Vacancy for a PhD Research Fellow in digital economics and strategy at the Laboratory of Economics and Management of IMT Atlantique.

The position is for a fixed-term period of 3 years

Location: IMT Atlantique Brest, Technopôle Brest-Iroise, France

Hollywood-style propaganda:
*analysis of the use of creative content as a strategic tool for shaping public opinion on climate action*

About the project

This interdisciplinary PhD project builds on previous studies to analyze the influence of creative projects aimed at eliciting action on climate change and sustainability on the community dynamics of the climate action movement online.

Art is often used as a powerful tool of political influence. Film, music, literature, and other forms of artistic expression play an important role in shaping public opinion and promoting values and agendas, both domestically and internationally. The academic literature is ripe with examples of how governments and activists use creative projects to draw attention to, mobilize support for, or express dissent on societal issues such as violence, immigration, or LGBTQ+ rights. For instance, during the cold war, the US government used cinema to counter communist narratives and project soft power internationally. Songs such as "We Shall Overcome" were also used as anthems of the civil rights movement in the US, and protest songs expressing opposition to the South African government flourished under the Apartheid regime. More recently, Russian punk band Pussy Riot has been challenging the political status quo with music, and street artists make art in public spaces to raise awareness about police brutality and environmental degradation.

The Internet and modern communication technologies have turbo-charged the use of creative projects to influence public opinion. Streaming and online distribution, social media marketing, immersive cultural experiences, and transmedia storytelling allow for the quasi-immediate mobilization of large crowds worldwide at the click of a mouse. Their reach brings novel audiences to extant conversations and leads to the emergence of new social groups forming online communities and collective opinion. The viral nature of widely shared and distributed content and resultant interactions among users also have well-identified negative implications, including disinformation, online radicalization, and reduced privacy and data security.

Climate action seeks to counter climate change and promote sustainability. This global movement is made of several independent groups, including Fridays For Future, Extinction Rebellion, Sunrise Movement, 350.org, and others. These groups coordinate campaigns, online actions, and events to raise awareness and push for policy change. They are very active on specialized websites, generalist platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Reddit and YouTube and online forums, which they use to share their views, amplify their messages, and engage with like-minded individuals or groups.

Importantly, these same online spaces are used by the groups that oppose climate action and promote climate denialism, conspiracy theories, or skepticism about the scientific consensus on climate change: for instance, The Heartland Institute, The Global Warming Policy Foundation, Reddit groups such as r/climateskeptics and r/climatehoax, and Facebook groups such as Climate Change Dispatch and Climate Realists. In the same manner as their opponents, these groups also actively use creative projects to promote their agenda.
Work tasks

The PhD project aims to answer the following research question: under which conditions and what kind(s) of creative projects provide the most significant impact on online community dynamics and collective opinion?

Additionally, we seek to analyze whether the scope of influence of creative projects on communities depends on the level of involvement of climate activists in the creation and broadcast of these creative projects.

The thesis will focus on the effects on climate action online community dynamics of topical creative projects such as documentary films Seaspiracy (2021) or I Am Greta (2020); art installation such as The New York Climate Clock (2020); music events such as Global Citizen Live or Climate Live in 2021; or publications such as The Ministry for the Future by Kim Stanley Robinson or Unsettled by Steven E. Koonin.

A qualitative netnographic approach will be used to capture the behavior and interaction dynamics of activist groups on different online platforms. This methodology involves the observation and analysis of online conversations, publications and behaviors to understand the social practices and norms of the members of the communities under scrutiny. Building on this qualitative part, data will be collected from relevant online platforms, and quantitative analyses of the associated social graphs and dynamic communities will be conducted. Indicators of impact of creative projects will include: (1) splitting, expansion or disappearance of existing communities; (2) communities’ cohesion (change in clustering coefficient); (3) change in the communities’ social isolation; (4) formation of echo chambers.

The PhD project aims to extend the academic discussion on the general role and risks linked to the use of different creative projects as non-market strategies of information influence to the digital context. The insights provided by the PhD project will also be relevant for the critical discussion of the potential benefits and dangers of recent technological advancements, including generative AI, when employed for the creation of “strategic” content to shape public opinion.

Candidate’s qualifications

This PhD falls within the framework of Computational Social Sciences.

The successful candidate will have a degree in social sciences (economics, management, political science, sociology, ethnography, or cultural studies), skills (and interest) in data science and computer science and analytics, and competences in (big) data collection, organization, and analysis in particular in the area of social network analysis.

What we offer

- Working contract for a full-time position under public French law for 36 months.
- Access to courses relevant for the different fields of research.
- Opportunity to attend national and international conferences.
- During the three-year PhD work, the successful candidate will have an opportunity to spend up to one year at the University of Cambridge Judge Business School, UK as an academic visitor.

Team & Institution

IMT Atlantique is a leading technological and engineering university - or "Grande Ecole" - in digital, energy and environmental transitions. Located on three campuses in France (Brest, Nantes and Rennes), IMT Atlantique is a member of IMT (Institut Mines-Télécom), the number one group of public engineering and management higher education institutions in France. As a top-ranked French institution, IMT Atlantique is recognized as a world-class Technological University. Its mission is to combine digital technology, energy and environmental sciences to contribute to developments in industry and society.
The PhD candidate will be supervised by a multidisciplinary supervision panel with complementary expertise covering social sciences, cultural studies and strategy – including expertise in analysis of online platforms, strategy in the creative industries, and social networks.

Main supervisor: Inna Lyubareva is Associate Professor (HDR) in economy and social sciences. She develops original approaches using quantitative and qualitative methods at the interface between social sciences, statistics and computer science. Specific contributions of her research activity include: analysis of the dynamics of business model innovation and its strategic and political implications; detection of latent social interactions on digital platforms and their impact on users' opinions and preferences.

https://www.imt-atlantique.fr/fr/personne/inna-lyubareva

Second supervisor: Allègre L. Hadida is Associate Professor of Strategy at the University of Cambridge Judge Business School (CJBS). She is also a Fellow and Director of Studies at Magdalene College, a member of the Centre for Film and Screen and the Centre for Heritage Research, University of Cambridge, and a Fellow of the Royal Society of Arts. Her research interests focus on strategy in creative, arts and media organizations, on temporary organizations, and on creativity, improvisation and agility in business. Her scholarly work has been published in the Harvard Business Review and in international peer-reviewed journals, including the Journal of Marketing, Organizational Behaviour and Human Decision Processes, and the Journal of Operations Management.

https://www.jbs.cam.ac.uk/faculty-research/faculty-a-z/allegre-hadida/

**TYPE OF CONTRACT: TEMPORARY / JOB STATUS: FULL TIME / HOURS PER WEEK: 35**
**APPLICATION DEADLINE: 18/08/2023**
**ENVISAGED STARTING DATE: 2023**
**ENVISAGED DURATION: 36 months**
**WORK LOCATION(S): IMT Atlantique Brest, Technopôle Brest-Iroise, France**

**Your application (in French or in English) must include:**

- a brief account of the applicant's research interests and motivation for applying for the position
- names and contact information for two academic references, including the applicant’s master's thesis advisor.
- a recent CV
- official transcripts showing completion of a bachelor's and master's degrees. If you have not yet completed your master's degree, please submit a statement from your institution confirming that the master's thesis has been submitted and an expected completion date

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