



New Media and Digital Culture

UvA Masterweek, 2025

Dr. Alex Gekker

Programme director MA New Media and Digital Culture





What is it about?

- Understanding, studying and using new media.
- Wide degree of subjects
- Three pillars: theory, research, practice



EXTRACURRICULAR

Terminally Online *Peripherals* launch,
Symposiuhmm: *The Best Version of
Yourself*
Mario Kart tournament

METHODS

Digital research methods

Collect and organise online data and apply digital methods to the study of online objects such as Wikipedia, archived websites, search engines, social media.

Digital Research Seminars

Investigating (Audio) Memes and
Templatability | Group-Making and Digital
Culture: Community and Identity on Reddit |
The Memeplex : Tracking Symbolic
Infrastructures of Distrust | Closeness and
Amplification: Persona as method

Data Sprint | Digital
Methods Winter School

THEORY

New Media Theories

Develop an understanding of the currency of select new media theories, including affordances, platform and algorithms.

Media theory seminars

Platform Labour | Ways of Seeing: Digital
Media and Visibility | Algorithmic
Surveillance Infrastructures | Media and War
in the Age of Influence | Global Giggles:
Digital Humor in a Connected World

PRACTICE

Panels with Alumni | Lunch with the PC

Spherical: [web Sphere](#) | [news Sphere](#) | [Blogosphere](#) | [tag Sphere](#) | [video Sphere](#) | [image Sphere](#) | [Code Sphere](#)

4CAT: Capture and Analysis Toolkit

[Launch tool](#)[Instructions & Scenarios of Use](#)

Create datasets from a variety of web platforms - including Reddit, Telegram, 4chan and others - and an

Amazon Related Product Graph

[Launch tool](#)[Instructions & Scenarios of Use](#)

This command-line Python script allows you to enter a (set of) ASIN(s) and crawl its recommendations |

App Tracker explorer

[Launch tool](#)[Instructions & Scenarios of Use](#)

DMI App Tracker Tracker is a tool to detect in a set of APK files predefined fingerprints of known trackin



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STUDENT GOV

Panels | Lunch with the PC



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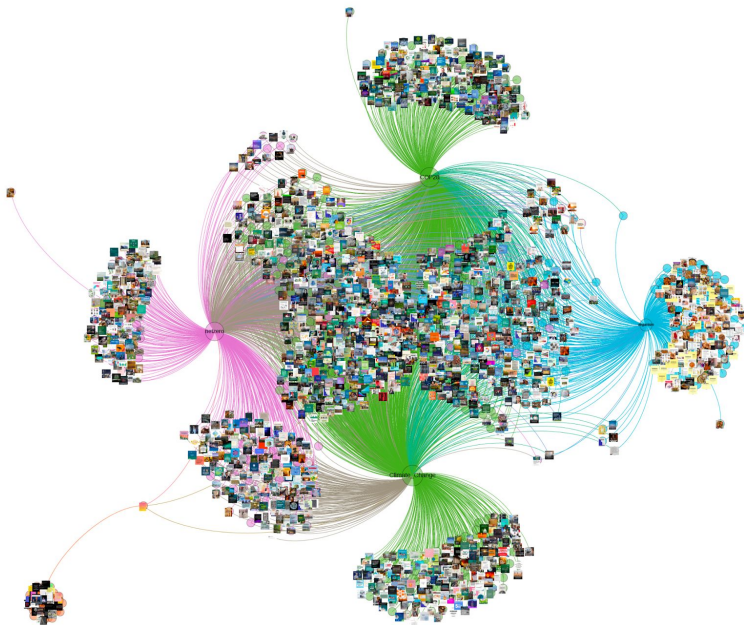
NM Research Methods (Digital Methods Data Sprint)

- Data Sprint -- a comprehensive data collection and analysis workshop in compressed 5-day format.
- Together with international PhD students, scholars, Journalism MA students and Density Designers (from Italy)
- Connected to the research group **Digital Methods Initiative**.
- See here: <https://www.digitalmethods.net/>





Culture-policy climate spaces of COP28: multimodal cross-platform analysis in TikTok, Instagram and Twitter (X)



Climate change

Instagram

ilyeducation



tezar



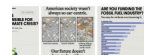
ty



stvaindia



ommons.earth



news



ifv

TikTok

talktv



seathechange



eurosport



save.ourworld_



ajplus



recider



news.com.au

Twitter

wideawake_media



VivekGRamaswamy



liz_churchill10



vivafalastin



shellenberger



cpsavesoil



DrLoudis

Instagram

koto_cabins



senator_rennick



lombardodier



guardianaustralia



greenpeaceuk



dwelldmagazine



oodlaworoject

Netzero

TikTok

russellshelby (irrelevant)



netzerocompany



nigel_farage



sambentley (irrelevant?)



kawakiwrlld (irrelevant?)



