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Polymedia and convergence: a study of social action and individual choice from the law phase of the TLANG project

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1. Introduction: polymedia and convergence

In this working paper, we explore the social media data from the law phase of the TLANG project in the light of the theory of *polymedia* put forward by Mirca Madianou and Daniel Miller. Polymedia conceptualises social media not in terms of distinct platforms but as an integrated communicative environment which users navigate in order to manage relationships and carry out social activities. As the range of social media platforms proliferate, each finds a niche in people's communicative repertoires depending on its affordances (Madianou 2015, p. 2) and, once barriers such as cost, access and media literacy skills recede, choice of platform becomes communicatively meaningful; in Madianou's (2014, p. 672) words, 'users are held responsible for their choices'. As a theory of social media communication, polymedia has parallels with a number of other concepts, including media ecology (Ito et al 2010), but its particular focus on how users exploit the affordances made available in the media environment makes it particularly relevant to our linguistic ethnographic approach. Like linguistic signs, platform choice is also ideological, in the sense that site identities are bound up with users' media ideologies and the uses they choose to make of them. Platforms accrue their own social meanings and significance through use, which in turn shape how individuals go on to use them. Meanwhile, users' ability to judge the suitability of a media platform to accommodate their specific communicative needs within a framework of shared social conventions brings out the significant role of communicative competence in knowing when to use a particular platform – and when not to – as a significant resource for interpersonal meaning-making. In this working paper, we focus specifically on the different choices that our participants make as they navigate their particular (social) media environments, focusing on three practices: transmedia meaning-making, compartmentalising and convergence.

Transmedia meaning-making refers to the way in which people move across platforms when carrying out online activities, identity or relational work – or (in the case of our participants) when they are campaigning for a cause, that of migrant rights. *Transmedia meaning-making* encompasses (but goes beyond) two documented practices: crossposting and transmedia storytelling. What Adami (2014) calls 'crossposting' refers to the way in which the same post is recontextualised on different platforms through being reposted, forwarded or shared. This action is facilitated by the particular affordances of digital media, to the extent that posts can be automatically sent to multiple platforms, although in practice this usually involves some user intervention in order to target the audience of a particular site (Adami 2014). Transmedia storytelling as discussed by Jenkins (2006) refers to commercially produced and globally circulating stories such as *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* which extend across different media – television, websites, fan fiction sites, internet games and so on (Williams 2009). Although transmedia storytelling predates the internet, the opportunities for distributing and participating in transmedia narratives, and by extension in popular culture, has been greatly expanded by digital technology and the internet. Going beyond both cross-posting and transmedia storytelling, transmedia meaning-making refers more generally to the observation that, in polymedia environments, an individual's identity performances and relational work are not restricted to one media platform, but involve the meaningful selection of affordances, the combining of different media, and a great deal of movement between platforms. Users

reach decisions about the appropriateness of a particular platform for a particular purpose by drawing on considerations of factors such as cost as well as their media ideologies (Gershon 2010): that is, their perceptions as to what the platform is suitable for (not to mention the various spaces and channels within one platform) in the wider media environment. This transmedia meaning-making was evident in the practices of two key participants in the law phase: Lucy, a legal advisor working for the Asylum Hope Project, a charity providing legal assistance to asylum seekers in Leeds; and BD, originally from Poland and now working in London as Chief Executive for the East European Research Centre.

Also evident in these two case studies was the practice of *compartmentalising*, by which participants explicitly and actively endeavoured to maintain certain perceived boundaries – usually between work and home or between a public and private identity – as they navigated their media environments. In other words, the individuals in both case studies use various social media platforms as part of their charitable work whilst maintaining distinctions between their working and private lives. In line with the theory of polymedia, the practices of both legal workers show how people's perceptions of the affordances of a platform in part determine and demarcate the particular 'niche' that the platform takes up in their communicative repertoire. Elsewhere in the literature, social media and mobile communication have been seen to blur these traditionally conceived boundaries. This blurring of boundaries was evident in previous phases of the TLANG project, such as in small business owners' use of mobile messaging apps (Tagg 2015; Tagg and Hu 2017) and in the online curation of personal heritage resources by participants working in the arts sector (Tagg et al 2016). We can see compartmentalising as a response to this – even a resistance – as users endeavour to mitigate the perceived effects of social media.

Such blurring of boundaries is often facilitated by processes of *convergence* and *integration*. By *convergence*, we refer to the fact that multiple communicative functions often tend to be fulfilled by one particular platform or device (Madianou 2014) or, as we have documented in our research, within one app. For example, many of the participants in the TLANG project rely predominantly on one mobile messaging app (such as WeChat) to carry out a range of functions, from conducting business transactions to bantering with friends. It is this multi-functional use which in turn encourages the convergence of different spheres of life (economic, social and domestic) into the personal space of the mobile phone (Papacharissi 2011). We use *integration* in line with Androutsopoulos's (2010, p. 208) definition as involving 'the co-existence of various communication modes on a single platform'. Integration can also be illustrated through the range of modes used by participants in our research: written messages, audio messages, images and video, among others. In this working paper, we look at one example of integration and convergence in the use of the messaging app WeChat by JW, Advice and Advocacy advisor at the Chinese Community Centre, Birmingham. In line with polymedia, we finish by suggesting that a 'super-app' like WeChat can be conceptualised as a polymedia environment within which a user selects from and moves between various modes of communication in fulfilling a range of communicative functions.

2. Lucy, legal advisor for Asylum Hope in Leeds

2.1 *Introducing Lucy*

Lucy¹ is an immigration lawyer who works for a Leeds-based charity offering free legal services to asylum seekers. She started working for the charity as a volunteer in 2009, and has been working there as case manager since 2011. Part of her job is office-based, but a significant amount of her time is spent doing outreach work (including drop-in sessions) at different locations in and around Leeds. She is passionate about her work, and her attitude to her clients can be described as empathetic and encouraging.

JH conducted an interview with Lucy to find out about her use of technology and communication media during drop-in sessions with clients, as well as her use of other forms of social media (LeeLawInt_20160819_JH_001, duration: 00:58:29). At this interview we established that Lucy is very active on social networks and uses social media both in her personal life as well as a part of her job. Lucy is active on three types of online social media: Facebook, Instagram and Twitter. On these, she has five different accounts, from four of which we collected data:

- a personal account on Instagram (13 screenshots)
- a personal account on Twitter (18 screenshots);
- the charity's Twitter account (16 screenshots);
- the charity's Facebook page (16 screenshots)
- a personal Facebook page (no screenshots collected)

As we shall see below, Lucy's use of these multiple accounts illustrates both transmedia meaning-making (as she draws on various platforms to carry out a cause) and compartmentalising (as she carefully separates her public and private accounts). Before looking closely at her use of these platforms, however, we step back to look at how her transmedia meaning-making is embedded in her everyday offline working practices.

2.2 *Transmedia meaning-making across the online-offline divide*

Lucy's use of different media involves her drawing resourcefully on a range of technologies: office computer, written notes and official forms, and her mobile phone. During our observations, we noticed that Lucy often uses her phone for various purposes during the drop-in sessions. During the social media interview, she explained:

sadly I am bound to my mobile phone (far too much) because erm for outreach purposes 'cause erm (.) most of my outreaches apart from City Mission don't have erm wifi () printing facility [JH: hm ok] () look into () my phone is valuable 'cause it's got the 3G so I can connect anywhere

[LeeLawInt_20160819_JH_001]

¹ Lucy's name and that of the organisation she works for are pseudonyms.

Lucy has had a smartphone since she started working in immigration. At the beginning, however, her internet connection was limited so she used to ring her office to double-check information, as well as carrying around a huge textbook, as she told JH, laughing. Once she was on a better data plan, the internet replaced the need to carry the printed textbook. It is interesting to note that, in this sense, the mobile phone has not transformed what Lucy does, but rather enables her to carry out existing practices more efficiently and easily. Still, Lucy does occasionally ring her office to double-check advice in areas outside her specialism (asylum), such as visas.

Before she starts to fill in any application form with her client, Lucy uses her phone to connect to the internet to check that they are using the most current version of the application form. She says she's obtained this habit from the training she has done, where her 'supervisor was always very big on making sure you check forms' [LeeLawInt_20160819_JH_001], the reason being that when the form is not in its current version, the Home Office sends it back. The forms are updated about two or three times per year. Also the prices constantly change, which is another piece of information Lucy occasionally checks on her phone. Here we see Lucy's mobile phone being used to support her use of more traditional paper-based media. Another example of this is Lucy's occasional use of Google Translate with clients who are unable to communicate in English.

She also occasionally uses a mobile phone to ring the clients. Lucy has a phone that she uses for outreach purposes; when she needs to use her personal phone, she blocks her identity to protect it (an act of compartmentalisation which we shall return to in section 3.3 below). However, she prefers the clients to ring the office, because when the clients call her while she is out doing outreach, she is not always able to take notes. The spoken message from the client needs to be converted into electronic written form, as it is the charity's requirement to insert the details of the communication into their database. In instances when Lucy cannot give the clients an instant reply, she goes back to her office to find out the answer and contacts them either by letter or by e-mail.

These practices reveal how Lucy draws simultaneously on the affordances of multiple media. For Lucy, each of these modes has their specific advantages and disadvantages:

- L I prefer e-mail just erm (to e-mail client) just ('cause) it's instantaneous it's cheaper for us () a small charity and I can get a I've got an instant record of all the conversation
- JH² yea yea yea yea
- L erm the only downside to e-mail is that if I e-mail a client who's not one of my clients it's just an outreach person so I () take him (along) and I e-mail them sometimes that can create a little bit of dependency and they will keep e-

² One of the authors, Jolana Hanusova, carried out the interviews with Lucy.

mailing me back so sometimes I am wary to e-mail because I don't want the client to think that I'm doing something that I'm not going to do

JH yea

L () managing that expectations ()

LeeLawInt_20160819_JH_001

So, email is cheaper than letters and it produces a written record, but it puts Lucy in a position that can be misinterpreted by an outreach client, creating expectations of continuous support rather than one-off advice. Although a more continuous support to the drop-in clients is possible, they are asked to come to the drop-in in person in case they need it.

Letters also have their advantages. Unlike e-mails, which are in electronic form (and printing them requires access to the internet and a printer), the letters and hand-written notes Lucy often produces for her clients to take away are tangible and therefore easy to take to a relevant person – Lucy uses the word 'powerful' when speaking about these. Also, letters and notes are in the same format as the paper application forms, making it easier for the client to keep all these materials in the same place.

L yea and I think it's quite powerful to do that with someone as well because it's just as you said (it's a) tangible thing

JH yea

L that then they take to other providers you know other support (agencies) and just to have it in their hand and often as well because (.) because the applications are paper-based I encourage people to (almost) keep their notes paper-based because (then they) can keep them all in one place ()

JH yea

L it makes sense I think

LeeLawInt_20160819_JH_001

Overall, the above description of Lucy's outreach activities is a good illustration of polymedia (Madianou and Miller 2012), as Lucy identifies and selects the affordances that she deems most appropriate for a particular task, moving between media according to her assessment of the immediate demands. This assessment is in turn driven by her media ideologies: her ideas about what each medium is for and how it fits into her particular mediascape. And, importantly, her use of these technologies is deeply embedded in, and driven by, her wider working practices and goals.

2.3 Moving between online social media: Facebook, Twitter, Instagram

Apart from the outreach work we have observed, Lucy is also responsible (with others) for maintaining the charity's social media accounts on Twitter and Facebook. In this section we describe and compare the two accounts.

Twitter: Charity account

The organisation's Twitter account was set up in October 2011. There are three people responsible for running the charity Twitter account: Lucy, her supervisor Lauren, and a volunteer. The posts from this account include original tweets from Asylum Hope and, more often, retweets.

In terms of the original posts, Asylum Hope occasionally tweet about things relevant to their organization, such as a brief 'thank you' for following the Asylum Hope website, a reminder of the donation event Big Give Challenge, and a plea for donations.

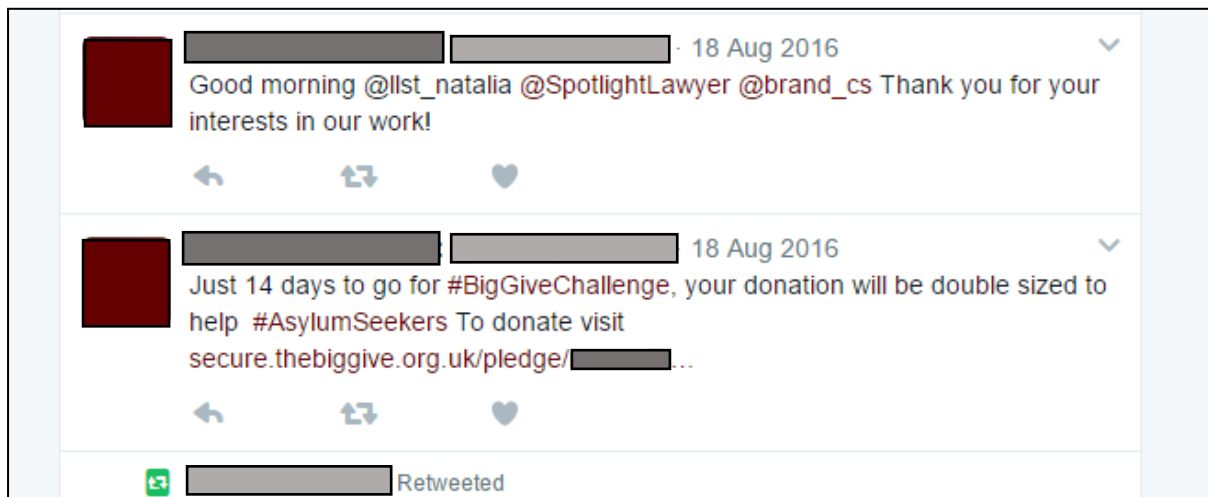


Figure 1: LeeScrLaw_20160825_JH_016



Figure 2: LeeScrLaw_20160825_JH_006

However, the majority of their posts are retweets of posts by individuals and organizations working in the similar field, that is, asylum and immigration.

Retweets can be seen in this context as serving multiple functions. Firstly, they help the organisation to establish and make visible their links with other organizations, especially those that are located in Leeds, as most of these organizations use Twitter. This likely has the

dual function of maintaining working relations with these organisations, whilst also affirming their own identity and stance through aligning themselves with a particular network of contacts: as with individuals on social media, identity is not so much a private endeavour as a networked one which emerges from individual's links with others and in communication with them (boyd 2012; Papacharissi 2010). The organizations whose posts Asylum Hope retweets operate:

- internationally (i.e. Amnesty International);
- nationally (i.e. Rights to Remain, Refugee Action, Refugee Council, City of Sanctuary). Some of these organizations have an office in Leeds.
- locally (i.e. LASSN - Leeds Asylum Seekers' Support Network)
- individually (often journalists).

Zappavigna (2012) describes alignments on Twitter as taking the form of 'ambient affiliation'; that is, 'alignments between people who have not necessarily directly interacted online' (p. 1). These are created, for example, when people come together – sometimes very fleetingly – around a particular topic by using a shared hashtag. In the present case, retweeting serves to bolster more lasting relationships with organisations who have a long-term interest in the same topic and who are often also linked by geographical proximity. This can perhaps best be described not as '*ambient* affiliation' but as '*networked* affiliation' – alignments which are maintained through repeated affirmation of a social connection through retweets and a more lasting affiliation around a shared topic of interest.

