidence of social polarization. Yet the tools we use to study fragmentation provide limited information about how people actually allocate their attention across digital media. We offer a theoretical framework for understanding fragmentation and advocate for more audience-centric studies. This approach is operationalized by applying network analysis metrics to Nielsen data on television and internet use. We find extremely high levels of audience duplication across 236 media outlets, suggesting overlapping patterns of public attention rather than isolated groups of audience loyalists.

**4:30 – 5:45pm**  
Westin Waterfront, Douglas  
**James Ettema**  
Session: The Purpose of Journalism  
Title: *(New)* Media and Public Accountability  
Division: Journalism Studies  
*Abstract:* Expressions of concern about the future of journalism seem primarily to reflect concern for the maintenance of a well informed citizenry. At stake, however, is not mere dissemination of information but the accountability of officials and institutions – if not to a frequently indifferent citizenry – then to each other and to the rules and ideals of the democratic polity itself. The chronic and progressive degeneration of tough-minded investigative reporting in print and issue-oriented public affairs documentary production on the air has damaged the ability of journalism to undertake a role in the maintenance of public accountability. At the same time, however, new opportunities for journalism to engage in this crucial task may be emerging – for example Talking Points Memo’s relentless tracking of the scandal arising from the Bush Administration’s improper firing of U.S. attorneys. This presentation analyzes accountability and related concepts (e.g. transparency) from the perspective of what (new) media might reasonably be expected to accomplish.
Monday May 30

10:30 – 11:45 am        Westin Waterfront, Lewis

Eszter Hargittai (with MTS student Heather Young)

Session: Emerging Trends in e-Health Research: From e-Health Literacy to e-Interventions

Title: Searching for “Plan B”: Using the Internet to Find Information About Emergency Contraception

Division: Health Communication

Abstract: While research has established that turning to the Internet for information about health matters is increasingly common, we know little about the strategies that people use to access such information and the accuracy of material they consult online. This paper draws on in-person observations and interviews with a diverse group of 210 young adults about their experiences with looking for emergency contraception (EC) information on the Web. Findings suggest that despite being a highly wired group with much experience using the Internet, many respondents are unable to find accurate information on this important topic. One third of participants were unable to find any relevant information about emergency contraception and the majority of the whole group could not identify the most efficient way to acquire EC in a time of need.