**Canada Excellence
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Datafication and digital witnessing infrastructure

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Abstract

The presentation presents the concept of digital witnessing infrastructure in relation to forced migration and human rights activism. Witness accounts are a genre in discourses on migration, with digital technologies enabling the production, circulation, and consumption of accounts about persecution and flight in addition to and apart from accounts provided in institutional settings. The presentation introduces the concept of digital witnessing infrastructure to discuss the continuing datafication of evidence of human rights violations. It shifts the focus from the datafication of borders to the datafication of violence – a type of datafication which can help those seeking asylum and safety to have their claims acknowledged and to pave the way for out-migration from the respective country of origin. Starting with a conceptual reflection on digital witnessing infrastructure, the presentation will identify its actors, such as forced migrants and their social networks, digital platforms, activists, donor organizations and the crowd. By the example of two witnessing projects, the presentation illustrates how digital witnessing infrastructure comes into being and enables connectivity between social mediascapes and transnational activism. Overall, the presentation makes a case for the link between datafication, legal claims-making, and migration.

Biography

Saskia Witteborn is Associate Professor in the School of Communication at the Chinese University of Hong Kong. She specializes in critical technology studies and migration and researches the geopolitics of identity, migrants' digital technology practices, the datafication of migration, and the link between mobilities and immersive realities. Saskia was a visiting scholar at Free University of Berlin, Humboldt University, and Télécom Paris. She is currently a Visiting Senior Fellow at the LSE. She is author of *Unruly Speech: Displacement and the Politics of Transgression* (Stanford, 2023), co-editor *of The SAGE Handbook of Media and Migration* (Sage, 2020), and co-author of *Together* (Oxford, 6th ed., 2005).