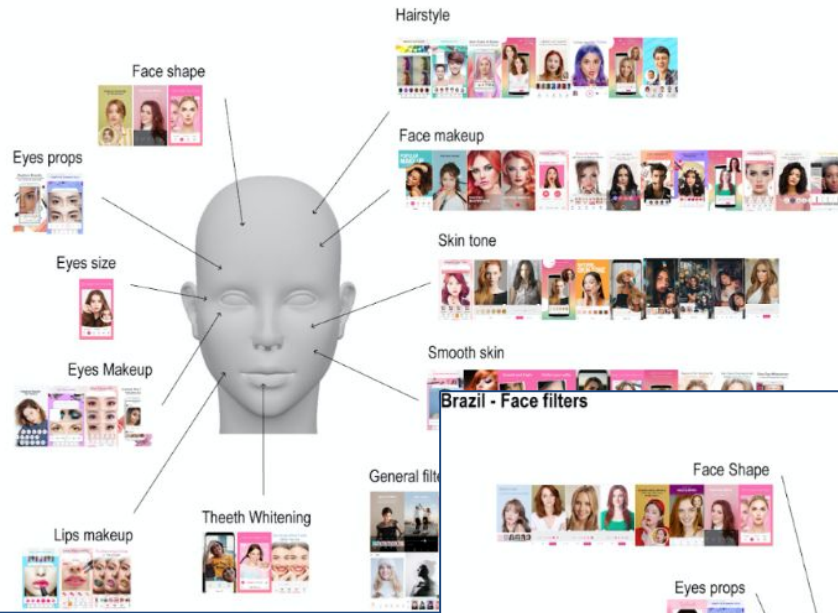
ariellekving



swaadador (irrelevant)

[Warren Pearce](#), [Janna Joceli Omena](#),
[Yuting Yao](#), [Carolyn Schwegler](#), [Jasmiijn](#)
[Visser](#), [Leyla Rommel](#), [Jöran Landschoff](#)

United States - Face filters



Brazil - Face filters



Figure 2 and 3: Beautification Apps. Studying cultural differences in the Google Play Store. Source: <https://wiki.digitalmethods.net/Dmi/WinterSchool2020BeautificationApps>



Digital Methods Winter School and Data Sprint: Call for Participation

Research-with-AI Critique

The Digital Methods Initiative (DMI), Amsterdam, is holding its annual Winter School on 'Research-with-AI critique'. The format is that of a (social media and web) data sprint, with tutorials as well as hands-on work for telling stories with data. There is also a programme of keynote speakers. It is intended for advanced Master's students, [PhD](#) candidates and motivated scholars who would like to work on (and complete) a digital methods project in an intensive workshop setting. For a preview of what the event is like, you can view short video clips from previous [editions](#) of the [School](#).

Just a part of the pipeline: Research-with-AI critique

Chatbots have become a 'part of the pipeline' in a number of research methodologies in the social sciences and humanities, contributing to formatting, summaries, annotation, labeling and even the generation of synthetic data. One question is how to go about using chatbots in the first place for such research tasks, and make use of the many best practice guides that have been shared across the research landscape. These guides contain steps about how to prompt and query chatbots properly. But they also advise that the chatbots explain themselves and that researchers validate their outputs. How does one gain confidence in how the chatbots work for the researchers? In other words, at each of these steps, one could consider how to ground chatbot findings, raising a series of questions such as when to undertake a manual and/or multiple chatbot comparison.

Digital methods and AI

Taking such a series of steps is in keeping with a digital methods outlook that would ask, what does this medium have to offer, and how can those offerings be repurposed for social and cultural research? And under which conditions can the findings be grounded in the medium? But it would also ask, what are AI native or medium methods? Can chatbots be used as societal and cultural reflections (such as the promise of 'synthetic data'? How does the medium or the platform affect the data? Here is where guardrail auditing comes into the picture. How to detect the guardrails that have been put up by the chatbots so that they can interact with users without offence? How do they affect the quality of the data? The Winter School is dedicated to how to undertake research with AI through a critical, digital methods lens.



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Digital Research Seminars

Investigating YouTube as Platform |
Experimental Web Research for (more than)
Human Rights | Russian Digital Warfare |
Exposing Algorithms between the Technical and
the Cultural

