

Crowdsourcing apps and the postdigital politics of affectual spaces and surveillance

The current study investigates the intersection between crowdsourcing apps and postdigital affective polarization of online affiliated communities as manifested in the mobile app safecity. Safecity is a mobile app that crowdsources personal stories of harassment occurring in public spaces. The app's interface affords narratives of anonymous victims relating incidents of sexual abuse which are displayed as hot spots on a map indicating trends at a local level. The Indian region was selected as the focus of analysis because it reports the highest incidents rates. Relying on the tools of Critical Spatial Discourse Analysis (CSDA), (Richardson, 2015a, b) and the semiosis of affect (Wissinger, 2007), this study examines the ways affective polarization, as enacted within the medium of crowdsourcing, entangles the individual with the collective (Westberg, 2021c). The main thesis is that the postdigital affective meaning-making process as enacted by the interface agency produces negative discourse of fear that may regulate the actions of the putative app users. To put it differently, the interface of safecity is analysed to come up with the operationalization of 'computational surveillance' which in turn, enacts spatial 'behavioural reinforcement' (Holmes 2017) through the discourse of affect.

One concept which serves as a backdrop to the interpretation of the semio-discursive findings is that of 'post-panopticism' (Boyne, 2000). Boyne's post-panoptic surveillance helps in interpreting the ways safecity instantiates a particular form of affectual polarization through which the putative users' spatial practices might be directed and regulated after interacting with app. Under the tents of post-panopticism, surveillance is no longer a power technique, rather it is a 'cultural tool' that is enacted by social actants. This notion is methodologically viable to discuss the affectual polarization properties of crowdsourcing mobile apps while relating them to the 'cultural surveillance' of modern societies where people's actions are regulated and optimized according to the dictations of culture norms, being in this context, the norms enacted by crowdsourcing apps. The result is a new concept of surveillance that is predicated upon the affectual polarizing properties of social media.

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