

THE SHAPE OF WITCHCRAFT. ANALYTICS OF RECOMMENDATION ALGORITHMS AND THE PLATFORMIZATION OF CULTURE

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The recommendation algorithm of YouTube is another blackbox of these times of platformization of culture (Nieborg & Poell, 2018). The platform is not only for user-generated content; it also embeds a full constellation of affordances that facilitate interaction, comments, and subscription among the prod-users of the content (Burgess & Green 2018). YouTube, in exchange, claims to be able to personalize the viewer experience with an algorithm that creates a narrowed list of recommendations. A way for the platform to factorize the recommendation algorithms consists of launching the videos of most popular user-creators. This helps the monetization circuit of subscription and recommendation processes (Rieder, Matamoros & Coromina, 2018).

Following McLuhan's statement "the content of a medium is always another medium" (McLuhan & McLuhan, 1994), YouTube is also an archival repository and an opportunity to preserve earlier audiovisual materials: documentaries, films and television programs produced in the past century. This is also a form of remediation (Bolter & Gruisin, 1996) that updates, and re-contextualizes, and maybe even revalues the archaeological material.

The question however is: how are these media-archaeological artifacts introduced in the algorithmic recommendation networks? And within which coordinates does this material re-enter the cultural semantic environment; and with what implications?

This paper uses the case of an extremely rare television documentary on witchcraft in the United Kingdom: *The Power of the Witch* (1971). The documentary was broadcast only once on the public service media BBC Two and the physical copies were lost, the only place where this documentary can still be found is on YouTube; where it is posted only three times under different profiles.

We have considered the video with more subscription and views and using the YouTube Data Tool (Rieder, 2015), we have collected the two first levels of the recommendation network (with the crawl depth of 2) generated by the YouTube algorithm. The result is a network of N=4119 videos organised in 10 modules - or clusters/communities. After a brief description of the modules, we will advance with the deeper analysis of the first cluster (N=1118 videos) using automated textual analysis and further qualitative and network analysis of the transcripts of the voice-over of the videos.

By analysing the connections and extension of meanings suggested by the recommendation algorithm of the documentary *The Power of the Witch*, this research will contribute to the discussion in the conference in three ways. First, conceptually discussing the role of

recommendation algorithms at updating, resignifying and emmeshing older audiovisual produce within the networks of cultural meanings today, and the extension of its implication. Second, methodologically, the innovative use of digital methods to discuss cultural and ideological meanings. Third, adding to the current debates about platformization and culture the points about appropriation, resignification, and remediation that are algorithm-washed through the recommendation process.

Dr. Hantian Zhang is a Lecturer in Media at Sheffield Hallam University. With a PhD in Digital Media and Communication awarded by the University of Edinburgh, his research covers multiple aspects of Digital Media including social media, audience engagement, social/(tele)presence, participatory culture and network analysis. His research explores YouTube video networks, audience engagement with YouTube video blogs (vlogs), and gamification elements on online streaming apps. Outcomes of his research have been recently published in and presented at peer-reviewed international journal and conferences in Internet, Social Media and Human-computer Interaction (HCI) studies including *First Monday* (2018) and *HCI International* (2020). In addition to Digital Media research, he also has a background in Creative and Digital Media Production: Graphic Design, 3D, Film Production and Web Design. He is currently specialising in teaching Audio-visual, Print and Web Media Productions, as well as Media Evolution and the Professional Landscape.

Dr. Joan Rodriguez-Amat is a Principal Lecturer in the Department of Media, Arts and Communications at Sheffield Hallam University. His main area of research revolves around the communicative spaces; the cultural constructions of time and space, and citizenship and power (see www.communicativespaces.org). This triple discussion emerges in the intersection of media governance research, cultural production, and democratic debates; and the communities and identities -among them sexual, national, and cultural identities- growing from the geopolitics of social media platforms and communication technologies.

Yulia Belinskaya is a Prae-Doc researcher at the Department of Communication, University of Vienna. She holds a Masters degree in Advertising from St. Petersburg Technological University and a Masters degree in Communications from Stockholm University. Her current work covers the issues connected with the governance of communicative spaces, urban communication, freedom of expression, pornography and obscenity, restrictive media policies, digital media in hybrid regimes and ethics of communication.

Diane A. Rodgers is Senior Lecturer in Media, Arts and Communications and co-founder member of the Centre for Contemporary Legend Research Group at Sheffield Hallam University in the UK. Her background is in film studies, specialising in teaching alternative media (including cult TV, film, music and comics), and storytelling in film and television, including textual analysis and folklore. Diane is currently conducting PhD research in folklore, folk-horror and hauntology in 1970s British Television and her research interests include media representations of folklore and contemporary legend. She recently published peer-reviewed articles in journals *Folklore* (2019) and *Revenant* (2020), has a number of forthcoming chapters in books on folklore and folk horror, and is co-editing a book (with James Fenwick) about the seminal television show *The X-Files*.