Data Sprint | Digital
Methods Winter School

THEORY

New Media Theories

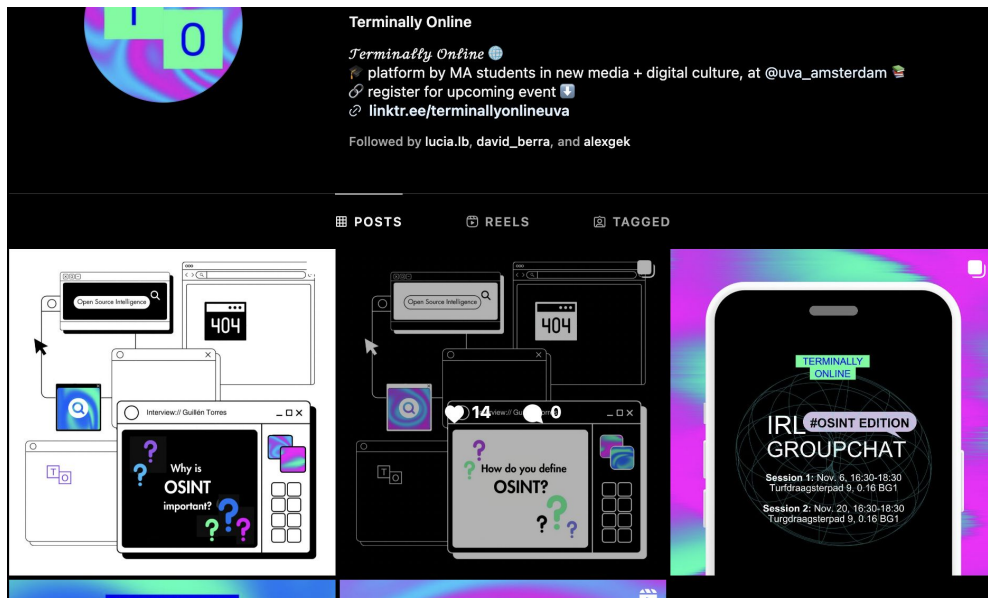
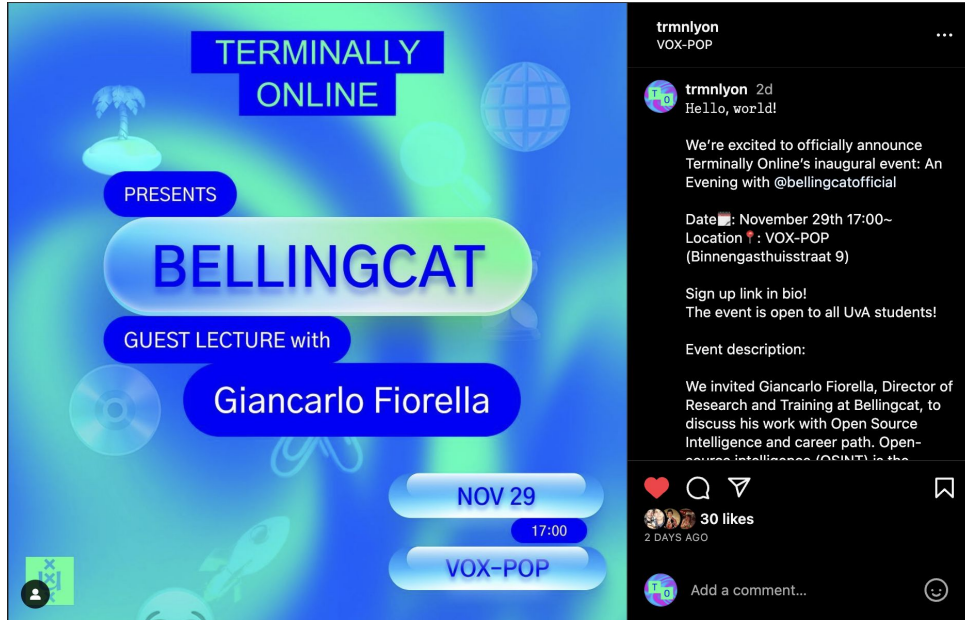
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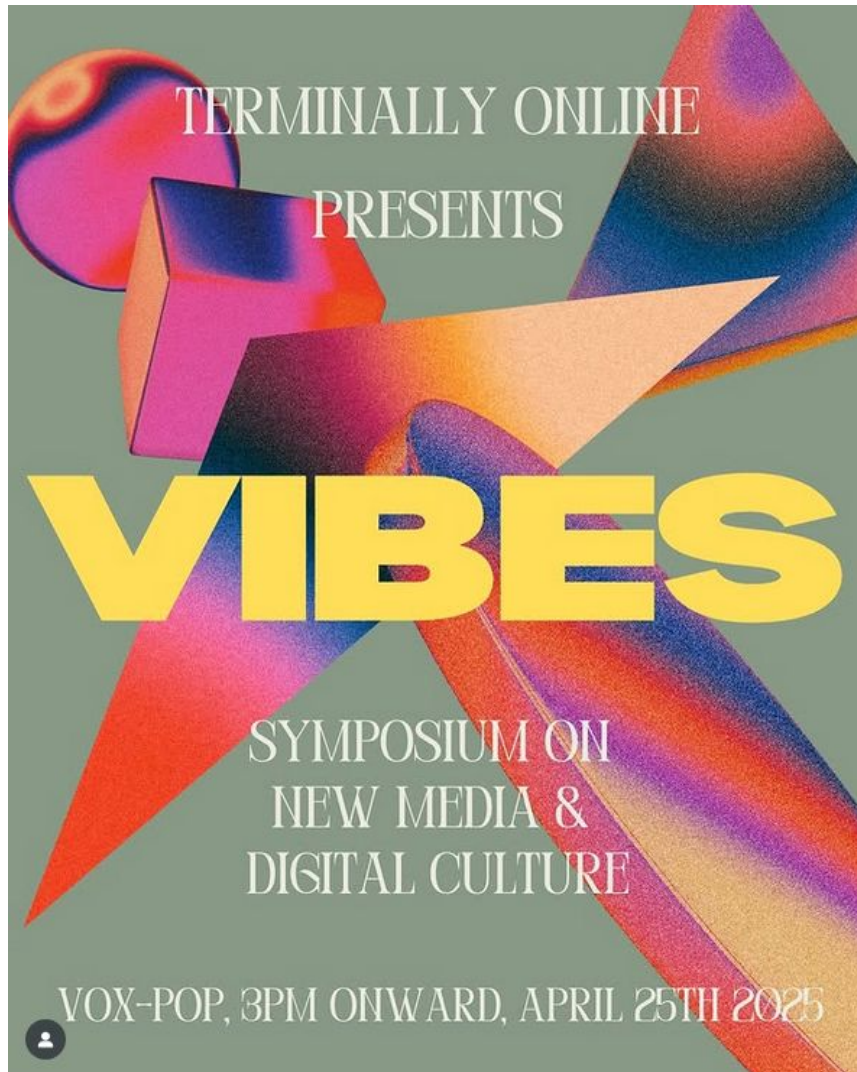
Media theory seminars

