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Prof Dr Margreth Lünenborg

Freie Universität Berlin

Institute for Media and Communication Studies

Margreth.luenenborg@fu-berlin.de

Affective publics – Theorizing digital dynamics in translocal forms of public articulations

The embeddedness of digital convergent media into everyday life challenges diverse concepts in media and communication studies. Distinctions between public and private modes of communication have blurred as well as those between interpersonal and mediated communication. This blurring of lines has complex consequences for what was formerly known as "the public sphere". The paper will focus the affective dimension of fluid, fragile and tiny forms of publics that can be seen as characteristic for new modes of emerging articulations not necessarily managed by traditional institutions of public communication like journalism.

Taking examples of #metoo, #blacklivesmatter and #aufschrei, descriptions and analyses of diverse forms of media practices used to translocally articulate personal experiences and mobilize protest by public articulation will be given (Maireder & Schlögl 2014; Drüeke & Zobl, 2016). Relying on a practice theory understanding of acting with media (Lünenborg/Raetzsch 2018; Postill/Bräuchler 2010), these activities are analyzed as enabling structures played out to create new forms of publicness going beyond the Habermasian concept of "the public sphere" (in a singular). The understanding of such kinds of publics urges for an observance of its affective character. Thus, the concept of "affective publics" (in plural) will be elaborated by analyzing the (a) relational, (b) processual/temporal and (c) performative character of emerging publics.

Terms like "networked public" (boyd 2011) or "hybrid public spaces" (van Dijck & Poell 2015) offer new understandings of the complex and dynamic constellations of public articulation. While they mostly focus on technology-based, but socially adapted structures of participation, the concept of "affective publics" adds to a specifically affective understanding of publics. Not as an antagonist to discourse, but as a part of it affect becomes a key term to capture the fluid dynamics between digital technology and human behavior (Gregg/Seigworth 2010). Especially the temporal logics of the emergence of new publics e.g. in moments of crisis and conflict as well as in search for solidarity or joint action can be explained in terms of affective dynamics. The performative character of publics (Butler 2015; Warner 2002) – offering an alternative to normative understandings – becomes obvious in the dynamic emergence of online as well as offline publics. Building on research of Papacharissi (2015) on protest communication, the concept of 'affective publics' is widened to understand public formations that go beyond rational discourse and deliberation.

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