Secondly, as in other contexts, retweets can also be seen as allowing Asylum Hope to join a wider conversation or debate around relevant political issues, which amplifies their voice on this public platform and gives their message a potentially global reach (e.g. Giaxoglou 2018). It appears fair to say that most of their posts are aimed at raising public awareness of migration and asylum, often related to the asylum crisis.



Figure 3: LeeScrLaw_20160825_JH_003



Figure 4: LeeScrLaw_20160825_JH_010

Another frequent topic, also related to migration, is that of human rights and the unstable situation in some countries.



Figure 5: LeeScrLaw_20160825_JH_004

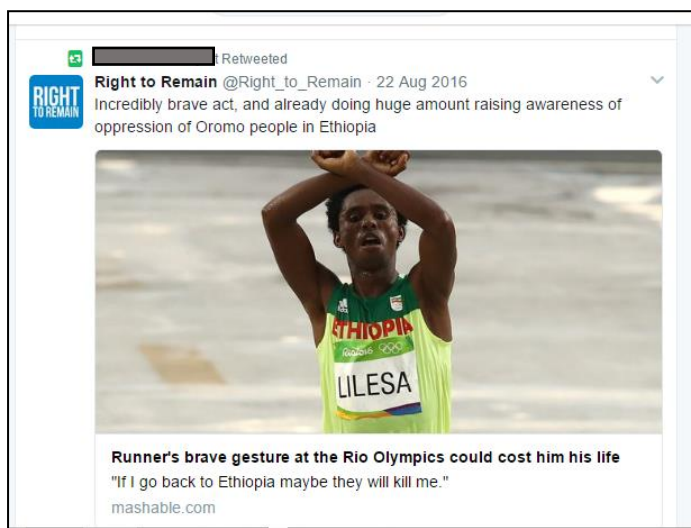


Figure 6: LeeScrLaw_20160825_JH_008

In summary, then, Lucy plays a role in enabling Asylum Hope to use Twitter to maintain and amplify their public presence through networked affiliation: that is, creating an online network of contacts by publically aligning with like-minded others and becoming part of wider debates.

Facebook – Asylum Hope account (Asylum Hope Project)

Again the Asylum Hope Facebook page must be seen in the light of multiple authorship. Lucy says about the page:

erm I'm there there are 4 admins on the page so it's me my manager and two other volunteers and we just use it to post interesting things about immigration that we find er about () the community needs but also just interesting things about our project so

LeeLawInt_20160819_JH_001

Lucy said she hadn't posted for a while, her latest post being one about a family reception centre that had been closed down:

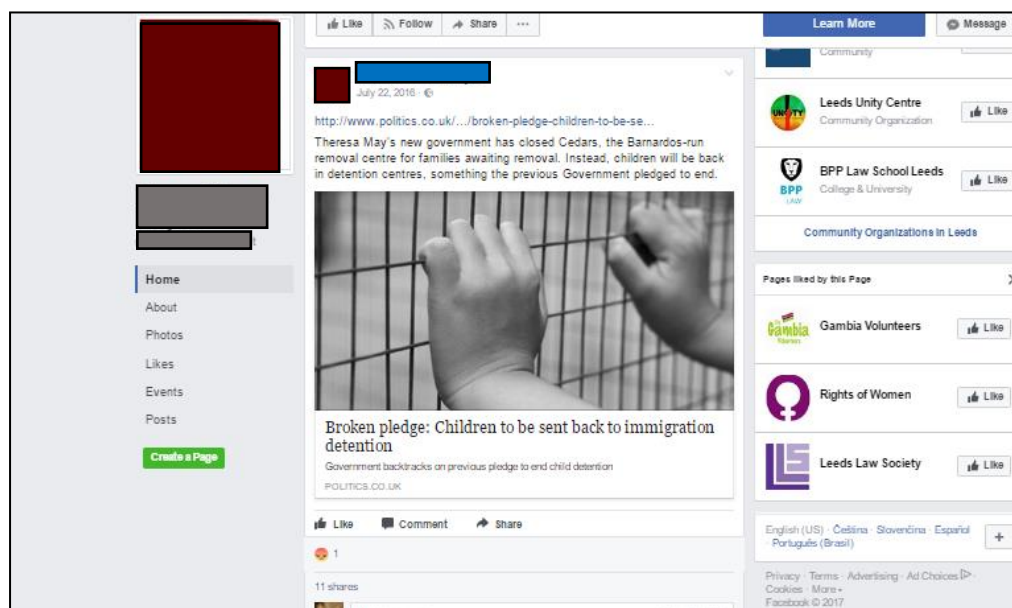


Figure 7: LeeScrLaw_20160825_JH_021

According to Lucy, the organisation uses Twitter and Facebook for similar functions. Furthermore, they often 'cross-post' (Adami 2014) in the sense that they post about the same topic simultaneously on both platforms. As Lucy points out, they do not post exactly the same on each platform.

JH so is it like er is it [the Asylum Hope Twitter account] similar does it have a similar purpose like the Facebook page () Asylum Hope

L yea and they they're linked together so often if we post something to Facebook (we'll) post (.) not the same thing to keep it interested but something along the same line () this is about erm this was a retweet about children so () war crimes child soldiers and a boy in the ambulance so that's this Syrian boy

JH yea yea

L we post something to our page about (detention) of children on Facebook so it's kind of a similar discussion topic and what we're trying to do we're not so much promoting discussion as such it's more awareness just keep people interested

LeeLawInt_20160819_JH_001

Lucy's claims are reflected in the data collected from the Asylum Hope Facebook page. The posts at the Asylum Hope Facebook page during the time of our observation include:

- A link to a podcast featuring interviews with people living in a refugee camp in Greece (LeeScrLaw_20160825_JH_018)
- A donation reminder – the Big Give (LeeScrLaw_20160825_JH_019)
- A job advert – a caseworker at Asylum Hope (LeeScrLaw_20160825_JH_022)
- A post quoting an article from freemovement.org.uk – 'Court of Appeal says when it's 'reasonable' to remove a child resident for 7 years or more' (LeeScrLaw_20160825_JH_024)
- A post about the upcoming Bradford Eid Festival (LeeScrLaw_20160825_JH_026)
- Photos from the Volunteer Fair, where Asylum Hope had a stall (LeeScrLaw_20160825_JH_028)

As the above list implies, the function of the Asylum Hope Facebook account is similar to that of the Twitter account – raising public awareness and joining wider debates. Similarly to Twitter, Asylum Hope also uses the Facebook page for networking with other organizations in Leeds working in asylum and migration by sharing their posts (such as that by 'our friends at xx' in the following example).

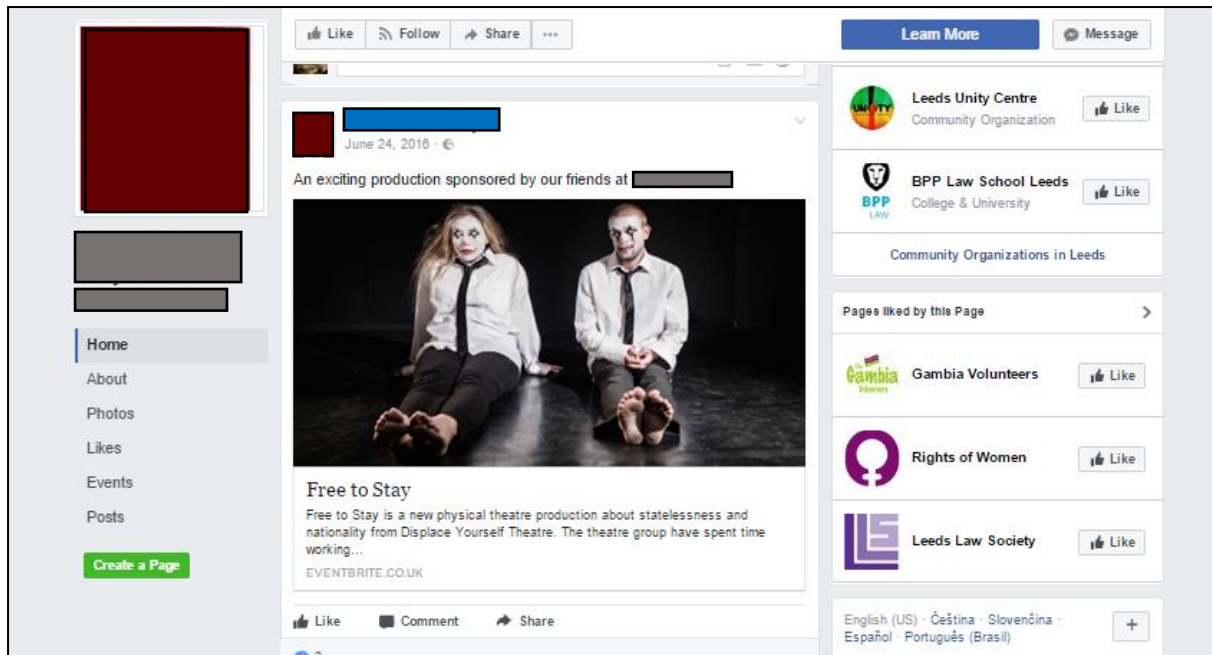


Figure 8: LeeScrLaw_20160825_JH_032

Another example of Asylum Hope's attempt to use social media to affirm relationships is the following post, which contains a link to the Leeds Citizens Advice Bureau article about the impacts of Brexit. The text reads: 'Here's a good message from Chapeltown CAB. How has Brexit affected the rights and eligibilities of immigrants? Short answer: it's hasn't – yet.'

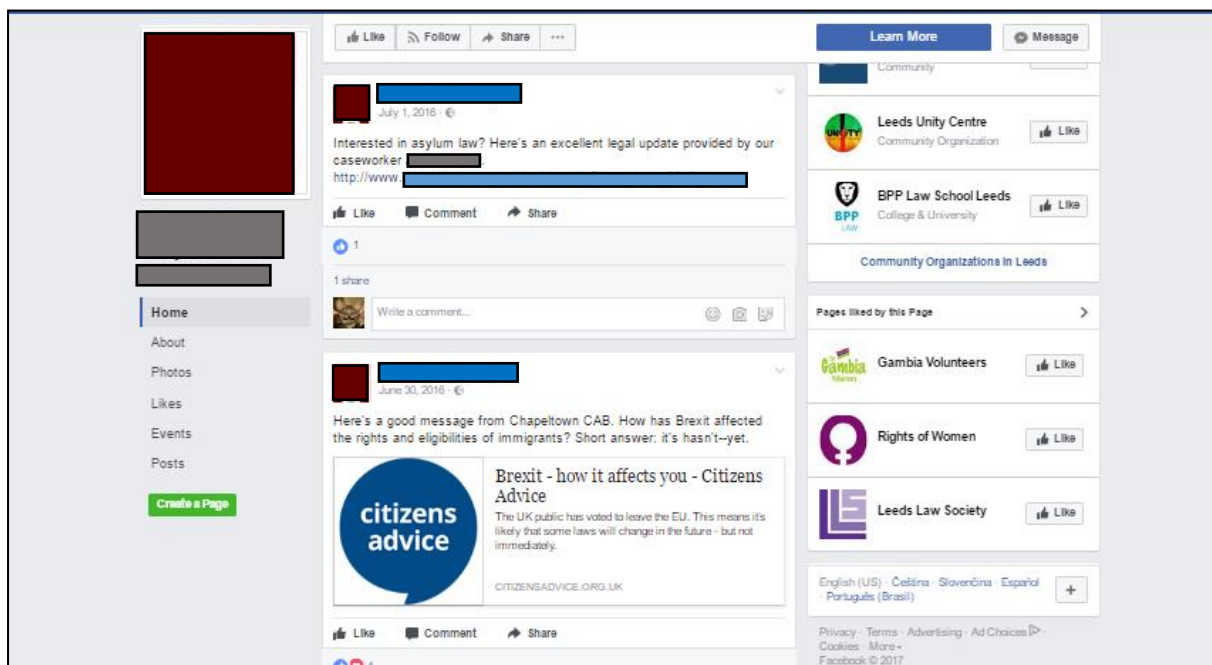


Figure 9: LeeScrLaw_20160825_JH_027

However, it is likely that their understanding of the different affordances and audience shapes how they design posts for the two platforms. In contrast to Twitter (and despite Lucy's

assertion that they are not aiming to encourage discussion), Facebook is seen to provoke more reaction from the public, as Lucy pointed out in interview.

we get a lot of private messages on Facebook with people (just) saying oh how can I help () that's terrible () not so much (on) Twitter we don't get a lot there

LeeLawInt_20160819_JH_001

The belief that Facebook is more interactive requires Asylum Hope to edit some of the reactions. The aim is to stay neutral:

L we we make sure basically we make sure () and it's not got a heavy () bias we try and be very neutral about things

JH yea

L we often don't pass a comment as well if it's something negative

LeeLawInt_20160819_JH_001

It is evident from this discussion that, in the wider polymedia environment, Asylum Hope operate their social media campaign across these two platforms with the deliberate intention that the two will work together but will be used differently – for example, they do not post ‘the same thing ... but along the same line’ on the two platforms. Although this was not picked up on by Lucy in interview, the social media data suggest that Asylum Hope’s own voice may come through more strongly on the Facebook page: compare the posts in which Asylum Hope comments directly on their relationship with other organisations (‘Here’s a good message from Chapeltown CAB’), in contrast to Twitter where the majority of posts are retweets which signal a connection structurally rather than discursively. The organisation also appears to construct a more localised network through Facebook. This may in part explain why Facebook was seen as attracting more responses and being more interactive, which may in turn (subconsciously) shape how the organisation goes on to use the site. In this example of transmedia meaning-making across two platforms, the perceived affordances of each are exploited with the aim of creating and maintaining networked affiliations with similar organisations in a way which promotes a networked identity and amplifies their voice and reach.

2.4 Compartmentalising public and private identities

As well as maintaining Asylum Hope’s social media presence, Lucy is also an active user of social media outside work and has her own account on Instagram, Facebook and Twitter.

Facebook: personal account

We did not collect data from Lucy’s personal Facebook account in part because of our understanding that Lucy was reluctant to share her private life with us. Her desire to maintain her privacy is also evident in her use of social media. Lucy says she keeps her Facebook

account separate from the Asylum Hope Facebook page and also raised the question of privacy protection:

JH so your personal Facebook page do you keep it strictly strictly personal or do you sometimes er lets's say share things form the Asylum Hope page or

L no (.) I tend to keep it really separate

JH yea

L 'cause erm I don't want () so the reason I'm I'm Lucinda Elizabeth Steadman (on Facebook) 'cause people don't know my middle name and I've spelt it slightly differently so it means people can't find me so my middle name is E L I S A B E T H and I've spelled it with a Z here

JH ok ok ok

L so people who know me know that's my name

JH yea

L but clients and other people who I may not want to discuss work () Facebook can't find me

LeeLawInt_20160819_JH_001

Topics such as migration and politics feature on Lucy's personal Facebook page as well, but she is extremely careful to make it clear that she expresses these views on behalf of herself, not Asylum Hope:

and then erm this is a (call) a shout-out I did it ('cause)() I volunteer for a women's group and erm we we needed some clothes basically so I put that out and then as you can see I get a little a little er political especially around the Brexit time

LeeLawInt_20160819_JH_001

I'm sometimes quite vocal in my political views on my Facebook but again it's never in the context of work

LeeLawInt_20160819_JH_001

There is some overlap between work and personal life in the sense that some of Lucy's colleagues are also her friends. Lucy, however, does not have her manager amongst her friends as she does not think it is professional, as she has 'lots of silly pictures there' [LeeLawInt_20160819_JH_001].