Platform Labor | What Kind of Medium is
Machine Learning? | Understanding the
Attention Economy | Critical Data Studie |
Digital Media and Visibility | Warn and Media
| Surveillance

STUDENT GOV

Panels | Lunch with the PC





Event Agenda

15:00-15:15	Introduction
15:15-16:00	Keynote "The Vibes are Immaculate: Towards a critical phenomenology of vibes" by Dr. Ludmila Lupinacci (Lecturer in Digital Media, School of Media and Communication, University of Leeds)
16:00-16:15	Break: Vibes Exhibition
16:15-17:45	Student Presentations
17:45-18:00	Break: Vibes Exhibition
18:00-18:45	Closing Panel



TO: Brainrot event

Graduation drinks

EXTRACURRICULAR

THESIS

ELECTIVES (M +T)

1. The Cultures and Economies of Apps.
2. Digital Activism.
3. Social Media and Contemporary issues
4. Issues Visual Subcultures Online.
5. Sustainable Digital Media?
6. AI and the New Conditions of Creativity

PRACTICE

Career Day

Humanities Venture
Lab

Putting AI in its Place

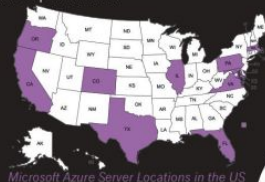
Mapping the placeless space of artificial intelligence

OpenAI Headquarters

The headquarters of OpenAI is located in San Francisco, California, USA. The headquarters is in the tech hub of the city, surrounded by other tech companies and startups. While the inventions such as ChatGPT and DALLÉ2 are managed from here, the actual computing takes place elsewhere. OpenAI utilizes server space and machine learning infrastructure provided by Microsoft Azure, a cloud computing platform operated by Microsoft. While OpenAI pays for Microsoft Azure cloud computing and server storage, Microsoft has recently invested \$1 billion in OpenAI.

Microsoft

The primary location of Microsoft is Redmond, a suburb of Seattle, Washington. The headquarters is a large complex of buildings that serve as the central hub for Microsoft's operations. Similarly to OpenAI, Microsoft HQ is strategically located within the technological tissue of the West Coast. To pin down the physical locations where AI is managed is to situate knowledge and values embedded in AI design. AI is made in specific places with specific dependencies.



Microsoft Azure Server Locations in the US

Servers in the Air and Cloud Computing on the Ground

Cloud computing of Microsoft Azure takes place on the ground across several countries in the world, but most of the exact locations are obscured. In *Atlas of AI* (2021), Kate Crawford notes, "servers are hidden in nondescript data centers" (p. 41), including "the computational infrastructures of Amazon Web Services or Microsoft's Azure, and the carbon footprint of the AI systems that run on those platforms" (p. 41). But AI cannot function without its material dependencies and embeddings, including natural resources, infrastructures, and human labor, which are hidden from customers' eyes and marketing campaigns (Crawford, 2021, p. 4; 64). This map reveals two exact locations of Azure server centers that OpenAI relies on, the first on the West Coast (Quincy) and the second on the East Coast (Reston).

OpenAI's Executive Board

OpenAI's seven key executives are predominantly male, white, in their 30s, and primarily from Western countries. There is one female executive, Mira Murati, who is of

How can we situate, map, and criticize the material dependencies of the 'placeless space' of AI based on the case of OpenAI? The myth of the immateriality of AI is particularly cherished in the industry. Seemingly, AI is everywhere and nowhere, stored in an invisible cloud, disembodied and transparent. By continuously claiming that 'AI doesn't have a physical location,' the AI industry dematerializes itself, its models, and its datasets, simultaneously dematerializing any responsibility. The industry's power remains invisible and intact. We attempt to counter-map the existing invisibility of AI. It's time to put AI in its place.

