



**Universiteit
Leiden**

Narrative and Fiction in the Politics of Social-Media

Applicants

Eligible proposals must have at least two applicants from Humanities, preferably with an interdisciplinary approach.

Supervisor Name	Discipline
Sara Polak	American Studies
Frank Chouraqui	Philosophy

Project description

Provide a brief description of the project (max. 300 words)

In the past politicians said things; the media critically communicated those messages to a large audience, and citizens would base their voting behaviour on this reporting, or so went the basic story. In recent years, a number of developments, both technological and ideological, have undermined this model. In particular, storytelling and politics are now mixed in fundamentally new ways. These developments have coincided with an intensification of the language of “narratives” in the public sphere. In this context, narratives seem to evade the alternative between truth and falsity; they could be characterised as a certain organisation of facts that allows some intended meaning to emerge. Therefore, the renewed focus on “narratives” suggests that discussions of “truth-telling” and “lies” and “information” and “misinformation”, which traditionally polarized public discussion, are losing traction.

This project asks what the appeal to narratives in the political sphere reveals. It does so by comparing the notion of narratives to the more traditional notion of fiction (in which facts are made up). We hypothesize that a fruitful way to think of the differences between narratives and fictions is to consider what compartments are appropriate in interacting with them. The trainees will focus on establishing what compartments are mandated by narratives and fictions respectively, by A) comparing and contrasting concrete case studies of (social) media narratives/fictions (sub-project 1), and B) developing conceptual and phenomenological analyses of the experience of narrative and fiction (sub-project 2).

The first subproject collects and analyses case studies from the American social media sphere, employing discourse analysis and data-mining tools. The second subproject proceeds analytically, by exploring the connections between certain behaviours and the concepts of fiction and narrative, to offer a basis for the systematisation of the data that results from the first project.

Research Trainee Profile

Each proposal requests two Research Trainees. Describe the general tasks of the research trainees, how these tasks are academically challenging to the research trainees, whether they need any preliminary knowledge

(regarding the topic and/or research methods) and which skills the research trainees should have. Also specify which type of students are eligible to apply (3rd year Ba, Ma, ResMa).

This is a project for two MA students. Subproject 1 requires a student with basic training in discourse and media-analysis as well as in digital methods of analysis, both quantitative and qualitative. They will have to gather data, before organising it and isolating patterns that are instructive of the distinction between the behaviours expected in the face of narratives and fiction.

Subproject 2 requires training in philosophical aesthetics and the phenomenology of fiction. It involves establishing a working understanding of the relations between the cognitive processes attached to narrative and fiction respectively, how they inform behaviour, and how in turn this relation to behaviour produces power. The research trainees will develop and hone their skills in these methods, but basic competency is necessary.

Collaboration

If applicable: Describe how your research improves collaboration and cross-pollination between the disciplines involved (max. 300 words)

While it is obvious that social media narratives and fictions have profoundly overhauled and in many cases disrupted societies, politics, the public sphere, and the individual and community constellations we inhabit, good methods to theoretically and empirically analyse these novel dynamics are still lacking. Philosophers and cultural studies scholars observe and theorize these changes in qualitative and conceptual terms, but usually have a limited body of empirical data to undergird these claims (usually just one or a few significant examples). Digital media studies scholars, conversely, have the tools to collect and quantitatively analyze large sets of, for example, social media posts, but such analysis often has relatively little explanatory power. The holy grail of this interdisciplinary field, then, is a combination of methods and approaches that both yield generalizable empirical results, and conceptual models that account for them and that hold up to analytical scrutiny. This project, by approaching the same question from a variety of different angles (quantitative and qualitative; bottom-up and top-down; example-driven and theory-driven), sets out to develop such mixed methods.

This supervisors of this project are embedded in the larger NWO Open Competition project “Playing Politics: Media Platforms Making Worlds,” and as such, the research trainees will benefit from interactions with the larger multidisciplinary team of research fellows, and their work, whilst self-standing, will conversely contribute to the team’s work. The project group meets weekly or fortnightly to discuss literature and engages in a wide range of collective thinking and writing projects. The experience of being part of an active research team will contribute to the training of these students as they become researchers.

Deliverables

Enumerate intended project results: papers, research proposals or otherwise. (max 200 words)

The deliverables of this project should be one short synthetic position paper (authored by both trainees in collaboration) as well as a first draft of a PhD project (one for each), in the format of the NWO Promoties in de Geesteswetenschappen.

Planning

Provide a breakdown of the project into phases with tentative timing (max 150 words)

	Sub project 1	Sub project 2
February-March	Literature review, selection of case studies, and	Critical literature review: conceptual and

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	initial data gathering on the language of fiction and narrative in the political sphere	phenomenological working accounts of narrative and fiction
March-April	Work on the co-authored article: Formulation of the research question and hypothesis	
April-June	First draft of the co-authored article	
June-July	Formulation of the PhD project's research question	Formulation of the PhD project's research question
July-August	Draft PhD Project	Draft PhD Project
	Final text co-authored article	

Student Application

Provide information on how to apply e.g. required documents for application (resume, motivation letter etc.) and an email address where student applications should be sent.

- Resume (including courses taken and results)
- Motivation letter which discusses
 - interdisciplinary interests and collaborative skills and ability for independent work
 - the relevance of the candidate's experience to the themes (fiction and narrative) and the methods phenomenological and conceptual analysis, digital data gathering and discourse analysis) involved in the project.
- To be sent to both f.chouraqui@phil.leidenuniv.nl and s.a.polak@hum.leidenuniv.nl