Twitter: Personal account

Lucy's Twitter account is a space where she shares her views, mostly on issues related to asylum and migration, but in a more personalized and creative way compared to the Asylum Hope Twitter account.

On her profile picture (Lucy drinking a cup of coffee) there is a ribbon with the sign 'Refugees welcome to Britain'. The background picture is seemingly unrelated to asylum or migration – an owl mingled amongst cats of the same colour.

On the front page of her Twitter, Lucy presents herself as 'Third-sector Immigration lawyer specialising in asylum-seeking women, gender-based violence and FGM. Loves social justice. So much.' This is not the formal register we would expect from someone introducing themselves as a lawyer – instead, Lucy uses light mockery to speak about herself.

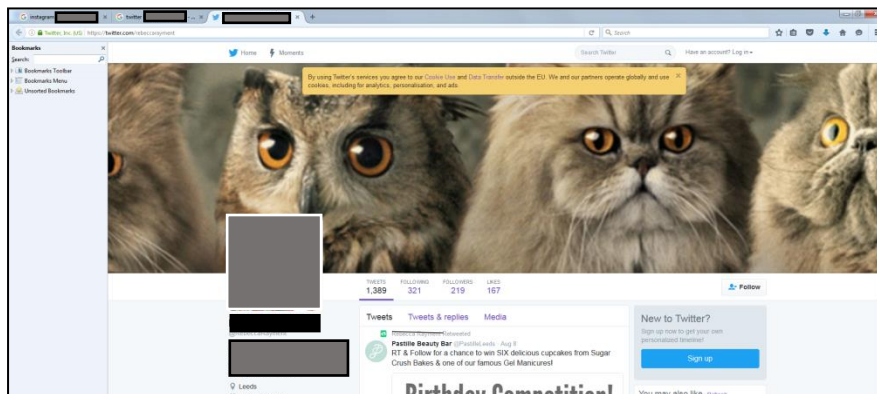


Figure 10: LeeScrLaw_20160825_JH_033

Here we also find retweets of news relevant to asylum from the mainstream media:

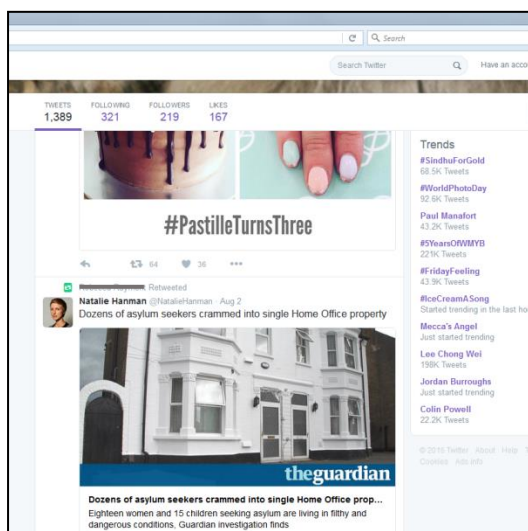


Figure 11: LeeScrLaw_20160825_JH_034

But there are also occasional posts on anything else:

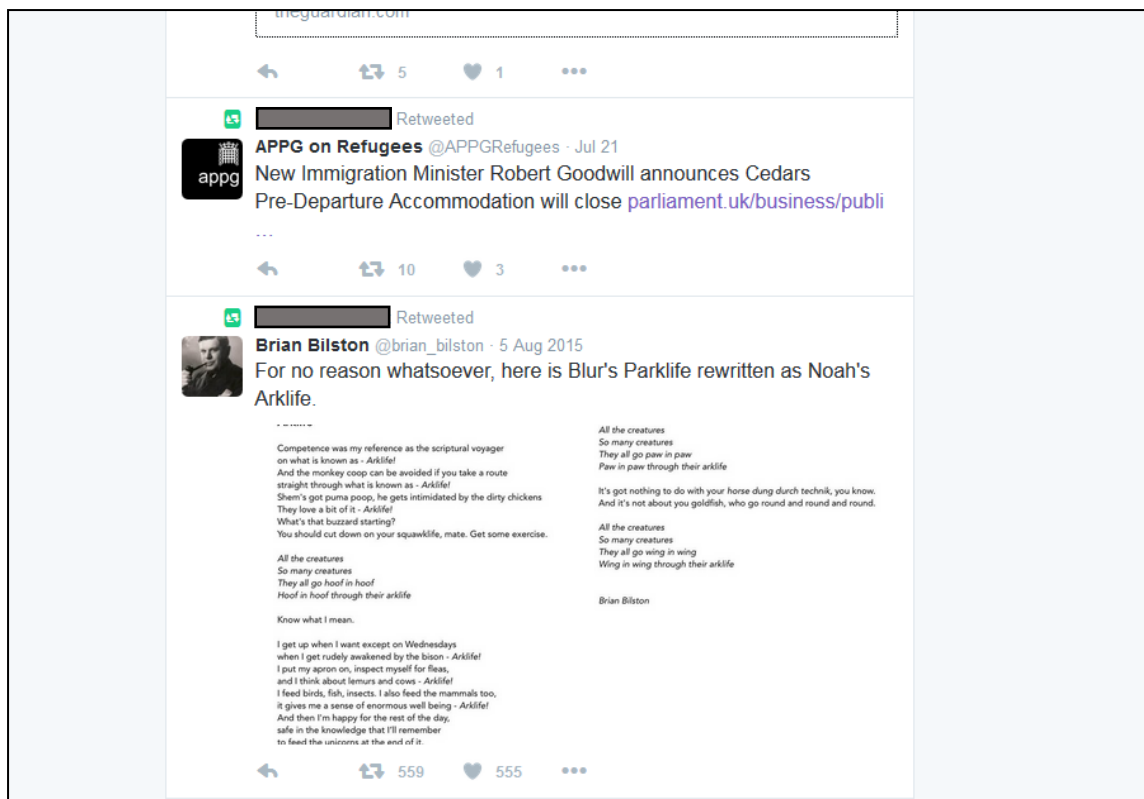


Figure 12: LeeScrLaw_20160825_JH_035

Lucy also comments on her use of Twitter on the platform:

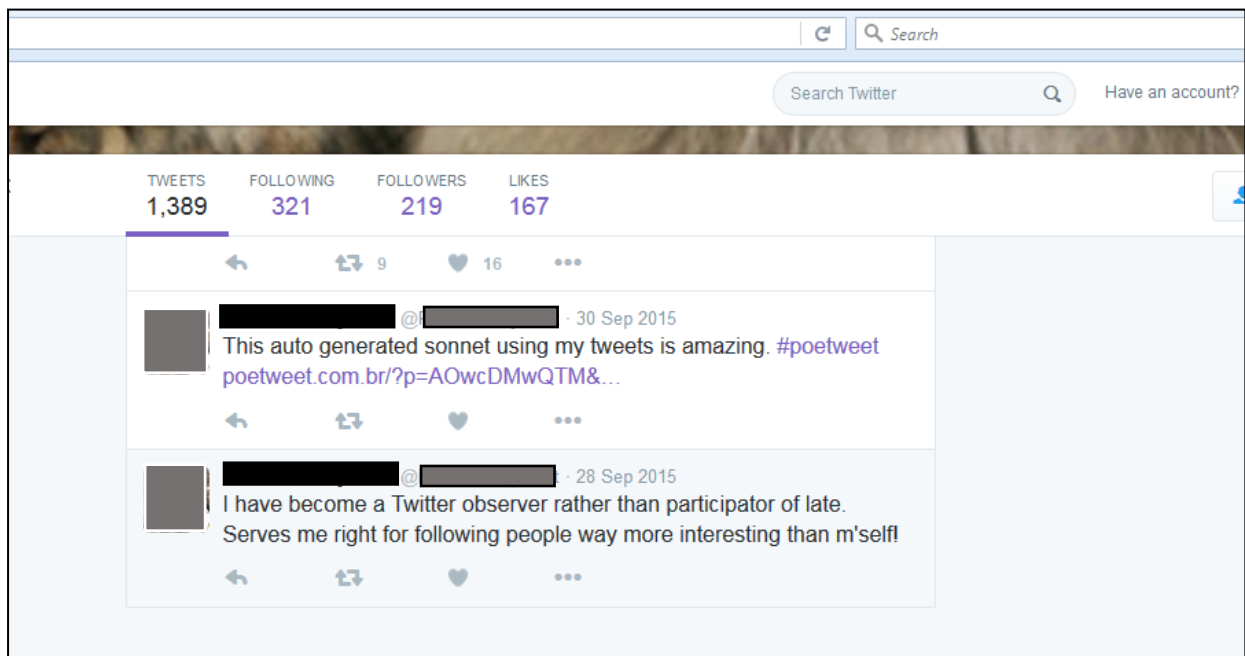


Figure 13: LeeScrLaw_20160825_JH_044

The second post in the screenshot above might refer to Lucy's change of attitude towards using Twitter which she told us about during the interview. She noticed an increase in abusive reactions on the topic of migration in the last year or so, which made her feel less

comfortable with Twitter. This illustrates how media ideologies are likely to change, given the fast pace of technological development as well as shifts in the social and political environment.

- L I'm I used to be quite prolific on Twitter and then I found the whole Twitter thing became quite aggressive almost it's quite anonymous so now ()
- JH is it anonymous?
- L well you can set 'cause my account is very open so I that's my profile picture my name is my name and then my Twitter () er description describes me (as an) Immigration lawyer and what I specialize in so I this is a lot more work-based than my erm Facebook
- JH ok ok
- L (it is) public as well so anybody if they google @lucindasteadman will find me on Twitter so () I have to be more careful about what I post
- JH hm yea yea
- L but
- JH (so) you don't put personal stuff there it's kind of work oriented
- L (slightly) more work-oriented but if you wanted to set one of these up with not your name not your photograph it's very easy to do
- JH ok
- L and I found that () a while ago maybe a year ago if I was posting anything controversial (especially) about migration I was getting a lot of abuse from people who () anonymous saying you know all kind of horrible things about migrants about ()

LeeLawInt_20160819_JH_001 (40:47)

As in case of Facebook, Lucy says she keeps her personal Twitter account completely separate from the Asylum Hope account, and avoids mentioning the Asylum Hope account on her personal one. Again there are exceptions: one exception to this rule was sharing Asylum Hope's poster inviting to the Refugee Week (LeeScrLaw_20160825_JH_049).

Instagram: personal account

Lucy's Instagram is the most personal of her accounts. We find there posts related to her family, hobbies and interests which include travelling, manicure, DIY, home decorations, cooking and baking.

Lucy summarizes her Instagram as follows:

yea as you can see the running theme is food and my husband and holidays (really)
((laughs))

LeeLawInt_20160819_JH_001

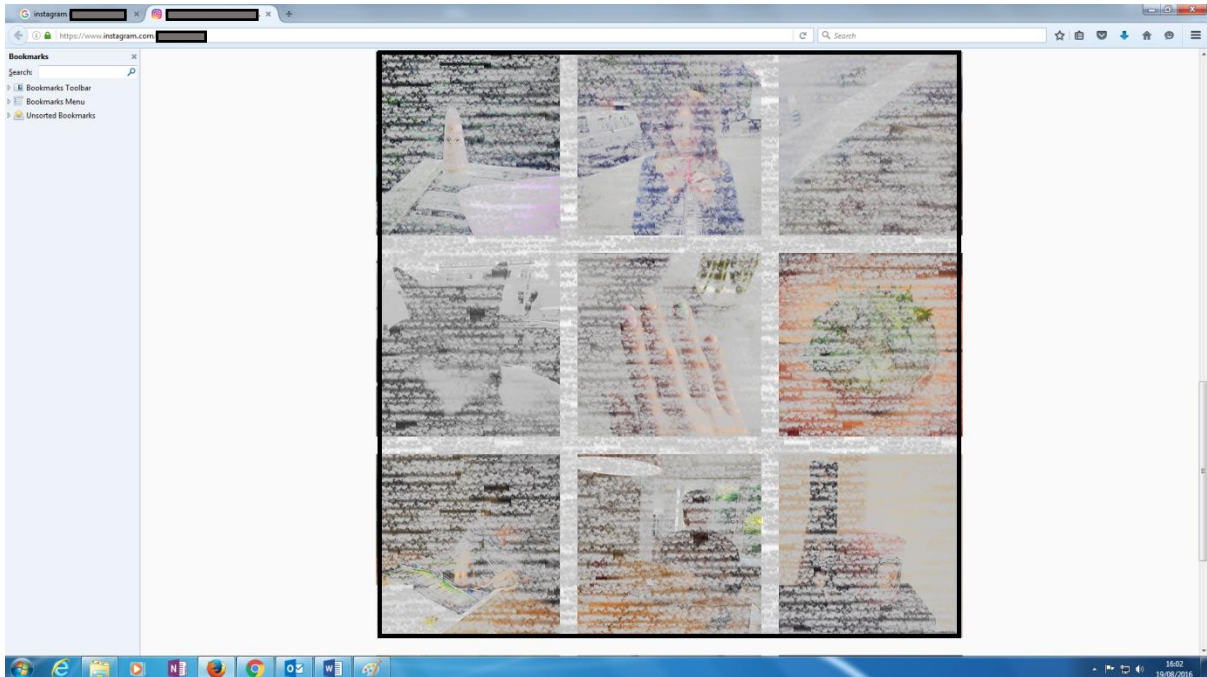


Figure 14: LeeScrLaw_20160825_JH_052

Looking at her Instagram account with JH, Lucy comments:

my husband features quite heavily because he's he loves having his pictures taken the common theme you'll see (in any) of my social media I hate having my photograph so there's never (.) (apart from) the wedding photograph

LeeLawInt_20160819_JH_001

There are no posts commenting directly on politics or migration, although she indirectly expresses her views by voicing her support of 2014 Eurovision song contest winner Conchita Wurst:

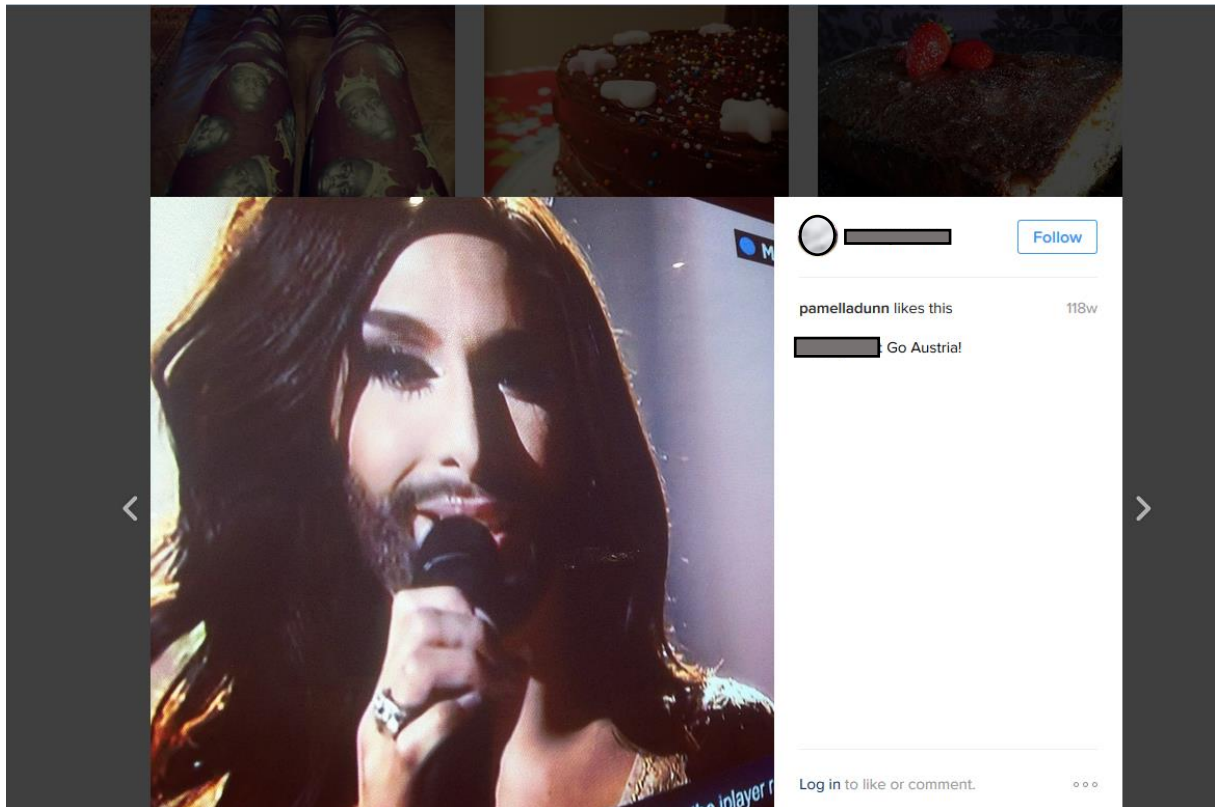


Figure 15: LeeScrLaw_20160825_JH_057

In the post below, Lucy downplays her interest in law and social justice, in the light mocking way we observed in her Twitter profile:

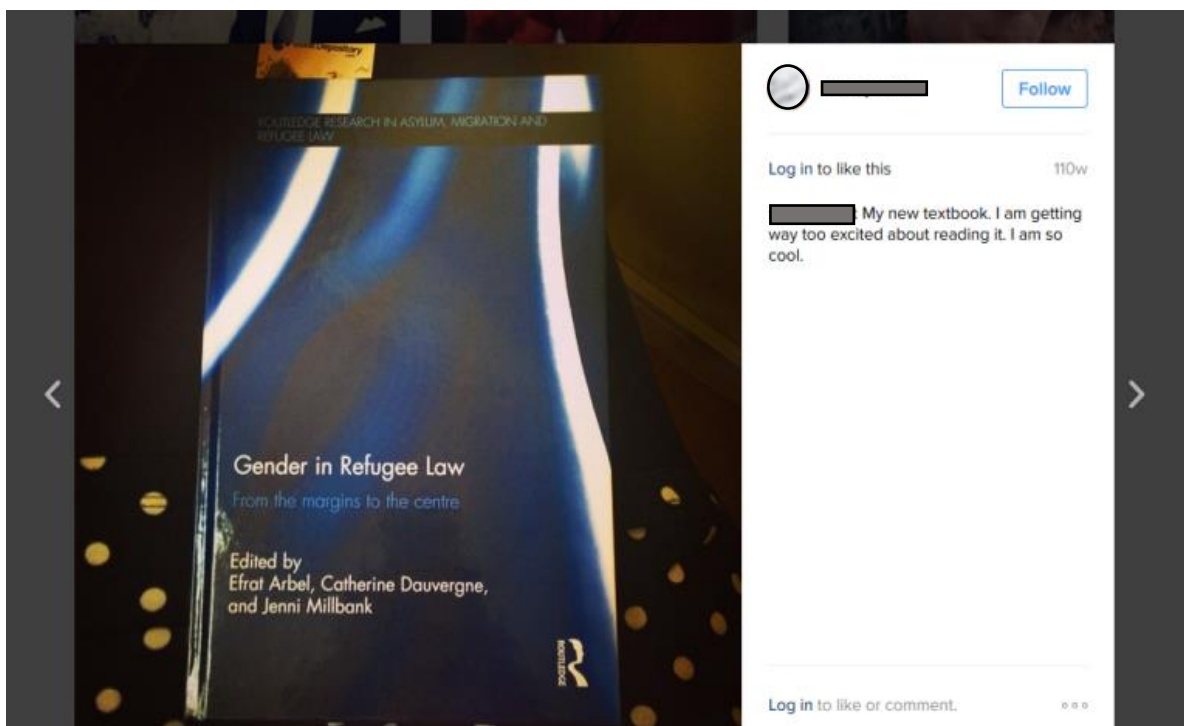


Figure 16: LeeScrLaw_20160825_JH_063

2.5 Summary

Through our data on Lucy's presence on social media, we gained an insight into the different ways in which she presents herself on each of her accounts. Different identity positionings are present also in the different situations her job involves – Lucy mentioned a 'casework Lucy' and a 'drop-in Lucy' in one of her interviews with us.³

On the Asylum Hope Facebook and Twitter accounts, Lucy is one of the several administrators updating the accounts. The posts are intended to be neutral and relevant to the work of the Asylum Hope Project, and serve the purposes of awareness raising among the public and networked affiliation with likeminded organisations. The organisation's use of the two platforms is to some extent deliberately designed to enable them to draw simultaneously on the different affordances of each and in that sense constitutes a process of transmedia meaning-making: an act of identity, relationship-building and campaigning that works across social media platforms within the polymedia environment.

Lucy's personal use of social media also shows how each platform fulfils a different communicative niche in her repertoire. On her personal Twitter account, Lucy presents herself as an Immigration lawyer and most of the posts are relevant to migration and asylum but we can perceive in them a personal twist; they are not the neutral posts of the Asylum Hope accounts. Lucy expresses her personal attitude, such as by using the 'Refugees welcome' ribbon in her profile picture. Also on her personal Facebook page Lucy expresses her political views but, as with her Twitter profile, she is careful to make it clear that these views are not connected to Asylum Hope. Finally, Lucy's Instagram page is dedicated mostly to lifestyle topics such cooking, travelling and DIY. This is an account from which we get the sense of what Lucy likes to do in her free time; topics such as migration are virtually absent.

Lucy's use of these different platforms reveals her attempts to compartmentalise her online self and, in particular, to separate her work life from her personal one. However, whilst compartmentalisation is an important principle underlying her social media use, it is not a straightforward process. From the data collected from Lucy's accounts on social media, we observed that topics such as migration and asylum are common both to Lucy's work-related and personal social media profiles – although the ways in which these are presented are different. This illustrates the fact that migration and asylum are far more than just work for Lucy, who is active in this area in numerous ways in her after-work hours through volunteering in different organizations. It also illustrates the ways in which different spheres of life seep into one another and the complexities involved in maintaining and policing one's identity in the age of social media. Nonetheless, the case points to the potential importance of compartmentalising in determining how users navigate the polymedia environment.

³ L: at the drop-in, I don't challenge anybody. But I do when I need to go to the court, as I'll need to swear etc. I have to be sure. So it's two different modes a casework Lucy is very different () casual
[LeeLawInt_20160819_JH_001]

3. BD and the East European Research Centre

3.1 Introducing BD

The Chief Executive Officer of the London-based East European Research Centre, BD,⁴ was interviewed about her perceptions of social media and her habits in using them. BD has extensive experience in the charitable sector and moved to the UK eight years ago. As CEO of the EERC BD's work activities focus on areas such as fundraising and budgeting, communicating and engaging with potential future stakeholders, networking, marketing and branding the public image of the charity. In the interview, she focused on her strategic uses of social media – mainly Facebook and Twitter, as well as LinkedIn – for professional and promotional purposes and achieving goals for the EERC, only occasionally mentioning personal use which (like Lucy) she generally appeared to keep separate from her professional use.

In BD's professional use of social media, of relevance to this paper is the way she recognises the different affordances and constraints of different platforms and chooses between them according to her aims. Firstly, for example, BD suggested that she had carefully weighed up the affordances of Instagram and decided that Instagram's main function – that of posting visual images – did not serve the EERC's needs.

BD	<i>we already well I was thinking about Instagram but because it's such a visual .. network . such a visual social media we don't really have that many visually kind of appealing things to post them so it's kind of natural ..dooh . not interesting for us . mmmh .. that's pretty much it</i>
----	--

Secondly, BD feels that emails are not appropriate for personal correspondence, but only for professional reasons and to receive newsletters.

BD and emails (IB4)

B	<i>my . email addresses have become practically //unintell// for these purposes because three years ago you would probably write an email to your mate now you don't . nobody does it anymore . so . you just use or for work or you use it for . you know just to get like newsletters that you are interested in .. but nobody really email anyone anymore privately I think . you don't even hand email addresses for people . not to mention phone numbers for most of them .</i>
---	---

Despite BD's perception that emails are nowadays used only for professional purposes, emails are rare in EERC, which BD puts down to her clients' limited digital literacy IT skills; in other words, the fact that the EERC responds to what it sees as its clients' capacities and

⁴ As evident in this cross-city report, project teams across the cities agreed different anonymisation procedures with their participants.

preferences. (Interestingly, another colleague suggested the problem was the amount of time they took and the difficulties involved in allocating time for emails between slots for meeting clients.)

<i>B</i>	<i>oh ... I don't really work with clients . but in principle . it kind of is . well . it's not electronic communication .. I'm sure that girls do get emails and like and so on but this is definitely not our primary source . way of our communication with users . lots of our users are completely IT //unitell//</i>
----------	--

<i>BD</i>	<i>the way our mission is to work with those who are most disadvantaged impoverished so on and so forth . isolated . and that's usually linked with either low life skills . or low skills . whatever their skills would be . and for example ability to effectively efficiently use IT is part of it . most of our users ..and it cuts across generations .. age has nothing to do with it . they just don't . hell . the email addresses if they do they don't know how to use them anyway . it's not convenient they don't believe they can achieve anything by writing emails . where us is mainly face to face or telephone really .</i>
-----------	---

In the following sections, we look briefly at the EERC's use of LinkedIn, and then focus on more in-depth analyses of Twitter and Facebook, drawing both on interview and interactional data.

3.2 LinkedIn

We did not collect any interactional data on LinkedIn. However, according to BD, the centre's LinkedIn account is used as a way to check details about other professional bodies and its online space is limited to displaying information about EERC.

<i>BD</i>	<i>używamy owszem Facebooka i Twitera i mamy profil na LinkedIn . no ale to LinkedIn in jest takie dość specyficzne tak że . tak że my tam generalnie egzystujemy . ale tam generalnie żadnej komunikacji nie ma</i>	<i>indeed we use Facebook and Twitter and we have a profile on LinkedIn . but this LinkedIn is rather specific so . we generally exist there . but generally there is no communication there at all</i>
-----------	--	---

<i>BD</i>	<i>I have LinkedIn profile . it's just pragmatically for . it's almost like subconscious encouraging people to use it because I do check people up on LinkedIn in .. so it's only fair that you have your . profile there as well {laughing} .. and that's pretty much it</i>
-----------	---

These extracts from the interview suggest that LinkedIn is not seen as a space for interaction but rather a place to go to for information. According to BD's account here, the EERC's LinkedIn profile is designed not so much to publicise the centre but rather to justify the fact that BD uses the site to access other people's profiles 'so it's only fair' that they put theirs up too. Given that LinkedIn has a messaging facility – like Facebook or Twitter – we can argue that BD's use of the site is shaped not only by its functionalities (if at all) but rather by her media ideologies: her ideas about the site in relation to the others she uses, shaped in turn by how she sees the site being used and other factors. As we shall see, BD understands, and uses, Twitter and Facebook very differently.

3.3 Twitter

Twitter is understood by BD as a tool suitable for contacting an audience comprised of what she describes as 'stakeholders' – understood in a somewhat loose sense as people who may have an interest rather than as clients or volunteers (she calls them 'beneficiaries'). In this, the EERC appears to use Twitter in much the same way as Asylum Hope, to engage with other institutions, as well as the media. This networked affiliation involves apparently long-standing relationships: below, BD talks of maintaining engagement with their various contacts.

B	<i>Ok so we are using Twitter . that we use to communicate strictly to stake holders . not to users or volunteers really . I don't think //unintell// one volunteer following us on twitter . so these are things that we want our stake holders to know .. public institutions we want to engage or we have engaged we just need to maintain this engagement . the media and so on and so for like .. the charities . some eerm kind of experts like lawyers and . so this is how we do it and we don't have communications person so it's kind of stealing time between the things that I normally do . social media stuff . but we try . the perfect option would be . once.. //unintell/ something happenings regularly at least two three two times a week . it's not perfect but still . something is going on .</i>
---	--

The data we collected from the EERC Twitter feed confirms BD's claims by revealing what appears to be a concerted effort to create a public voice and engage with others. Between 10th June and 1st December 2016 (nearly 7 months), the EERC (@East_Europeans) posted or reposted ('retweeted') 94 Tweets. Of these, 32 were original Tweets; 42 were Quotes (where a post is retweeted with additional text added); and the remaining 20 were Retweets. The fact that so many of these posts (the original tweets and quotes) contain the EERC's own words highlights in particular the attempt to make their own voice heard.

Original tweets

The EERC's original tweets are generally aimed at carrying out the following main functions.

- **announcements:** of, for example, funding successes, recruitments
- **publicising events,** either beforehand or after, e.g.



Figure 17

- **thanking** organisations or people for making events a success or contributing in some way (note that thanking was a frequent practice across all types of Tweet)



Figure 18

- **crowdsourcing**: e.g. publishing a picture of a missing woman (Nov 3)

- **responding to news**, e.g. murder of Polish man after a racial attack in August; news following Brexit vote
- **spreading information**, e.g. providing Crimestoppers' number, publicising a new tool 'to inform victims of #modern slavery'
- **linking to posts on their own blog**
- **announcing or reporting on their own media engagement activities**, e.g.



Figure 19

The EECR's original Tweets include some use of other languages, particularly when advertising an event aimed at a particular community, such as one event held at the centre, 'Poles Connect i East European Resource Centre zapraszają na bezpłatny warsztat na temat aktywnego obywatelstwa', advertised in Polish on 20th September 2016.

Retweets and Quotes

EECR retweet or quote the following third sector organisations, government or parliament related accounts, and individuals. The list shows some repeated engagement with organisations and individuals working in a particular area (migration and labour exploitation) and with some particular organisations and individuals, such as Paul Broadbent from the Gangmasters and Labour Abuse Authority (GLA), an agency investigating modern slavery and exploitation (who they retweet 13 times).