On an ontological level, our mapping is a media studies map of challenges. Our research aims to visualize how difficult it is to situate the materializations of contemporary technologies, both on physical and philosophical layers. Different maps are drawn depending on what we define as 'where:' where it is used, programmed, designed, trained, and what infrastructures allow it to function. There are many 'wheres,' and each of them is correct; AI can be situated within all of them. In the media studies sense, our counter-mapping project is a great example of how modern technologies challenge geographical thinking of mapping and the simple notion of where things are.



Not So Automated

OpenAI relies on Sama, a San Francisco-based company that outsources data annotations and validation tasks to workers from Kenya, Uganda, and India. Aside from OpenAI, Sama provides services for prominent Silicon Valley clients such as Google, Meta, and Microsoft. Sama presents itself as an 'ethical AI' enterprise



March 2023

UvA Course: Appification: The Cultures and Economies of Apps

Instructor: Esther Weltevrede

Apps for "Break-ups"

Comparative Analysis of Google Play and Yingyongbao

FINDINGS

1. My point here is not to go against the idea that apps cannot be instrumental and they fail to fix certain problems. Instead, the curiosity this paper aims to generate is on the question of how apps engage users to solve more advanced problems. The advanced problems are not straightforward and they have been hard to tackle, and one case is the heartbreak problem of pain after separation from significant others. Heartbreak is counted as a complex problem since solving it takes a nonlinear approach. That is to say moving on from heartbreak is not certain and it takes "emotional push-ups" in a manner of "two steps forward" and "one step back" according to psychological studies on emotions (Pacune-Leone 124; "How to get over the end of a relationship")



2. To my inquiries with keywords [heartbreak] [breakup] and [divorce], Google Play has so far done way better than Tencent's store, for it detects more apps relevant for helping people go through breakups, and for returning qualified content. Both stores contain apps that show capitalist logics of dating and marriage in terms of women's "erotic capital" (Illouz 57) and the breathless cycle between connection and disconnection (Stäheli 21), dating and break-ups.

3-4. Even though apps for break-ups are not big, they fit into the thinking of complementary technology, in itself low in value, but can "make platforms more valuable to customers" from the theoretical perspective on the business ecosystem (Jacobides et al. 2257). Journaling is used as a potential tool for dealing with "stressful events" (Ullrich and Lutgendorf 244). Joy is brought by turning suffering into playable forms (Galloway 17). They type of app for dating after divorce pushes may be associated with the traditional value for raising children or for carrying the blood line, especially important for males as a family duty (Liu and Yan 21). Women face more tension, whose appearance subjected to male's gaze in a heteronormative society and to their own digital self-surveillance (Best 9).

RESEARCH PROTOCOL

Data collection

My project takes the "thematic app collection approach" or "apps for that" born algorithmically or editorially (Weltevrede et al 5). My first report used five keywords for inquiry [heartbreak], [breakup], [divorce], [ex], [move on] on Google Play (Xu 3). My second report continues the three keywords [heartbreak] (心碎), [breakup] (分手), and [divorce] (离婚) on the Chinese app store Yingyongbao which I translate as App Treasure.

In total, 111 apps are returned with five keywords on Google and 39 apps remain valid across nine categories. On App Treasure, 169 apps are returned and on [divorce] with 100 apps.

Data curation

Data is both manually curated and by machines. Two scrapers are used, one developed by the research group Digital Methods Initiative (DMI) and one by the company Houyi (后裔). Superfluous and duplicate elements are deleted with double-checking. Each url has at least one click for evaluation. On the site of Google, the valid apps are assigned number 1 and the invalid number 0, with the help of Spreadsheets for further organizing. On App Treasure, an extra column is created to code the categories, given that not many store-defined categories are available. Filtering is used. A comparative look is adopted.



MAIN RESEARCH QUESTION

How apps engage users to solve more advanced problems?

