Hilke Brockmann: Current Projects

1 Future Perfect

with Fosca Gianotti, Fabrizio Sebastiani, &John Torpey

It is often claimed that innovations in information technology, nanotechnology, artificial intelligence, cognitive sciences, biotechnology, and other emerging technologies will fundamentally change society. But how? In this project, we investigate how members of the global high tech-elite envision the future of human society. We focus on tech-elites because their wealth, expertise, and control of technological developments gives them a pivotal role in contemporary social change. Which social scenarios do they foresee? What are the opportunities and threats they anticipate? What values do they emphasize ? What are their political views? To explore these questions, we will identify CEOs and founders of the 100 largest tech enterprises (as measured by market capitalization) and trace their conversations on such platforms as Twitter and Facebook, as well as on their personal, corporate, and foundation homepages for a period of approximately two months around the time of major political and tech-related events.

The project addresses a highly relevant topic both socially and academically. First, sociological research on elites has thus far mainly focused on political, military, economic and, more recently, financial elites (see, e.g., Mizruchi 2013 and Milner 2015). Despite their central role in social change today, relatively little scholarly research has been conducted on the social and political views of the new technological elites that are at the center of our project (see Markoff 2015; for one of the few exceptions, see Broockman, Ferenstein, and Malhotra 2017).

Second, to study this group of people is crucial because they have amassed enormous expertise, wealth, market power, and political leverage in a very short period of time. Their technological inventions are transforming the functionality of established political, military, economic, financial, and media institutions (see Torpey and Jacobson 2016 and Torpey 2017). For example, research suggests that democratic discourse during the last US election campaign was distorted by social media bots (Bessi and Ferrara 2016).

Third, by focusing on the commercially most successful representatives of the tech elites we avoid problems of self-selectivity in internet presence. We assume that the leaders in our sample will be digitally literate and compelled by their positions in the business world to communicate broadly their perspectives about the future.

Big data analytics will help to systematically analyze the content and sentiments of leaders comments regarding future uses of technology and their impact on society. We

intend to scrape data from Twitter, Facebook, and individual and foundation websites in order to reconstruct debates about the social and political impact of technological change and, at the same time, to cross-validate findings. Machine learning and text analytical tools will help to build a robust model of communications regarding the future from the members of the new tech elite. The project is supported by the SoBigData consortium (http://www.sobigdata.eu/).

2 Parenting

with Song Yan, Su Li, & Kai Ludwigs

Recent studies have shown the influence of the parental home on learning effectiveness (Braun and Stuhler, 2018; Khanam and Nghiem, 2016; Hyunjoon Park, Buchmann, Choi, and Merry, 2016), social mobility (Hartas, 2015), and mental health (Musick, Meier and Flood, 2016). In this project, we investigate how cultural differences in parenting affect the time-use and subjective well-being of school children and their parents in Germany and China. Which parenting norms and parenting styles (Heejung Park & Lau, 2016) contribute to or hinder school success and a happy upbringing?

Our focus is on middle-class families in China and Germany. On one hand, middle-class families tend to have a strong educational orientation. On the other hand, the middle classes are deeply socialized into prevailing parenting cultures. This most-different design helps us to identify the cultural determinants of a satisfying and successful everyday-life for schoolchildren and their parents.

The study is based on a mobile App-Survey. The app allows following the everyday life of Chinese and German schoolchildren and their parents for one week. We collect data on time-use , and combine them with data on parenting norms and styles, as well as with socio-economic information. The project is supported by the Chinese Academy of Science (CAS) and the Happiness research organization (http://www.happiness-research.org)