

merzWissenschaft | medien + erziehung
call for papers 2019

Submission of abstract: 18th February 2019

Formation of opinions in evolving public spheres

Supervising Editors: *merzWissenschaft* (JFF) editorial team

Public discourse is of enormous importance in democratic societies and has for many years been primarily medial in nature. The current transformation in the media landscape, in particular in the online world, raises a number of questions regarding the significance of media for the processes involved in formation of opinions. Some examples here are network-specific forms of communitization in homogenous interest groups or in groups which are dominated by highly polarizing extremist positions, the significance of filter bubbles and filter clash, alternative facts and fake news. With a particular eye to social networking services, another example is the role of social media influencers, the impact of information intermediaries as well as the use of image-based and audio-visual messages such as memes, GIFs and video clips as arguments in discourse. Structurally speaking other agents appear in addition to journalistic providers. In spite of the hope of democratizing public discourse through new possibilities for participation for all potentially informed citizens, currently the power of algorithms and the granularization of message contact give reason to ask:

- How do opinion formation processes take place in the light of this structural transformation?
- Which agents play which roles?
- What does this mean for medial discourse in democratic societies?

Articles addressing such questions make it possible among other things to identify appropriate points of departure for the promotion of necessary skills in adolescents as well as adults and to outline conducive basic parameters for formation of opinions. *merzWissenschaft 2019* wants to help improve understanding of the role played by media transformation, in particular as made more dynamic by the Internet, in opinion formation processes. In this context the treatment of the following focus points appears sensible; the following are however only a selection of possibilities, some of which may overlap in scope:

Focus point: Agents and structures

- To what extent can the diversity of opinions present in the Internet also represent the diversity of opinions found in the population and be integrated in a public discourse?
- What challenges emerge, for example with regard to the transparency of the influence of certain agents, to the particularization of sub-audiences or to the accessibility of information as well as the possibilities for participation?
- What role do new agents and content ranges in the Internet play in opinion formation processes? Examples here are algorithms, information intermediaries and social network services as well as social media influencers including the associated networks, etc.

Focus point: Substance and Discourse

- How can substantive discourse in the Internet be characterized in terms of its significance for the process of opinion formation?
- What (new) strategies and phenomena are emerging from current network-based discourse? What are their specific respective objectives?
- What is the significance of the various types of arguments and representational forms in current discourse? What change processes can be observed here (e. g. fake news, alternative facts, GIFs, memes, etc.)?
- What conclusions can be drawn based on the analysis of processes and argumentation structures with regard to the opinion formation process?

Focus point: Individual opinion formation processes

- What is the significance of the Internet for opinion formation processes in different segments of the population? To what extent are aspects such as social control, forms of communitization, reflection or critical evaluation relevant?
- To what extent do individuals or groups use participative opportunities in the Internet? Why do (don't) they use these opportunities?
- To what extent do individuals fully understand network-based information in terms of sources and intentions? To what extent can they gain a complete and deep understanding of medial participation structures?
- What skills does the individual require in order to deal productively with information and interpretation possibilities among the diversity of agents? What are the associated challenges?

merzWissenschaft provides a forum advancing scientific analysis in media education and promoting progress in the theoretical foundation of the discipline. For this purpose qualified articles are called for from various relevant disciplines (including media-educational, communications sciences, (developmental) psychological, legal and philosophical perspectives etc.), also with an interdisciplinary approach, for the continuing development of expert media-educational dialog.

Of interest are original papers with an empirical or theoretical foundation, presenting new findings, aspects or approaches to the topic and which are explicitly related to one of the topic areas or questions outlined above or which explore a separate topic within the scope of the overall context of the Call.

Abstracts with a maximum length of 6,000 characters (including blank spaces) can be submitted to the *merz*-editorial team (merz@jff.de) until February 18, 2019. Submissions should follow the *merzWissenschaft* layout specifications, available at www.merz-zeitschrift.de/fileadmin/user_upload/merz/PDFs/merzWissenschaft_Hinweise_zur_Manuskriptgestaltung_englisch-1.pdf. The length of the articles should not exceed a maximum of approximately 35,000 characters (including blank spaces). Please feel free to contact Susanne Eggert, tel. +49.89.68989.152, e-mail: susanne.eggert@jff.de with any questions.

Summary of deadlines

- February 18, 2019: Submission of abstracts to merz@jff.de
- March 01, 2019: Final decision on acceptance/rejection of the abstracts
- June 07, 2019: Submission of papers
- June 10 to July 22, 2019: Assessment phase (Double-blind peer review)
- August/September 2019: Revision phase (with multiple cycles, when appropriate)