Case: Heartbreak Problem

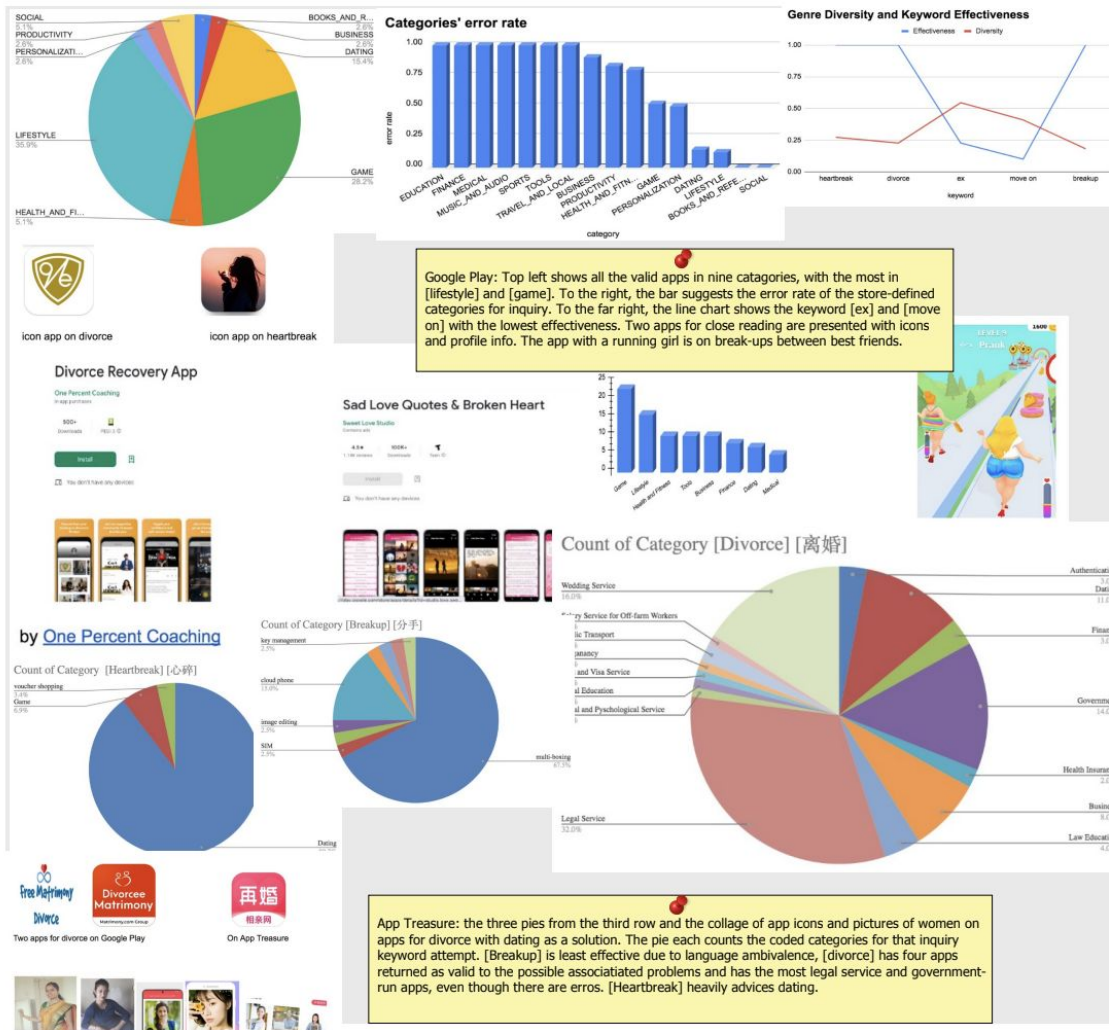
1. What is heartbreak and how is heartbreak a complex problem?
2. How are Google Play and Yingyongbao doing with app for "break-ups" to solve the heartbreak problem?
3. How can apps for breakups be valuable to users?
4. How apps for "break-ups" exercise power and reflect specific cultures?

Visualisation and Analysis

Countif function contributes to analysis of the distribution of categories and keywords matched to apps. Pie and line charts are involved for the representation of empirical data.

The conceptual force for analysis come from the ecological framework, the concepts such as serious inquiry, biopower, capitalist logic, use-economy, postmodernity, cruel optimism, techno-solutionism, algorithm, complexity etc., and needless to say, heartbreak and break-ups.

VISUALISATIONS AND ANALYSIS



Sample Entry: Cultural Analysis of Apps for Break-ups

#lifestyle #sadness #girls

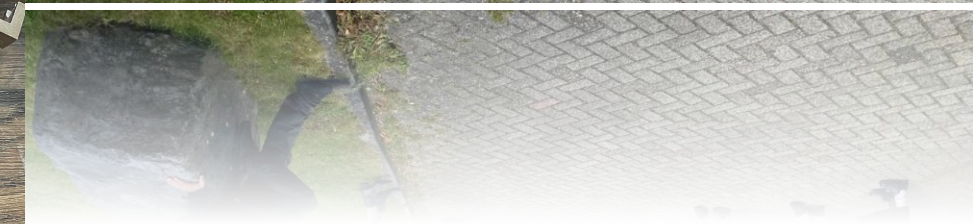
A close look at two apps in the [lifestyle] category: the first has the keyword [divorce], the second, [heartbreak]. Because this report page limit is short and my focus is on category, I can't get into too much close reading of the apps. One question here is what the category of LIFESTYLE and these two apps together afford the users. The left below indicates that coaching can be with divorce recovery. Coaching entails "how-to guides", which justifies Google's taxonomic work. The right one below uses quotes to mend a broken heart, which links reading to lifestyle. Compared to coaching, shorter quotes may give guidance but are more likely to relate to "style guides", if it is supposed to agree with the Google taxonomist. This app is first of all postmodern since the quotes are "fragmentary" and reflect the quality of a public feeling in living with uncertainty and ambiguity (Bark and Jane 234). Second, given the icon of the app for heartbreak creates a normative impression of a female person and that the tile affectively uses the sadness in love, it is worth thinking with the author of *Sad by Design: On Platform Nihilism* (first published in 2019) Geert Lovink who argues sadness on platform can well be "a feminist strategy" to self-empowerment to agency, and liberation (49).