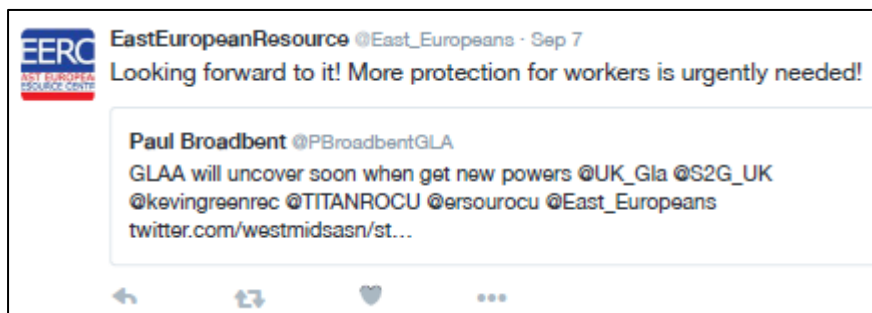


Figure 20

All of the following were retweeted once in the data set, unless otherwise specified.

Third sector organisations and charities

- Migrant Voice (non-profit organisation in London) (4 retweets)

- Law Centres Network (community legal services)
- Interfaith Matters (charity promoting inter-religious harmony based in London)
- Europa (charity working to educate and empower European expats based in Manchester)
- LondonMigrantRights (Migrant Rights Network project focusing on migrant communities in London)
- UKREN (The UK Race and Europe Network, a network of local and national organisations across the UK that work to combat discrimination)
- Acas London (legal services)
- FLEX: Focus on Labour Exploitation, which works to end human trafficking for labour exploitation (5 retweets)
- Paul Broadbent (from GLA) (13 retweets)
- Gangmasters and Labour Abuse Authority (GLA) (3)
- LAWRS (charity supporting Latin American women in London) (2 retweets)
- Migrants Resource Centre, charity that works with migrants to reduce barriers, including legal ones (2 retweets)
- Akwaaba (Sunday social centre for migrants in Hackney, London)
- EIN (Electronic immigration network, providing specialist information on immigration, asylum and refugee law)

Government or parliament related

- Mayor of London (2 retweets)
- Team London (the Mayor's volunteering team)
- Heidi Allen MP
- Andy Slaughter MP
- Polish Embassy UK
- Newham London (Twitter account for Newham council)
- Department for Communities and Local Government (2 retweets)
- Andy Hull (Labour councillor for Highbury West)
- Deirdre Brock MP (Edinburgh North and Leith)
- Marianne Thyssen (European Commissioner for Employment, Social Affairs, Skills and Labour Mobility)
- Roxanne Mashari (Labour Councillor for Welsh Harp Ward)
- Kevin Hyland OBE (UK Independent Anti-Slavery Commissioner)??

Individuals

- Mya Pope-Weidemann (writer and communications officer)
- Georgi Mechkarov (describes himself as typical Eastern European immigrant, leading discrimination lawsuit vs Citigroup)
- Philippa Newis (individual)
- Gary Linekar (celebrity footballer and commentator)

- Matthew Evans (Director of The AIRE Centre, charity promoting awareness of European law rights)
- Colin Yeo (Immigration and asylum barrister and writer) (2 retweets)
- James Gray ('charity/arts comms type')
- Ben Judah (writer)
- Ruth Hayes (Centre Director at Islington Law Centre)

(Total number of retweets: 61)

Although the EERC's interests revolve around immigration and Europe, their Twitter activity suggests the creation of a local, rather than a transnational network, centred to some extent on London, and reaching out to other parts of the UK. This is interesting to note given the fact that the research literature has tended to focus on the globalising potential of online networks and their superdiverse nature (e.g. Androutsopoulos and Juffermans 2014).

Their desire to use Twitter to network and engage in this way is shown not only in the number of Retweets (which, including quotes, accounts for two thirds of the posts), but also in their frequent use of mentions and hashtags, as well as photos. All three are illustrated in the following Tweet (#CommunityChampion; @Brent_Council).



Figure 21

Finally, the EECR often retweet or quote posts in which they are tagged; for example, when other people tweet about the EECR's media or engagement activities. They are tagged 29

times across the period in posts that they go on to retweet. This practice highlights mutual engagement and reciprocity – one organisation mentions another and they retweet or quote the original post.

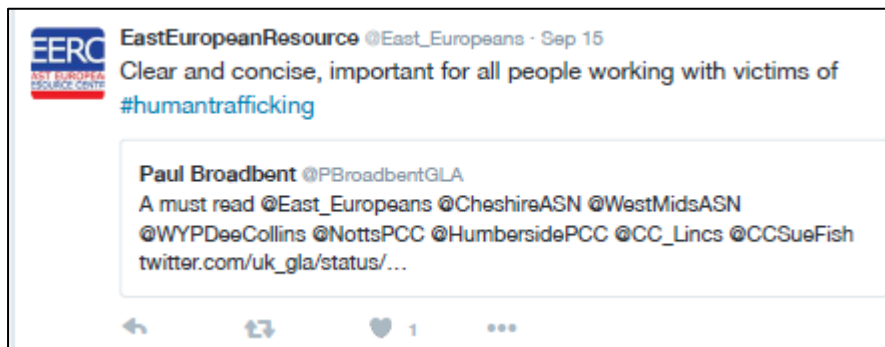


Figure 22



Figure 23

As well as showing how the EERC uses Twitter to create a public presence and networked affiliations, their use of Twitter also highlights the way in which traditional media reports and engagement events are combined with the social media platform in order to promote this particular cause. This can be seen in the above example, where images of BD speaking at the

Migrant Voice 2016 conference are posted on Twitter by Migrant Voice and then retweeted by the EERC. It is also evident in announcements of media engagement events. This transmedia activity also involves the EERC linking from Twitter to their own blog posts on the topic being discussed, which they did frequently. We return to the EECR's transmedia activity when we turn to Facebook later.

Personal use of Twitter

BD sees Twitter as a professional, and therefore not a personal, space. The extract below suggests that like Lucy at Asylum Hope she attempts to compartmentalise her social identities, and to avoid having her professional identity linked to her personal identity. While Lucy strategically concealed her full name on her personal profile, BD's stated approach is not to use Twitter for personal reasons.

B	<i>hmm . personally for example I don't do private Twitter . because twitter has been so much .. forced into professional kind of frameworks . that you are not private person on Twitter . this is why I don't particularly want to be linked with my – someone to link my charity's views and opinions and tweets with my personal interests so someone could look up . //unitell// so that's the reason I don't use it personally . eer .</i>
---	--

3.4 Facebook

In the period 13th October 2015 to 7th September 2016, the EERC shared 87 posts on their Timeline. Their use of Facebook parallels that of Twitter in the sense that they use it for similar functions: chiefly to create a public presence and to network, and more specifically to announce and document events, publicise their media engagement activity, and respond to news. From 10th June to 7th September (the period that overlaps with the Twitter data), the EERC posted on both platforms in relation to the same topic or event eleven times. However, they never 'cross-post' by posting exactly the same post and it is particularly clear on these occasions that the sites are exploited in different ways.

One of the main differences is that, compared to Twitter, on Facebook the EERC shares more of its own original posts in its own words, rather than sharing or retweeting others' posts. For example, in early July, the centre met the Minister for Integration and Equalities in the Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG). On Twitter, the EERC retweeted a Tweet from the DCLG, adding the following short message with a link to the popular hashtag #StopHate and mentions of both the Minister (@SusanBaroness) and the Department (@CommunitiesUK).

EERC EastEuropeanResource @East_Europeans · Jul 8
Great meeting with @SusanBaroness and friends from charities/faith groups - let's #StopHate! @CommunitiesUK



DCLG @CommunitiesUK
Important discussion today with @SusanBaroness and communities in Manchester on how to tackle hate crime. #stophate



Figure 24

In contrast, the Centre posted the following on Facebook. As you can see, the post comprises their own account of the meeting (while on Twitter much of the message was in the words of the DCLG) and their own message to followers about responding to hate crime (rather than expressing that through a popular hashtag).

EERC East European Resource Centre EERC
12 July · 🌐

We went to meet Baroness Williams of Trafford, the minister for integration and equalities in Department for Communities and Local Government. We talked about increase of hate crime as a result of the Brexit referendum and what we all can do about it.

Have you experienced hate crime or racially motivated bullying?? Do you feel that your child is safe at school? do you feel safe at work, on bus or on the streets? Let us know!

<http://bit.ly/29rxDs8>



We met Baroness Williams of Trafford at DCLG roundtable to discuss issues of hate crime and...

We met Baroness Williams of Trafford at DCLG roundtable to discuss issues of hate crime and integration Posted on July 7, 2016 by EEAC We went to the round table...

EEAC.ORG.UK

👍 Like 💬 Comment ➦ Share

👍 3

Figure 25

The above posts also illustrate the fact that posts on Facebook are generally longer and more informative than those on Twitter. As you can see, much more information is given about their visit and in less concise language: ‘Great meeting with @SusanBaroness and friends from charities/faith groups’ becomes the paragraph beginning ‘We went to meet Baroness Williams of Trafford ...’. This is also evident if we compare the centre’s Tweet about the Neasden Festival (Figure 23), which read ‘Our #CommunityChampion in #Neasden helping to reach out to #easterneuropeans in @Brent_Council’, with their Facebook post below which elaborates at much greater length on the event, whilst also carrying out other communicate functions, such as thanking the people involved, flagging up future events, and naming the people in the photos.



Figure 26

The difference in practice here is likely encouraged by the different affordances of the two platforms – the fact, for example, that Tweets were restricted at the time to 140 characters – as well as the social practices more widely associated with the two platforms. Importantly, the increased space available on Facebook may also encourage a more interactive style. In the above post, we see the use of multiple exclamation marks (punctuation flooding) and capital (THANKS), as well as direct appeals to readers: KEEP THE DATE!!!

Generally speaking, on Facebook the EERC makes more attempt to appeal directly to their audience and to get people to respond in various ways. A vivid illustration of this is given in parallel Twitter and Facebook posts on 25 June, which report on the centre’s engagement with the US media. On Twitter the Centre asks ‘What do #EU migrants feel about Brexit? We speak in US @AlterNet’, but on Facebook the question is reframed as ‘How do you feel about Brexit?’, directly addressing the reader. In the following example, a report on possible threats to the British citizenship of East European children, which the EERC shared on both Twitter and Facebook, is accompanied on Facebook (but not Twitter) with a call to people to write to the centre with their personal stories. In contrast, what the Twitter post allows them to do is to link with organisations and individuals through hashtags and Tweets: namely, *The Guardian* newspaper and immigration and asylum barrister Colin Yeo.



Figure 27



Figure 28

As the above suggests, the different approaches taken on Twitter and Facebook may also be explained by the nature of the (perceived) audiences on both platforms. In contrast to her perception of Twitter, BD sees Facebook as technology used to address EERC's target communities: i.e. the public, clients and volunteers.

<i>B</i>	<i>and we also have Facebook which is much more focused on our kind of target communities .</i>
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This particular imagined audience may also account for the fact that more posts on the EERC's Facebook Timeline are written in languages other than English than on Twitter (i.e. the languages of their target communities). In our data sets, only 5 of the 94 Tweets are written in other languages compared to 35 of the 87 of the Facebook posts. These mainly include posts written entirely in a European language other than English (that is, there is not much translanguaging evident), while some posts are written in English with another language used in the event poster or online article being shared.

In summary, we can (as with Asylum Hope) see how the EERC moves between these two platforms in achieving similar objectives of creating a public voice as well as establishing and maintaining patterns of networked affiliation. The affordances, audience and practices of each site are again perceived somewhat differently and so fulfil subtly different communicative functions, with Twitter being used for engagement with other organisations and Facebook being used to target the public. Interestingly, despite the use made of both Facebook and Twitter for networking, BD also voiced her preference for face-to-face communication, emphasising the need 'to be there physically'. Networking is officially part of BD's work responsibilities as she deals with budgeting and hunts for funding EERC's projects.

<i>BD</i>	<i>20 - 40 % of my work load is networking with people . sometimes on purpose because I want to achieve something and sometime you just have to network just for the sake of networking because . because this is how business works . is it . doesn't it? . so . we are members of various sort of kind of membership bodies and that helps .. we get . its constant kind of brand build thing . so that you are seen as a serious respectable organisation . and this way people will invite you to places or you know . will engage . and that's an awful lot of work . I don't mind because I'm a naturally born networker I love it . that's my favourite part of the job . (...)</i> <i>. so networking is really I mean is good old school charm offence you have to be there physically .. and that's it and that's my view of it and this is how we do it and I think we've been fairly successful in it . quite frankly</i>
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Personal Facebook

BD does not perceive the same need to avoid using Facebook for both professional and personal reasons as she does with Twitter. This may be because profiles and posts can be kept more private than on Facebook, but interestingly this contrasts with Lucy's approach to using Facebook. From a personal perspective, BD relies on Facebook to keep connections from the past accessible and, as mentioned previously, uses the Facebook Messenger (a written chat channel on Facebook) utilities to contact closest friends.

B	<i>I use Facebook as a person but it's more .. I may be quite a passive user . so I may kind of share some funny mem that's kind of it . really . but I use Facebook just to try to keep in this extremely arm's length contact with some I people I think it's worth to keep in contact with some you know . mates from university . then years ago and this kind of . to have some sort of gateway into those older . connections . having said that I don't really think I have been making any recent connections on Facebook . it kind of is very . relating to the past for me how I use Facebook ..</i>
---	--

BD's claim that she uses Facebook 'to keep in this extremely arm's length contact with some people' reflects the use noted by Miller (2016) in his ethnography of an English village, whereby people appeared to use the site not for close contact but to avoid losing touch with what we might call 'weak links' (Granovetter 1974). He termed this the Goldilocks phenomenon, in that the site encouraged relationships that were not too hot, not too cold but just right (in analogy with the children's fairy tale). Interestingly, given the focus elsewhere on the immediacy of breaking stories on Facebook (e.g. Georgakopoulou 2013; Page 2012), Facebook for BD was more about 'relating to the past'; i.e. maintaining connections with people she used to know.

Although she used her phone to keep in touch with friends and family, she claimed not to use WhatsApp, suggesting that neither she nor her personal contacts had phones which were able to support the messaging app, nor Skype (for reasons she struggled to voice). She gave her friends' and family's lack of access to WhatsApp as a reason for using Facebook Messenger to keep in touch, although it is unclear why their phones could support one app and not the other.

D	<i>so how do you communicate with your family and friends and the closest people to you who are the really . important part of</i>
B	<i>well . with my family I phone . that's just exclusively to phones . I don't use skypes really I dont know why</i>

B	<i>... neither I nor none of my dearest and nearest use devices that could allow for WhatsApp .. so if these are my friends I just message through the Facebook messenger or Facebook functionality</i>
---	---

It is interesting here to note that while Twitter is seen as a professional platform which must therefore not be used for personal reasons, Facebook can serve as a space for both personal and professional communication.

3.5 Summary

In summary, the London case study reveals general patterns in practice and principles that reflect those identified in the Leeds case study. Like Lucy, BD uses different social media platforms in concert to raise awareness and maintain networked affiliations whilst employing each one for subtly distinct purposes, and this is both achieved by and reflected in her communicative choices. This use is driven by her understanding of the purpose and audience that each platform is best suited for, as well as her perception as to which platforms (Instagram, LinkedIn, email) are either not suitable for her purposes, or less relevant. Like Lucy, BD's decisions regarding her personal social media use are again shaped by her desire to maintain boundaries – however difficult this is to achieve – between her private and public lives. The case illustrates another example as to how working professionals – in this case, in the charity sector – exploit various digital affordances across personal and professional online contexts.

