

Working with nature, working for change: social media influencers and environmental practice in Oman

Sean P. Smith

(Tilburg University, Pays-Bas)

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Université de Lorraine – campus de Metz

(séance ouverte à toute personne intéressée)

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Do Instagram posts have an effect on the environment? This talk examines how social media influencers in a networked public work to change practices of littering, or the improper discarding of waste. Drawing on qualitative ethnographic and online data collected in 2022-23 in the Arabian Gulf country of Oman, local campaigns against litter are shown to be intrinsically connected to the global popularization of nature tourism and outdoor activities via social media. In response to the increase in litter associated with people spending more time outdoors, an anti-litter discourse has consolidated among online communities as influencers and everyday users seek to spread awareness about litter and instigate change. Taking an historical perspective on litter and urging a nuanced understanding of the media economy in Oman, global anti-litter discourses are shown to be recontextualized according to local concepts of nature through the study of three genres, which circulate in tandem with mediated campaigns among private actors and the national government. Anti-litter discourses, it is shown, are a key component in the promotional work undertaken by influencers in Oman as they seek to develop the country's growing tourism industry—a process that reshapes not just environmental practices, but sociocultural relations with nature.

Sean P. Smith (Assistant Professor of Digital Discourse, Literacy and Practice, Tilburg University)

Dr. Sean P. Smith is Assistant Professor of Digital Discourse, Literacy, and Practice in the Department of Culture Studies at Tilburg University in the Netherlands. Receiving his Ph.D. from the University of Hong Kong in 2021, prior to coming to the DCU he was an FWO junior postdoctoral fellow in the Department of Social and Cultural Anthropology at KU Leuven in Belgium. His current project investigates how concepts of and practices in nature (or, the more-than-human environment) are transformed through social media and tourism, with a focus on Oman and the Arabian Peninsula.

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