

SPACE EDUCATION AND OUTREACH SYMPOSIUM (E1)  
New Worlds - Non-Traditional Space Education and Outreach (7)

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SOCIAL MEDIA FOR COMMUNICATION IN CONTEMPORARY SPACE PROJECTS AND PUBLIC  
NETWORKS: PRELIMINARY FINDINGS OF MIXED-METHOD, MULTISITED ETHNOGRAPHIC  
RESEARCH**Abstract**

In this paper I present some preliminary findings of my PhD research, exploring digitally-mediated communication and future-making practices within space projects and networks, with a particular focus on the use of novel social media to coordinate/deliver projects; to communicate/disseminate information and media content; and to consume, receive, and use it. The project is primarily ethnographic, grounded in interviews and participant observation with a range of actors within the space industry and interested publics, and is supplemented with social media and social network analysis, and discourse analysis. Fieldwork began in October 2016, and will run to December 2017, in Australia, the US, and online across sites.

This presentation will make use of preliminary fieldwork data and analysis to explore several key issues: 1) Discussion of the kinds of space-related projects, events, and information being communicated across different platforms (focus on human exploration of space). 2) Discussion of various ways outreach and promotion are being conducted (considering platforms, messages, strategies, etc.). 3) Discussion of ways of quantifying and qualifying engagement and publics (considering various models and metrics and their advantages and limitations; as well as how people in the field actually access and use information and content, based on observation and self-reports). 4) Based on this primary and secondary research, what strategies, platforms, programs, etc. seem to be working well, with an eye to providing some recommendations with regards to theory, methodology and best practice with actual projects and publics.

Keywords: social media, anthropology, human-computer interaction, publics, science communication, methodology