4. JW, advisor at the Chinese Community Centre, Birmingham

4.1 Introducing JW

JW is the Advice and Advocacy advisor at the Chinese Community Centre (CCR) in Birmingham. JW has been working at the centre since 2003 on different roles across various departments including Carer, Health and Reception. JW was born and raised in Shenyang, the capital city of Liaoning Province, China. She studied English Literature for her BA degree and had been working as a tour-guide in China after graduation for several years. She was then sent by her company on a one-year language-enhancing course in Scotland, where she met her then-boyfriend and now-husband, who is originally from Hong Kong and a Cantonese speaker, working in catering in Scotland. They moved to Birmingham in 1999 and have been living in the city since then.

Although we observed JW at work for four months, her busy schedule meant that WeChat data was always collected in a haste. Towards the end of the observation period, JW handed her phone over to the Birmingham research fellow, Rachel, so that she could collect any data she liked while JW was in a meeting. The method Rachel used was to take photos of JW's screen with her own phone. Concluding that WeChat seems to be the only social media channel JW uses on the daily basis (with the exception of email), Rachel collected 1825 WeChat messages from 323 WeChat screen shots. A detailed statistical count of all the data can be seen in the following two tables.

Table 1: WeChat Messages Breakdown (with UK/overseas Chinese contacts)

JW's key contacts via WeChat	No. of screen shots	No. of messages
V (JW's husband)	25	137
K: JW's friend & previous colleague; Female	23	154
LM: JW's colleague and friend; Male	3	12
AC: line manager at CCCB; Female	15	74
XB: Friend and previous colleague; Female	3	16
J: Classmate at university, now lives in USA; Male	8	42
SiHai Logistics	1	3
Personal profile, contacts, and Friend Circle Posts	12	16
Sub Total	89	454

Table 2: WeChat Messages Breakdown (with family and friends based in China)

JW's key contacts via WeChat	No. of screen shots	No. of messages
Z: family member, female	79	548
ZR: nephew, male	7	25
ZT: University classmate, male	7	35
Q: new friend, female	6	40
RK: friend, male	1	6
S: taxi driver, male, distant relative	21	133
CH: friend, male	18	124
MH: friend, female	1	2
C: friend, female	1	3

Group of 4: close family members in China (mainly JW's brother and his family)	38	208
Year 88 Class 22: Chatting group with university classmates	35	172
English Department Year 88	20	75
Sub Total	234	1371

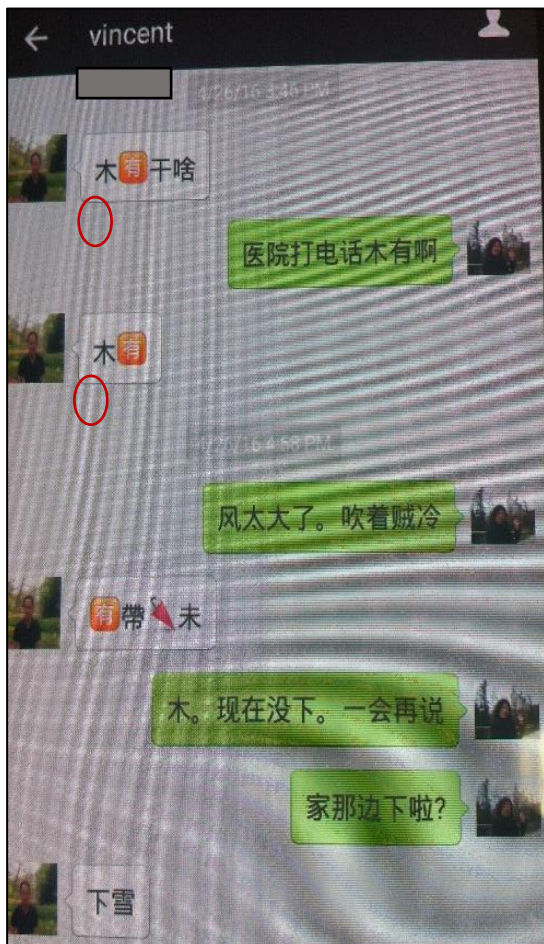
As the tables suggest, the social media data collected in relation to this final key participant differs in a number of important ways from the previous two case studies. WeChat for JW was a space in which a range of different kinds of relationships and communicative functions played out (as we shall conclude, a polymedia space). Below we discuss three different interlocutors which illustrate the diversity of uses to which JW put this one app: intimate exchanges with her husband V; work-oriented interactions with AC, her line manager; and negotiations with a member of her China-based family, Z, concerning their transnational WeChat business.

4.2. Mobile sphere of intimacy: JW's husband V

The following exchange between JW and her husband V illustrates the way in which the two keep in touch throughout the day through a series of mundane check-ins or updates and gentle banter. Elsewhere this has been described as 'a way of maintaining ongoing background awareness of others' (Ito and Okabe 2005, p. 264) through exploitation of the affordances of the mobile phone, and of maintaining 'a continuing state of incipient talk' (Schegloff and Sacks 1973) in which conversation is never closed down but is always potentially open. The effect of this is to create a sense of 'connected presence' (Licoppe 2004) and to enhance feelings of intimacy between interlocutors. In earlier phases of the project, we found that mobile messaging (rather than voice calls) may be particularly convenient and efficient in achieving this and similar communicative functions, not least because communication can be asynchronous and interlocutors do not have to reply immediately (Tagg 2015). In this case, feelings of intimacy are likely further heightened by the pair's playful use of a shared set of language resources and practices.

For example, in the first screenshot below, V uses the Chinese word 木 (*mu*) (meaning 'wood') to replace the standard usage of 没 (*mei*) (meaning 'nope', or 'no, there isn't'). This is a form of wordplay now widely used among Chinese speakers on social media. In this same exchange, V also uses stickers of an umbrella and a Chinese character 有 (the red square with a Chinese character inside) to replace Chinese words of the same meaning. Although it is likely that V did not actively hunt out the latter sticker, which would probably have been offered by his mobile as an option for that character, it can be argued that these resources serve to index the pair's shared background resources. This is particularly evidenced by the fact that V's use of 木 (*mu*) appears to mimic the northern Chinese dialect spoken by his wife. As a Cantonese speaker, it is possible that V is not even aware of the regional origins of this form, but has simply picked it up from his wife.

Figure 29



V: doing nothing

JW: has the hospital rang or not?

V: nope

JW: the wind is too strong! Soo cold!

V: brought an umbrella with you?

JW: nope. It's not raining now. So I will see what I can do later on

JW: is it raining there where we live?

V: snowing

In Figure 32 below, we can see various translanguaging practices: the pair move from Chinese to English in naming various food items (coffee, yoghurt, satsuma, apple) and it seems as though V may be deliberately and playfully echoing JW's use of *coffee* when he uses the English word *yogurt*; V also uses emoji, namely a picture of a banana rather than using the Chinese character 有. Finally, we can also see that in her last turn JW makes her point not through her own words, but by posting an article entitled 'Take a second thought before you eat bread'. Sharing news stories is a frequent practice across JW's messages, as is discussion around health.

Figure 30

J: <what have you got for lunch>

V: <just bread>

J: <and > coffee?

V: <yep but no>yogurt

J: <have some fruit>

V: <one piece of> banana

J: Satsuma. Apple

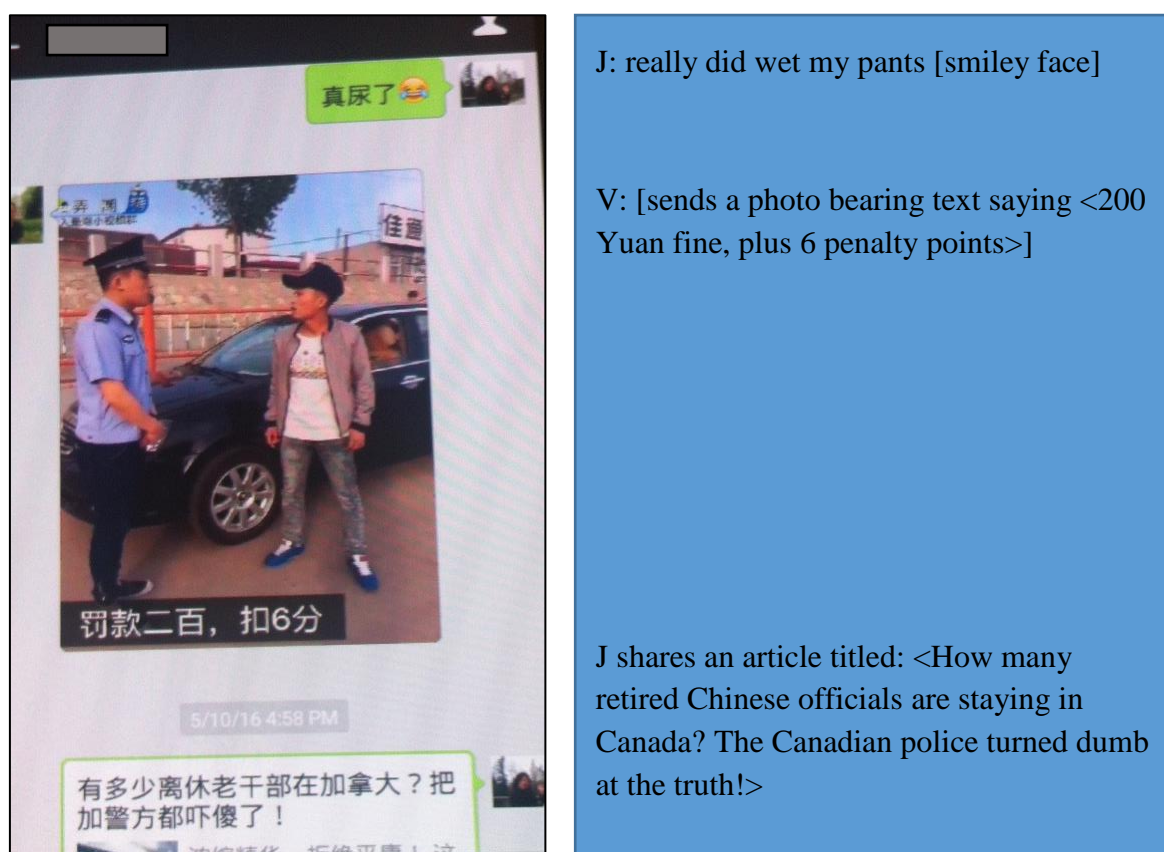
V: later

[J shares an article entitled as: Take a second thought before you eat bread]

Interestingly, throughout their conversations, they use both the simplified (JW) and traditional (V) Chinese scripts, although this is a strategic practice rather than a playful one. As with the meat orders between the Mandarin-speaking butcher and the Cantonese-speaking restaurant owner which we documented in the Birmingham market (Tagg 2015), it is very likely that they have their chosen script set as default on their phones and so the choice likely is not actively involved in interpersonal meaning-making.

The following example (Figure 33) is also illustrative of the way in which the pair draw on their shared communicative repertoire to recreate a sphere of intimacy in the communicative space of this mobile phone app. JW has just joked that she is so busy at work that she has not had time to go to the toilet.

Figure 31



V's response to his wife's joke takes the form of a sticker showing a young Chinese man being stopped by a traffic policeman who gives him a fine and points against his licence. The use of stickers is a frequent practice in WeChat and other apps, as documented in our previous reports (e.g. Tagg 2015). In this case, the sticker serves to give voice to V's opinion of his wife's stated action but does so indirectly, through analogy with the communicative situation in the sticker. Its humour emerges partly because of the clash between contexts – the idea that you might be fined because you couldn't get to the toilet in time – and also because of the layers of shared background knowledge that it assumes. On one level, the sticker assumes a shared understanding – drawing in part on communicative experience and their shared interactional history – regarding the practice of using such stickers and what it means in this context; on another level, the sticker assumes a shared cultural understanding in that it can be seen as representing a typical scenario in mainland China where the traffic police play a prominent role in regulating drivers. Again this highlights V's familiarity with his wife's background, no doubt gleaned through his frequent and lengthy stays in JW's hometown.

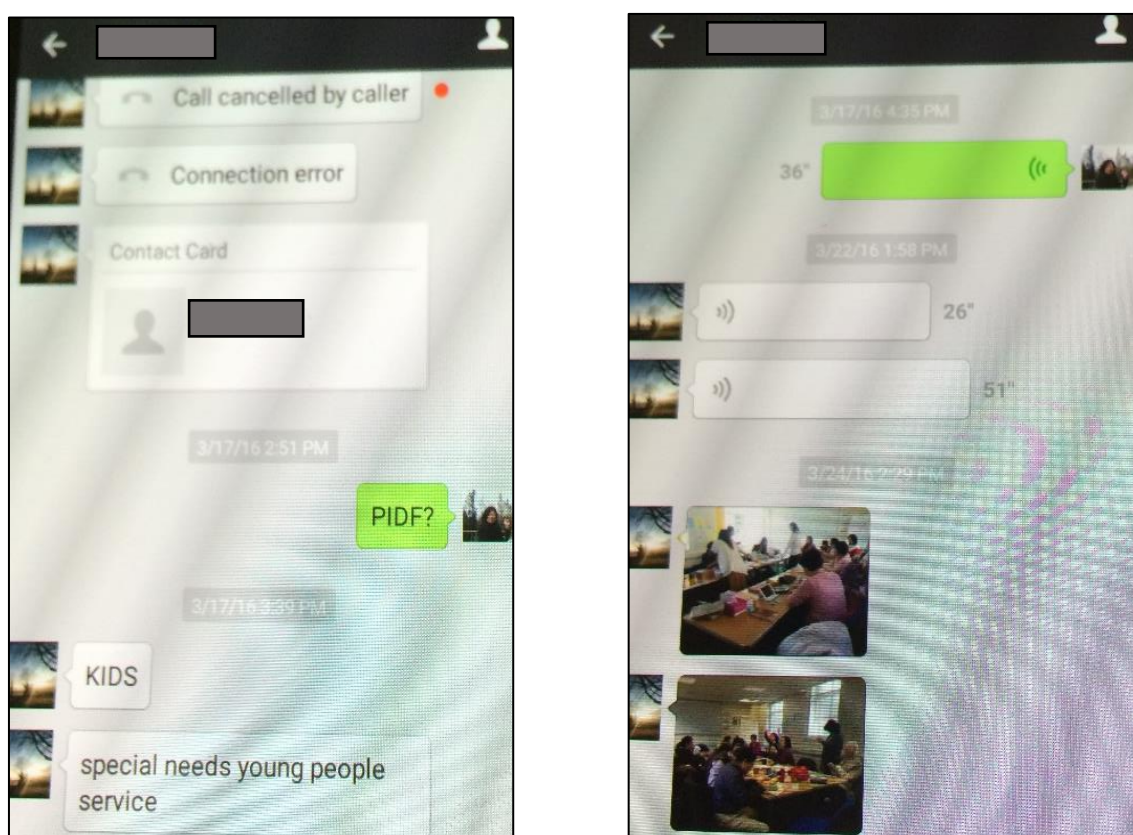
In summary, we can see how this couple draw on the affordances of WeChat messaging to maintain and perhaps enhance their intimate relationship both through creating an ongoing channel of communication – one which extends into their working lives throughout the day – and through drawing playfully and knowingly on a set of shared communicative resources, also afforded by the messaging function of the app.

