

**CALL FOR PAPERS:
Media Infrastructures in the Middle East**

Organized by the Media Studies Program
American University of Beirut
January 9 to 11, 2020

Over the last decade, and in the wake of popular protest movements and uprisings that swept the region, scholarship on the Middle East has come a long way in recognizing the contested and pivotal role of media in shaping the political imaginaries and repertoires of action across the region. From the 2009 Green movement in Iran, to the 2011 Arab uprisings, to the 2013 Gezi Park protests in Turkey, Middle East scholars across disciplines increasingly turned their attention to the role of media – and social media in particular – in political organization, mobilization, and dissent under authoritarian regimes. Across these varied contexts, where political activity is largely restricted and freedom of expression violently repressed, new media such as social networking platforms and mobile technology were credited with heralding a new era of political participation and dissent. The revolution, some argued, will be tweeted, and the socially-mediated network, many noted, managed to leverage individual discontent for collective action.

With the aim of interrogating this techno-utopian outlook, amidst the entrenched inequalities and repressive politics that continue to plague the region, this conference seeks to move the conversation from the front-end to the back-end of media: from networks, as it were, to infrastructures. How does a focus on the material conditions and labor that channel and process communication flows unsettle what we understand media to be and what they can accomplish in the Middle East? How can an inquiry into media infrastructures inform our understanding of the economic, political, and cultural boundaries and flows that constitute the Middle East as region? And, what are the political stakes of this infrastructural turn?

If infrastructure is the “basic physical and organizational structures and facilities...needed for the operation of a society or enterprise,” then we can think of media infrastructures along these same lines – as the building blocks of our entire *mediascape*. Platforms, data centers, software, algorithms, and human labor shape and transform media industries and everyday media practices. This conference explores how these technological and organizational infrastructures are embedded within and reproduce power relations and inequalities, but also how they condition human agency and struggles for social justice.

We are particularly interested in papers that examine the social, material, cultural and political dimensions of media infrastructures (digital or otherwise), and related issues, such as the built and natural environments, surveillance, privacy, interconnectivity, labor conditions, access, and the reproduction or disruption of social inequalities.

Other topics that papers might explore in relation to the conference theme are:

Technological development
Conflict and Displacement
Accessibility
Surveillance
Counter surveillance
Online violence
Information infrastructures
The politics of platforms
Labor conditions
Economies of repair and breakdown
Digital platforms as infrastructure
Social, political and epistemological consequences
Impact on communication and circulation of data
Online participation and mobility
Knowledge production
And other related themes

We invite submissions (maximum 400 words) on the variety of topics listed above, or others that engage with the conference theme. Submissions should include: author name(s), affiliation, email address, paper title, and a brief bio, and be emailed to mediastudies@aub.edu.lb no later than **July 31st**.

Decisions on acceptances of abstracts will be communicated by mid to late August.

A limited number of modest travel subsidies may be available. Applicants should identify in their email if they would like to be considered.

For further information, please contact the organizers: The Media Studies Program at the American University of Beirut at the email address listed above.