#divorce #dating #women

Speaking from the side of China and imagining its similarity with Indian society, the type of app for dating after divorce pushes changes of family structures. The motivations of users may be associated with the traditional value for pro-reproduction/ raise children or for carrying the blood line, especially important for males as a family duty (Liu and Yan 21). This is interesting for noticing that all three apps on their promotion screenshots show females, who are subjected to a male gaze in a patriarchal and prominently binary gendered society. The way that the developer teams showcase attractive females as singles, not males (see the horizontal collage of photos of female figures) may serve male users' visual pleasure more than other users. The sociologist Eva Illouz, in making an analogy between a labour market and a marriage market of heteronormative societies, states the finding of another sociologist Catherine Hakim who specialises in women's issues. It goes: the young and the more attractive women are, the more "erotic capital" they have and the more likely that they will marry earlier, and have more household income (57). This raises tension to widows, for their fertility status and age will be objectified as data and be watched in a form of "digital surveillance" or "dataveillance", a phenomenon describing how the citizens-consumers are monitored on platforms (Van Dijk 205). The allies of such "dataveillance" are surprisingly the users themselves who volunteer to participate in what they consume (Beer and Burrows 4), who are aware that they are watched by using such technology products (Best 8) - thus volunteering in "self-surveillance" (9) and may want to be looked at a more advantageous way for their erotic capital. Maybe, the apps for filtering and photo editing are recommended to these app users. Back to this paragraph, service on apps is fed by data from users and is interconnected to the Indian and Chinese cultural system of gendered values and beliefs.



- ★ Expert/activist roundtable
- ★ Student mini conference
- ★ Field visits: hackerspace
- ★ Grade: Essay or project

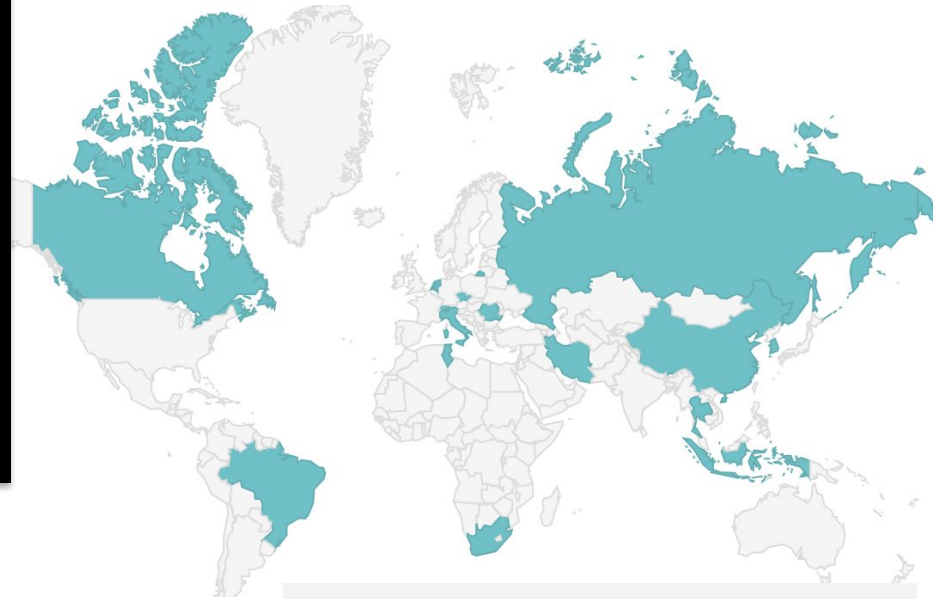


DIY Short Wave Radio Station
student project 2022
Betsy Brossman and Mohamed Amina



International Culture

- Student mix: very international, mixed academic & professional backgrounds.
- 90-100 students.
- Developing independent critical thinking and intensive group work experiences.
- Interdisciplinary & international team.
- Active Amsterdam new media scene: Institute of Network Cultures, Waag Society, Mediamatic, NXT museums etc.