4.3 Blurring the boundaries between work and play: JW's line manager AC

On the same app, JW also conducts interactions with AC, her line manager, who shares the same office as her. Their exchanges illustrate another range of resources and modes available to JW through WeChat, which this time take on very different meanings to those used in exchanges with her husband. Her work-oriented interactions also offer a more pertinent illustration of the way in which messaging apps facilitate a blurring of boundaries between the domestic and work spheres.

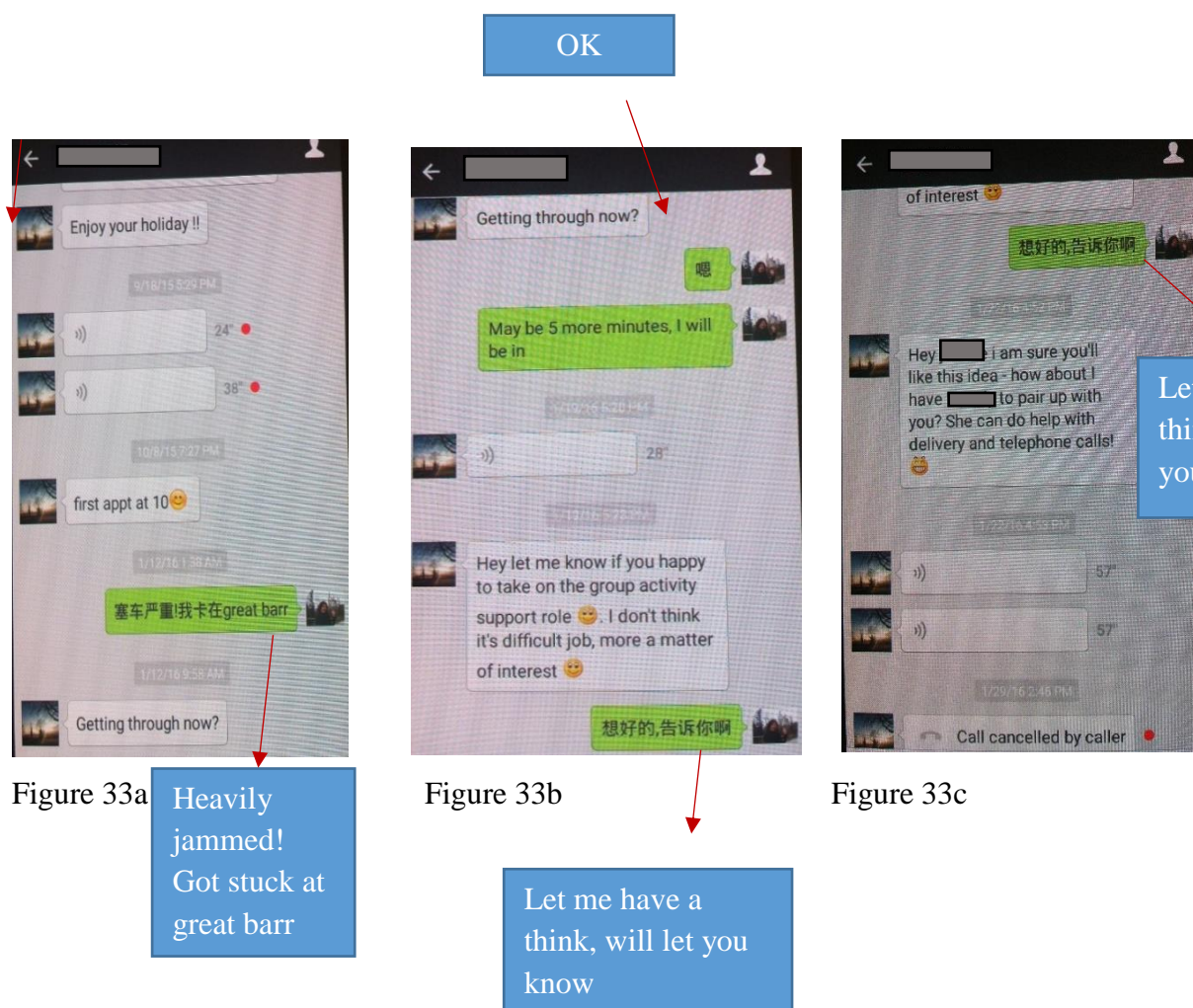
Figure 32a and b illustrate how JW and AC draw on voice calls, recorded audio messages and images, as well as the written chat function of WeChat.

Figure 32a and 32b



Unlike JW's conversations with V, these varied resources are not drawn on playfully but resourcefully and strategically in order to fulfil communicative functions in the workplace. Although we do not have the necessary data to carry out an in-depth analysis of their modal choices, we can speculate that the choices are motivated by the pair's assessment of the affordances of each mode and their appropriateness for carrying out particular functions. For example, acronyms (PIDF and KIDS) are discussed using written messages, while the images likely provide an immediate update on events being held at the CCCB, visualising key elements such as the good turnout and engaged audience. We also speculate that leaving a voice message is likely seen as being much quicker than typing a message.

In Figure 33a and 33b, JW draws on the immediacy and convenience of WeChat to let AC know she is stuck in traffic and to keep her updated on her progress. In this case, written messages are evidently deemed more appropriate, perhaps because both must fit their interaction into and around other activities (such as driving). Although it is evident that they are drawing on linguistic resources from across their repertoire (that is, from Mandarin and English), it is interesting to note the dominant use of English, particularly by AC, perhaps motivated by the work context. AC's fairly direct tone probably reflects here concern that JW's running late won't look good in front of the clients.



In Figure 33c, AC starts to talk to JW about a new role, the 'group activity support role', which AC hopes JW will take on. In an apparent attempt to engage and persuade JW, AC draws on resources associated with more informal digital interactions, namely emoji. This practice is also apparent in her later suggestion that JW pair up with a colleague, Wendy. Again, it is interesting to observe how AC moves between written messages and audio ones, although the specific motivations behind her choices are not available to us. Also of interest is the way that WeChat enables the two to stay in touch even when JW is not in the office, in this case when she is caught in traffic en route. Certain affordances of WeChat make it both possible and convenient to talk about work in what is not traditionally working time or space.

This is particularly evident in our last exchange, which takes place between JW and her line manager while the former is on holiday. In Figure 34, AC consults JW on an advice and advocacy case regarding a client whom JW had seen previously, with a series of messages into which she ‘chunks’ the narrative, updating it as events unfold. JW’s narrative is an interesting twist on the mundane, immediate and fragmented ‘breaking news’ stories that are facilitated by social media (Georgakopoulou 2013). Breaking news stories are ‘small stories’ – that is, they depart from feature of a classical narrative and are often mundane, contextualised, fragmented and unfinished – which play an important role in everyday social relations and understanding of the self. In telling very recent or evolving stories, people make sense of what is happening and create a shared understanding. AC’s account of the events unfolding in JW’s absence below has a similar sense of immediacy and fragmentation shaped by the affordances of mobile messaging which enable a story to be chunked and sent while offline activities take place, albeit with a different kind of purpose: that of eliciting information from JW. In contrast to everyday social exchanges, the importance of providing accurate information is evident in her correction message (she writes ‘Typo’ and corrects the client’s name). At the same time, however, there are interpersonal elements, evident most clearly in the final message in Figure 36c where AC switches register in order to provide a metacomment on the preceding narrative which acknowledges the fact that JW is on holiday but also underlines her frustration. This switch to a more informal register is marked by emoji and by letter flooding (‘toooo many AA’).

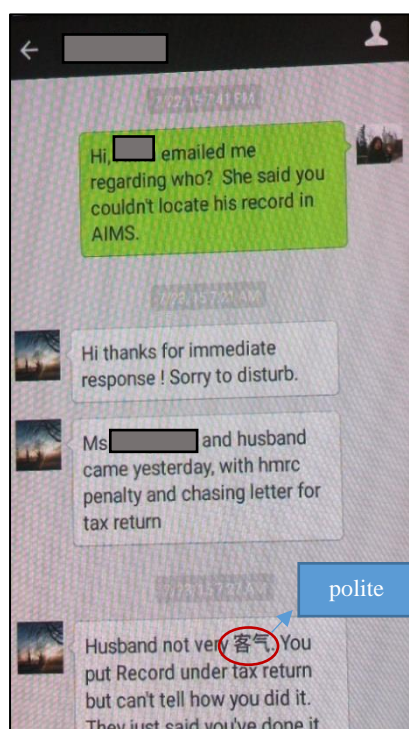


Figure 34a

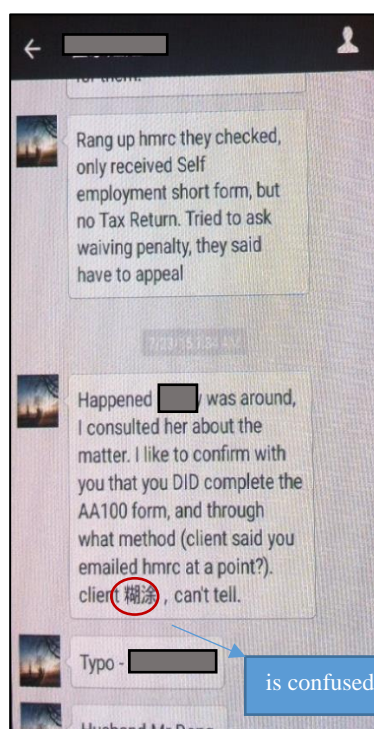


Figure 34b

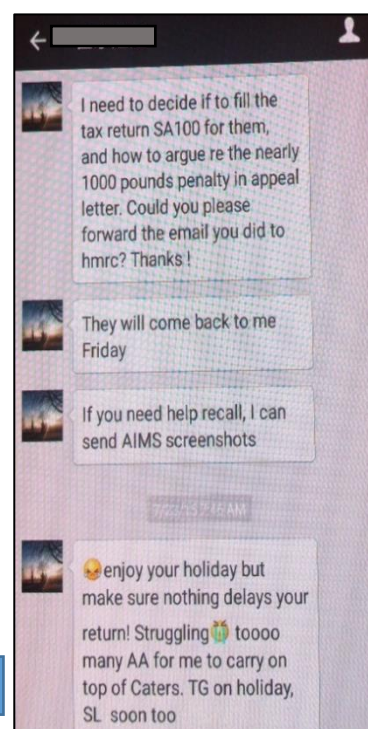


Figure 34c

Finally it is interesting to note again AC’s use of English, likely motivated by convenience as they are discussing a case within the UK benefit system and would otherwise have to translate various terms into Chinese, and perhaps because English is easier and quicker to

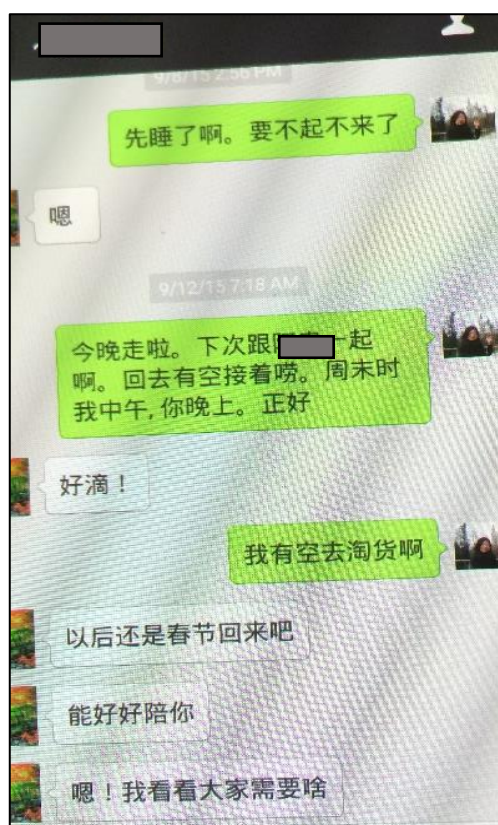
type than Chinese. In this respect, it is interesting to note that AC continues to use English even when she switches to a more intimate register at the end of the exchange. At the same time, however, she uses Chinese words to describe her clients as ‘polite’ and ‘confused’ – this may be an attempt to capture a particular evaluation or ‘a more vivid expression’ which she feels more capable of doing in Chinese (cf Fung and Carter 2007).

This exchange offers a clear illustration of the way in which mobile messaging enables a blurring of work and personal spheres, in the context perhaps of a more general and increasing overlap between the two, allowing the former to seep into the latter. In this case, AC may easily have been able to justify the interference into her employee’s personal time, given that the problem was connected to a tax return form filed by JW on behalf of the client, who is now not satisfied with JW’s casework. Nonetheless it is striking how WeChat facilitates a channel of ongoing and private communication which extends beyond working hours and into JW’s annual leave.

4.4 Transnational family business venture: Z in China

JW’s frequent WeChat exchanges with Z shows, firstly, how JW also uses the app to maintain transnational contact with her close family members (a third use which differs from the two discussed above) and, secondly, how they move between discussion of personal and business matters within the same interactional context. Their close relationship – and the ongoing communication between them – is evidenced in the friendly banter in Figure 37 below. The exchange took place just before JW left China to go back to Birmingham after a short holiday.

Figure 35



J:< I will have to go to sleep first or I can't wake up on time for work>

Z:< yep>

J:< I will leave for UK tonight. Next time will come back together with H. Let's keep chatting when have time after I coming back home. It will be noon time when I get back on Saturday. It will be your evening Beijing time so suits us fine>

Z:< good>

J:< Will shop around for goods when I have time>

Z:<it's better if you can come back home around Spring Festival>

Z:<this way I can have more time to keep you company>

Z:< Sure! I will see what everyone wants to buy>

Embedded within this interpersonal chat is a mention of their WeChat business when JW offers to shop around for goods when she has time. This movement between personal and economic concerns reflects their WeChat communication more generally. In the data, there are quite a few instances in which they talk about their WeChat business. This is a new function of WeChat called a 'WeChat Store' (or 微店) whereby an e-business can be conducted through a reliable payment channel. Setting up and running digital stores is now a popular practice among WeChat users.⁵ In this case, the two manage the business between them, with JW being the buyer of the UK luxury goods while Z looks for clients in China for those goods.

The following screenshots (Figures 38-42) illustrate how Z and JW use WeChat to communicate between themselves in the very process of launching the WeChat business. These messages contrast in interesting ways with typical text messages sent for social purposes and characterised by vague language, playfulness and formulaic phrases (Tagg 2012). The precise yet compact language and noun phrases ('milk powder', 'average postage') suggest a new register of digital business communication, which we also observed in the business phase of the project (Tagg 2015). In the exchange, JW and Z are talking about the price and costs of buying, transporting and delivering formula-milk from the UK to China.

⁵ See, e.g. <https://www.businessoffashion.com/articles/global-currents/wechat-stores-are-chinas-latest-luxury-craze>

Figure 36



Z:< I see>

J:< Milk powder costs 100 Yuan, the average postage will be 100 Yuan per can. If by air the goods will be received within 10 days. You will have to sell it at least 260 if you want to make a little profit. Would it be too expensive?>

Z:<900 grams per can>

Z: <postage is too expensive>

J: 900

Z:<wait for me to check the prices with the others who have done this business.>

In Figures 39-42, Z and JW exploit the multimodal affordances of WeChat by posting images of products they have found in local shops, as they carry out price comparisons. The images here play a very specific role in the immediate activity in which the interlocutors are engaged.

