

## Conference Report: Social Media & Society 2017

Dr Wil Chivers

The 28-30<sup>th</sup> July marked the 8<sup>th</sup> annual [Social Media & Society](#) conference. The conference is organised by the [Social Media Lab](#) at Ryerson University in Toronto and this year it returned home to Canada after [last year's](#) excursion to Goldsmiths in London. WISERD Research Associate, Dr Wil Chivers presented at both of these conferences and in his latest blog he reveals his highlights of this year's event.



The conference spanned three days, with the first being dedicated to a series of workshops and the remainder to the usual [programme](#) of keynote presentations, papers, panels and a packed poster session. Social Media & Society is an interdisciplinary conference and I was excited by the diversity of research on show, from the methods, culture and politics of social media, to young people, journalism and bots. You can read all the high-quality research papers online in the [ACM Digital Library](#).

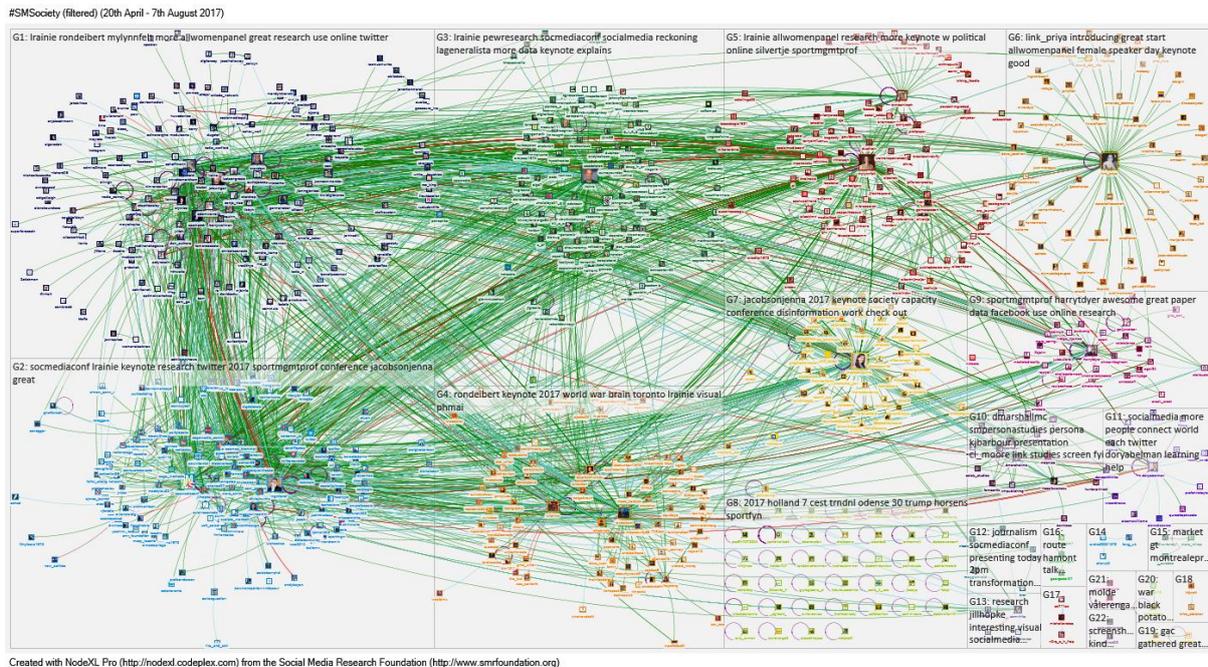
Saturday and Sunday's keynotes were delivered by [Lee Rainie](#) (Director of Internet and Technology Research at [Pew Research Center](#)) and [Professor Ron Deibert](#) (Director of the [Citizen Lab](#) at the Munk School of Global Affairs). Lee Rainie presented a wealth of data from Pew's Internet and American Life Project. Although the data spoke only to a U.S. context, the insights into people's engagement with politics via social media in an age of 'fake news' was fascinating. On a similar theme of trust and propaganda, Ron Deibert gave a gripping (if more than a little concerning) talk about surveillance and cyber espionage and how civil society organisations face a increasing barrage of digital attacks. As a live accompaniment to each keynote, 'graphic recordings' were made by [Brilliance Mastery](#), which added a novel dimension to each presentation (Lee Rainie's 'The Reckoning for Social Media' pictured above).



Aside from the keynotes, highlights for me included ['Spiral of Silence 2.0'](#) by Christian Hoffman and Christoph Lutz (winner of the Best Paper Award), a 'fireside chat' panel with [Cam Gordon](#) from Twitter Canada and the extensive poster reception that showcased among other things some really exciting projects from early career researchers (Best Poster Award: Tommy Tse and Joey Chan, pictured left).

This being a social media-oriented conference, there was inevitably an active Twitter backchat before, during and after the event (as shown by the density of the network below), helped in no

small part by a prize on offer for ‘Most Engaged Attendee on Twitter’ (congratulations to [Ann Pegoraro](#) who fought off some stiff competition, including my own). This sort of chatter is sometimes dismissed as distracting or self-serving but the reality as I found it was that it was a useful way to hear snippets of presentations from parallel sessions to follow up later, connect with more people than it would otherwise be possible to do and build a *community* that lasts beyond the confines of the three days of the conference. This last point is particularly important; social media research is international, interdisciplinary and growing rapidly and the development of this kind of community is great to see.



My work-in-progress paper from the conference – ‘Investigating the Patterns and Prevalence of UK Trade Unionism on Twitter’ with Helen Blakely and Steve Davies – is available [here](#). In this paper, we outline early findings from our network and account analysis. Hashtag use and tweeting patterns vary between unions and although some unions can dominate Twitter conversations, other groups and individuals with an interest in labour and employment are sporadically drawn in to this community.

You can recap some of the key moments from the conference by searching for the hashtag [#SMSociety](#) or checking out the [Storify](#) account for the Social Media Lab. Social Media & Society 2018 will be held in Copenhagen; check the [website](#) for more information.

## W. Chivers

*This blog is the author's own work.  
For the original post see: <https://wiserd.ac.uk/about-us/people/wil-chivers>*