

Joint conference of the section *International and Intercultural Communication* (DGPuK) and the network *Media Structures*

## **INTER/TRANSNATIONAL MEDIA POLICY AND REGULATION IN DIGITAL ENVIRONMENTS. DEBATES; STRATEGIES INNOVATIONS**

October 24-25, 2019

Venue: Erich-Brost Institute, Dortmund/Germany

Affiliation: Institute for Media Studies (IfM), Ruhr-University, Bochum (Germany),

Deadline for proposal submission: 1. July 2019

Submissions in English via email to: [iic-conference2019@rub.de](mailto:iic-conference2019@rub.de)

There will be two lines of submission:

**Proposals for individual papers:** abstracts of no more than 500 words addressing one of the issues outlined below.

**Proposals for panels** with 4-5 papers in a panel: abstracts of no more than 1000 words.

The disruptive transformations of the media ecology are in the focus of media scholars and politicians world-wide. Technological and cultural changes as well as major shifts in audience behaviour are core drivers of these transformations, which can be observed in various sectors, refer to different aspects of media systems, and are based on intertwined, but often contradictory and dialectical dynamics (D'Haenens, Sousa & Trappel 2018). Transformations of the media ecology have to be considered in a wider scope of challenges of democracies in the digital age. The planned conference aims to bring together research that addresses current developments and challenges with regard to four dimensions:

1. **Media policy, strategies and regulation** are crucially challenged by meta-narratives such as globalization and digitization, since they have historically evolved through national regulatory routines (Holtz-Bacha 1994). Scholars and politicians alike critically assess questions whether the information available to citizens is sufficient to build an informed citizenry and what kind of regulation of digital media contributes to plurality and diversity. Moreover, civil society demands for more involvement and participation in content creation and regulation. Contributions to the planned conference will debate the (re-)formulation of public service media (PSM and the extent to what a „Civic Commons Online“ is necessary. A possible point of discussion is whether public service media (PSM) are in the position to establish such a deliberative space complementing both public sphere and parliamentary debate (e.g. Ramsey 2013; Schweizer 2016).

2. **At the economic and innovations level**, commercial media in Europe have always been challenged to balance between fulfilling the professional norms of journalism by acting as a watchdog to the government while at the same time making profit. However, with the loss in revenues, this tension became more intense. Many media institutions cut costs and reduced the number of staff, which in consequence limited the ability of the media to act as a watchdog (McChesney & Nichols, 2010; Pickard, 2011; Siles & Boczkowski, 2012; Starkman, 2014). Alternative economic models for mass media funding in a digital age, such as the public financing of the private press, are discussed controversially (Kiefer 2011, Schweizer & Puppis 2018). Conference contributions are asked to address commonalities and differences of

economic challenges in the private and PSM sector and discuss alternative funding schemes. The question to what extent the nexus between economy and media quality is addressed in media strategies will be addressed. Technological innovations such as recommender systems allow for personalized user experience, audience interaction and may also foster participation as a core requirement of democracies.

**3. At the content level**, despite the described crisis in journalism, it has never been easier for the audience to receive and publish information, while at the same time it has never been more difficult to evaluate the quality of information gained. The number of digital media outlets, blogs and social media posts seems to be expanding continuously. However, the establishment of social networks has been accompanied by undesired developments such as the rise of hate speech, an increased influence of populist spin on the formation of public opinion (Sponholz 2018) and disinformation (Report of the High-Level Group on Fake News and online disinformation 2018). Paradoxically, while governments and regulators discuss how to hold social networks accountable, established and publicly funded media have become customers of these companies in the meantime, because they enable, for example, PSM to reach younger audiences in order to fulfil their public remit (Sehl, Cornia & Kleis Nielsen 2018). Conference contributions are asked to assess the online content, public value and the ethics of journalism in the digital media world. Contributions may inquire in how far the automatization of journalistic content is in the public interest and address advantages and disadvantages of personalized information. What kind of debates and measures are necessary to tackle the future of the public remit of media in general and PSM in particular?

**4. On an international comparative level**, it is important to analyze how different media systems adapt to the current changes in the media landscape. In the non-Western world, digitization causes different problems and advantages; e.g. in post-conflict and developing countries well-established regulation structures and strategies do not exist. Comparative research can shed light on the question, in how far the digital era challenges the establishment of regulation patterns in various countries and regions (Sousa et al. 2013). We welcome conference contributions that discuss the most pressing challenges and/or innovations for deliberation, political representation and participation in the media in international comparison. We further invite contributions that aim at identifying patterns of similarities and differences across countries concerning press freedom, media subsidies, and the framework in which media act.

This international conference, hence, aims to bring together scholars *and* practitioners working on a variety of theoretical, methodological and practical issues arising from the investigation of media policy and regulation in digital environments. Questions to be discussed during the conference should be rooted in theoretical approaches and at the same time inform these approaches to broaden not only the scope of research, but also deliver key factors and messages to media practitioners, policy makers and regulators. The conference especially welcomes international comparative research, but is not limited to it, as case studies may be crucial to understand trends. Also, proposals with a transnational perspective dealing with trends and topics crossing borders are welcome. The call is open to theoretical contributions as well as various empirical designs.

Conference organizers: Dr. Christine Horz (Ruhr University Bochum) and Dr. Julia Lönnendonker (Vrije Universiteit Brussels)

Submissions and further inquiries via [iic-conference2019@rub.de](mailto:iic-conference2019@rub.de)