Figure 37



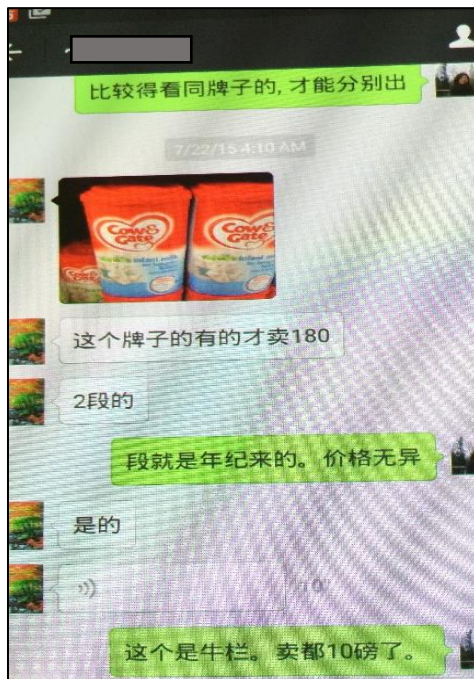
Z: [posts two photos of a can of milk powder]

Z: <I have asked one of my relatives who have been doing this business: 310 a can for this brand.>

J:< different brands might have different prices>

J:< have to check the same brand and compare their prices>

Figure 38



J: < it only makes sense if compare the prices of the same brand>

Z: posts another picture of canned milk powder

Z:< this brand only sells at 180 Yuan>

Z:< band 2>

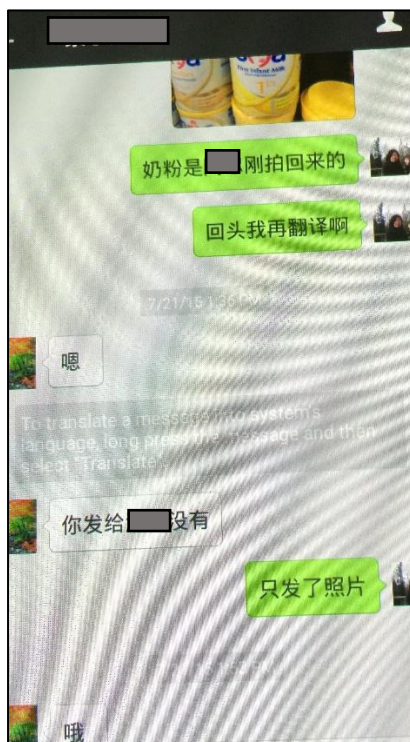
J:<band is to do with babies' age. The prices stay the same>

Z: <that's right>

Z: sends an audio reply

J:< this is Niulan. Sells 10 Pounds already in the shops here>

Figure 39



J: posts a photo of canned milk powder

J:< the milk powder picture is just taken by H from the local shop>

J:< I will translate it for you later on>

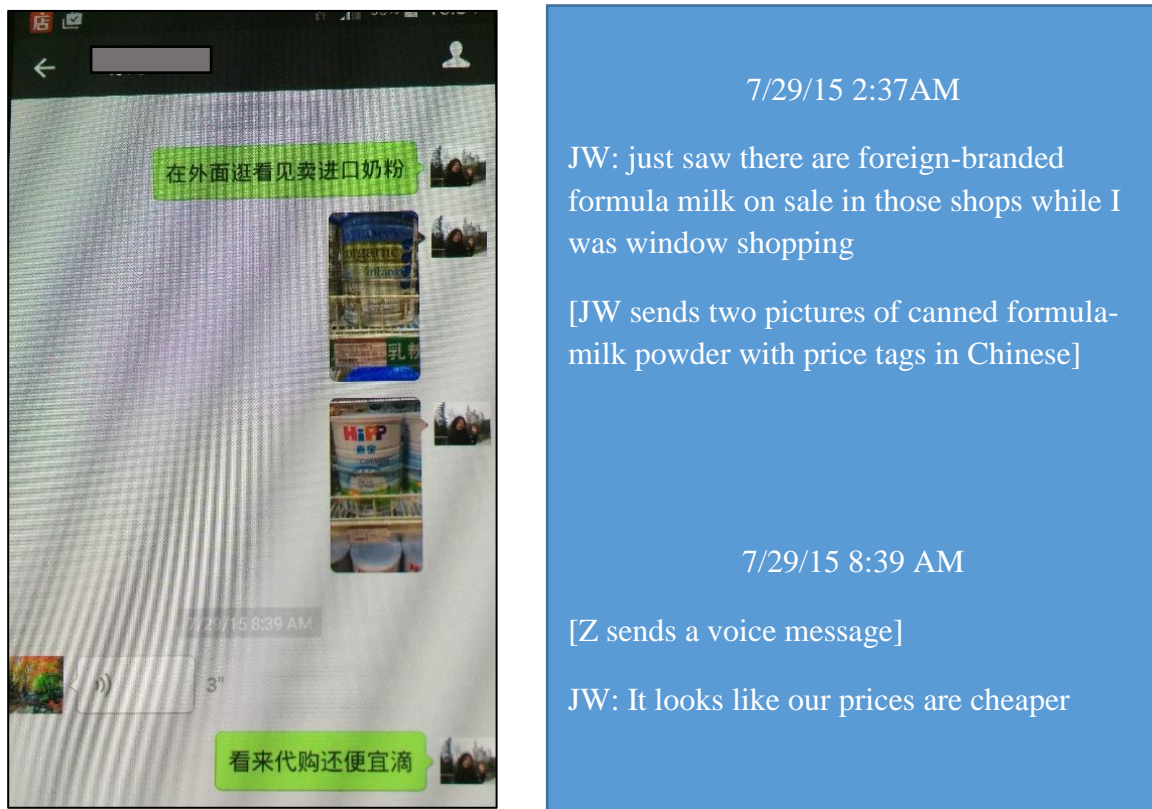
Z:<ok>

Z:<have you sent it to WH?>

J: <only the photo>

Z:<ok>

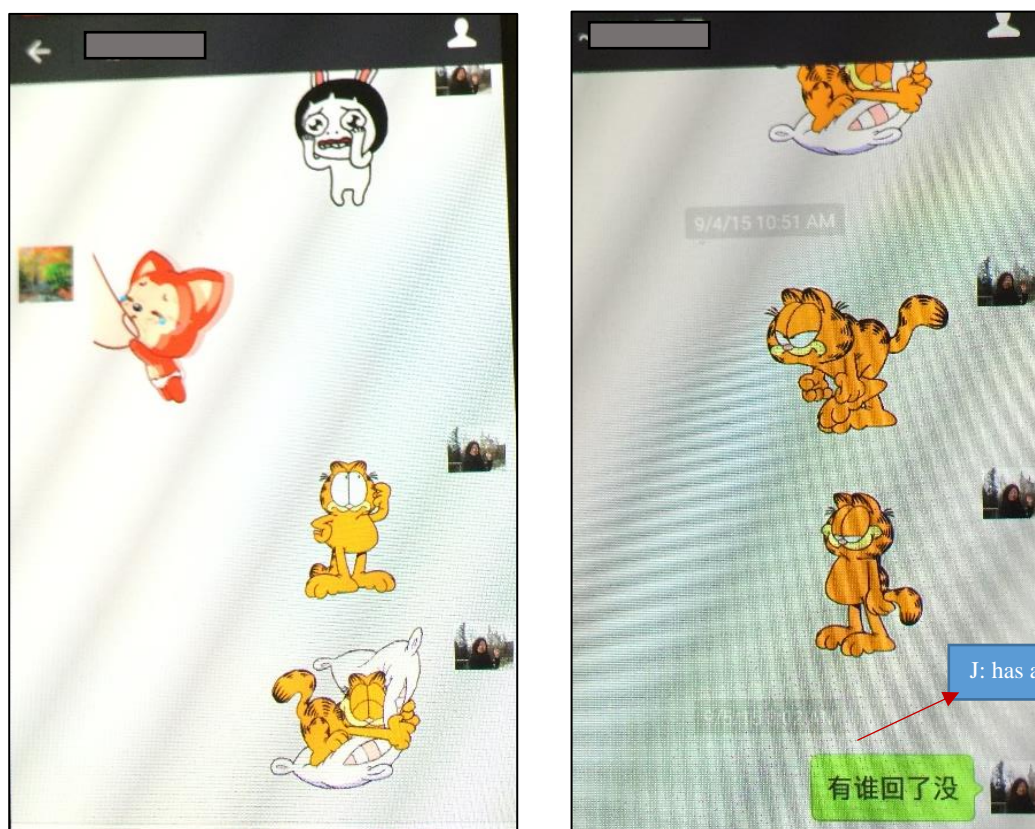
Figure 40



As these interactions highlight, the running of this business is a complex matter, which involves price comparisons, estimates of costs, and translations between English and Chinese. It is also interesting to note how their conversations about their digital business are not only deeply intertwined with offline activities – chiefly the act of hunting out and pricing products in shops – but also involve a wider network of contacts across two countries. For example, in Figure 41 above, JW shares with Z some pictures taken by V from the local Birmingham shops and some other details, telling Z that she will translate the brand’s names later on. In an earlier example, Z tells JW that she will ‘check the prices with others who have done this business’. In another example not included here, Z urges JW to send pictures to ‘WH’, who is probably another partner or family member who is helping them to sell. As well as enabling them to set up an e-business, then, WeChat also provides easy access to contacts they can call upon for help and efficient ways of sharing information quickly.

As we have already seen in the work-related exchanges between AC and JW, the use of WeChat enables interlocutors to draw on resources commonly associated with more informal chatty online interactions in facilitating their business communications. These reflect – and are of course permitted by – the close relationships between the people involved. In the middle of their discussion about powdered milk prices, JW uses stickers to express her impatience at waiting for a reply from Z. The stickers can be seen as mitigating the potential face-threatening speech acts being carried out by their light-hearted and less direct nature.

Figure 41



4.4 Summary

In summary, JW's use of WeChat involves both the *integration* of different modes into one app (stickers, audio messages, photos, voice calls and so on) and the *convergence* of a range of communicative functions in a way that blurs traditionally conceived boundaries between different spheres of life. This is not to say that these boundaries otherwise stand firm. In fact, the convergence of communicative functions in JW's use of WeChat is to some extent shaped by the already porous nature of her social and work relationships. The technology has not transformed JW's lifestyle and relationships, but can rather be seen as extending and facilitating her existing practices and tendencies. As with earlier technologies such as the television (Williams 1974), the relationship between technology and society is complex and works both ways.

Processes of convergence entail a diversification of uses to which an app like WeChat is put. The communicative functions of SMS text messaging have diversified since the late twentieth century (e.g. Thurlow and Poff 2013) so that mobile messaging is now used for advertising, communication with schools and patient reminders (among other uses). It could be argued that technology companies have exploited this in their creation of 'super-apps' like WeChat which offer users a wide range of online services. Like Facebook and Google, WeChat acts as a kind of 'walled garden' within the wider internet – that is, an online space which controls users' access to the web – with many users exclusively accessing the internet through the app. In this report, for example, we have seen how WeChat encompasses e-business opportunities and news sharing facilities, as well as the ability to send written texts, audio recordings,

images and memes. This diversification of communicative function is accompanied by a growing range of ways in which language and other resources are drawn upon, highlighting the fact that language use is shaped not by the technological constraints or any inherent features of the technology, but by however its users choose to use it. As the interactions show, JW and her interlocutors draw on and move between a range of different registers for interactions carried out within the interactional space of the one messaging app.

The way in which JW and her interlocutors navigate the affordances which make up WeChat suggests that the app can itself be seen as a polymedia environment: an environment of different affordances which users navigate and select from, according to their communicative needs. Having initially chosen to use WeChat (itself a potentially meaningful act), choices made between various modes of communication available through the app are likely to be socially meaningful to interlocutors. Although we did not explore this directly, the fact that JW and her husband use the mobile messaging function to ‘check in’ with each other may mean that they are likely to interpret each other’s typed messages as lacking urgency and having a primarily phatic function, and we might speculate what a phone call would mean in comparison. It would also be interesting to explore how JW interprets her line manager’s audio messages and whether they have a similar status to written messages or convey something else: urgency, perhaps, both in the sense of having been produced quickly and requiring a quick response. In this sense, then, Madianou’s (2014) argument that the smartphone be seen as a polymedia environment can also be made with more specific reference to super-apps like WeChat. That is, WeChat is, like the smartphone, both part of a wider polymedia environment and a polymedia environment itself. The increased convergence of communicative functions into one app may in fact heighten the social significance of media choice in mobile interactions: where all modes of communication are so immediately and easily available in the same app, how do people decide which to use and what meaning does this convey?

5. Conclusion

This paper explored three women’s uses of social media platforms or apps at work and in their social and private lives in the light of the theory of polymedia, which sees social media users as navigating an integrated environment of communicative opportunities. Firstly, we saw how two of our participants draw on multiple technologies and platforms in carrying out their professional work, including that of achieving networked affiliation with relevant organisations. This transmedia meaning-making involves complex ideological decisions regarding the appropriate uses and affordances of each site and results in subtly different practices on each site. We saw this most strikingly in BD’s use of Twitter and Facebook, which are exploited in different ways according to her perception of the function of the site and the audience.

Secondly, we also saw how our participants work to maintain what they perceive as the necessary boundaries between work and home, or between public and private identities. This was evident most strongly in how Lucy negotiated her work and personal uses of social media, but was also evident in BD’s perception that some platforms were suited for

professional purposes and others for personal uses. As a reaction – or resistance – to the way in which social media has been seen to blur traditionally perceived boundaries, acts of compartmentalisation may be a key – but hitherto neglected – practice in shaping social media communication in a polymedia environment.

Finally, we also saw how social media can be exploited in a way that encourages convergence between different communicative modes, functions and spheres of life, such as when JW uses WeChat not only to maintain regular informal check-ins with her husband even at work, but also for a range of work- and business-related purposes which intersect both her private time and her personal relationships. We posited that super-apps like WeChat are themselves polymedia environments, where the choice between different communicative modes likely has social significance for interlocutors, which in turn sit within the polymedia environment of the smartphone and the wider mediascape beyond, speculating on whether the ongoing trend towards convergence and integration might heighten, rather than diminish, the social significance of media choice.

Within a complex and layered polymedia environment, these different practices – of transmedia meaning-making, compartmentalising and convergence – are important because they underline the point that social media communication is always about choice, to some extent and however socially constrained, in terms of how affordances are taken up. In these cases, we see how ‘platforms’ themselves, and the characteristics that accrue to them, are themselves resources that can be drawn upon in different ways as part of people’s wider media ideologies. These observations in turn challenge the notion of the ‘platform’ as a valid unit of analysis or site of enquiry. We can more profitably start from the concept of polymedia, whereby people exploit and move between various affordances in order to make meaning, and in which different platforms, like different languages, registers, styles and voices, are ideological constructs which constrain speakers to particular meanings whilst enabling them to communicate social identities, affiliate with others and achieve social actions.

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