Students: Brazil, Chile, China, Czech Republic, Denmark, Egypt, Estonia, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, India, Indonesia, Iran, Ireland, Italy, Morocco, Netherlands, Poland, Romania, Russia, South Africa, South Korea, Switzerland, Syria, Thailand, Tunisia, UK, US

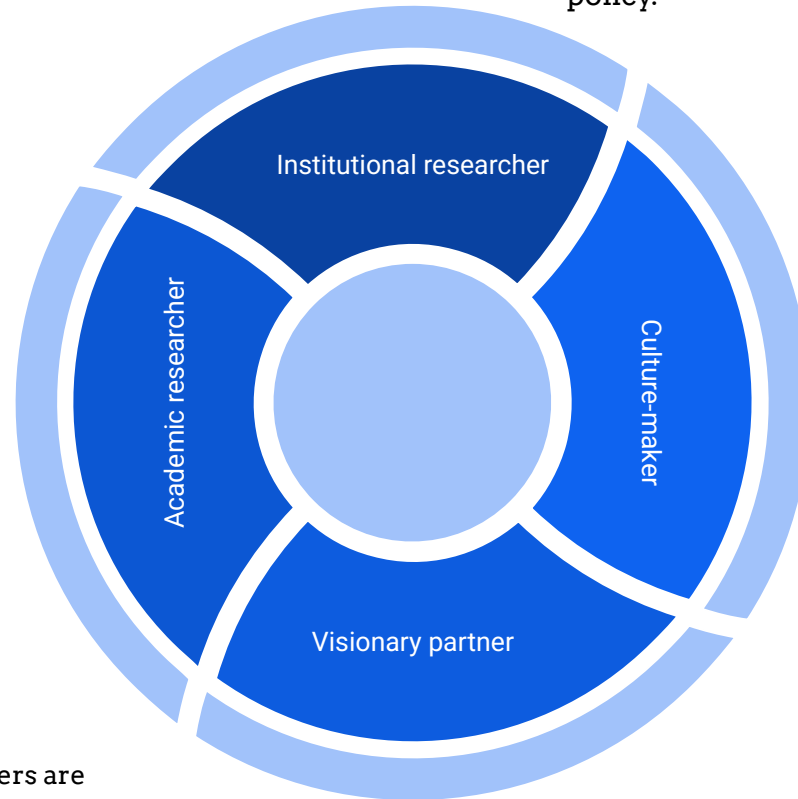
Research as professional training



- Most media jobs require dealing with **(information) complexity**.
- Contextualise practices, technologies & media cultures.
- Develop analytical skills & expertise in new media methods.
- Build critical, creative & innovative thinking.
- Become a **new media expert**.



Institutional researchers work within governmental, non-governmental, and advocacy organizations to conduct in-depth research and also often oversees project management. This role involves hands-on research that gathers information and analyzes complex media systems, explores power structures, and assesses the societal impacts of media, technology, and policy.



Academic researchers go on to pursue a phd, teach and conduct research at universities and think tanks.

Visionary and critical partners are professionals who help organizations manage, implement, and make decisions regarding communication and media-related aspects of their workflow, including privacy, data protection, fairness, diversity, inclusivity, and human rights issues.

Culture-makers work within arts organizations, cultural institutions, design studios, or research-focused practices to explore how media shapes public and private life and to comment on popular culture. In this role, individuals engage in concept development and translate research into insights and stories that resonate with the public through various formats, such as documentaries, publications, public educational programs, and art installations.

Career perspectives

- 85% of our alumni work in new media fields.
- Recent graduates work as academics, governmental media advisors, community managers, concept and content producers, researchers, editors, social media managers/ marketers, journalists, app developers, and data analysts.



- Or join the **2 year Research MA in Media Studies** (coordinator: Sudeep Dasgupta).
- Transition possible after the first semester.





Why New Media and Digital Culture in Amsterdam?

- The knowledge and analytical skills to be competitive in the field of new media,
- One of the leading programmes of its kind worldwide.
- Focus on practical investigation of culture with and through AI.
- Connect to Amsterdam new media scene & network of international students.



How to apply (successfully)

- Show your interest in new media (subjects, previous courses, work experience).
- Demonstrate academic English writing skills.
- We take **all aspects** of the application into account.



NMDC [Application & Admission](#)

I have a Dutch nationality

Register in Studielink (see step 3 of the application process)

8 May 2026, 23:59 CET

Submit complete application (see step 5)

15 May 2026, 23:59 CET

I have an EU/EEA-nationality

If you wish to apply for housing

- Register in Studielink (see step 3 of the application process)

23 February 2026, 23:59 CET

- Submit complete application (see step 5)

1 March 2026, 23:59 CET

If you do NOT wish to apply for housing

- Register in Studielink (see step 3 of the application process)

8 May 2026, 23:59 CET

- Submit complete application (see step 5)

15 May 2026, 23:59 CET

I have a non-EU/EEA nationality

Register in Studielink (see step 3 of the application process)

23 February 2026, 23:59 CET

Submit complete application (see step 5)

1 March 2026, 23:59 CET

Student work

- mastersofmedia.hum.uva.nl
- digitalmethods.net
- [MA theses](#)
- studiegids.uva.nl

Pre-Master:

- bit.ly/media-pre-master

Question about admissions process?

- gsh.uva.nl
- gsh.uva.nl/contact

Questions about the programme's content?

- Alex Gekker
- a.gekker@uva.nl

MA in New Media and Digital Culture