

Affective Publics - Lecture Series

Prof. Dr. Tobias Matzner

Understanding the affect of algorithmic publics

AFFECTIVE SOCIETIES

Thursday, 15th July

06.00 pm

online

[Meeting Link](#)[\(Click here\)](#)

Several forms of Western publics are increasingly structured by algorithms. Traditional forms of gate keeping are replaced by algorithmic filters that compile “feeds”, search engine results, etc. Increasingly, algorithms also create content, e.g. as chatbots disguised as human social media users. Algorithmically generated measures such as likes, retweets or subscribers join established markers of visibility or relevance. Many of the recent debates regarding such developments and other implications of algorithms for publics concern affect. Those who follow Habermasian ideals of publics fear a shift towards the affective, populist, and partial through algorithms – most present maybe in public discourse on filter bubbles, behavioral manipulation, dark patterns, and similar phenomena. Yet, also prominent adherents of affective publics consider algorithms as a threat, provoking wrong, detrimental, or defective forms affectivity. Even where publics are not directly concerned, in critical debates on algorithms a rich, relational form of intersubjectivity is often pitted against a more affective, even behavioral form of interaction brought about by algorithms. Considering the history of thought on algorithms and technology, this connection of algorithms and affects seems surprising. For a long time, the algorithmic and the machinic have been associated with instrumental reason, “cold” pitiless logic, and the proverbial reduction of thinking and feeling beings to numbers or cogs in the machine. Given that peculiar development, I want to argue that the combination of algorithms and algorithmic publics with affect is not only based on efforts to describe recent effects of information technologies. Rather, they are the result of a particular contemporary way of supplementing thought and debate on algorithms with other discourses and theories.



Tobias Matzner is Professor in the Faculty of Arts and Humanities, University of Paderborn. His work combines theories of (digital) media and technologies with approaches from political philosophy, cultural studies, and social theory.

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