



Call for Abstracts

Citizens, Media and Politics in Challenging Times: Perspectives on the Deliberative Quality of Communication

November 8 – 9, 2018

Mannheim Centre for European Social Research (MZES), Mannheim, Germany

Keynote speaker: Kaisa Herne (University of Tampere)

Roundtable on the future of deliberation research with: André Bächtiger (University of Stuttgart), Céline Colombo (University of Zürich), Christiane Eilders (University of Düsseldorf), and Hartmut Wessler (University of Mannheim)

Western democracies nowadays face a number of challenges induced by political developments. These challenges have been affecting the way in which citizens, the media and political elites communicate about politics. Critical observers witness a deteriorating quality of political conversations between ordinary citizens. It appears no longer possible to discuss politics normally. A high-choice media environment facilitated by online and in particular social media enables citizens to refrain from exposing themselves to counter-attitudinal information and engaging in cross-cutting political talk. The polarization of opinions within society is promoted by increasingly fragmented media systems and a reporting style that favors sensational and scandalous over a balanced and multifaceted reporting. Rapid media cycles shorten time for balanced and thorough argumentation and media outlets are steadily confronted with the accusation of producing fake news. Political actors adapt to the media logic by employing ever more simplified and emotionally arousing communication. Instead of deliberating publicly on complex problems and finding compromises or solutions, political elites rather prefer to communicate through short soundbites and populist messages to promote their positions and eventually attract voters at election time. Overall, these dynamics indicate a deteriorating deliberative quality of political communication among and between citizens, the media and political elites. While this phenomenon has caused concern among scholars from both political and communication science, it still needs further empirical substantiation and demand a reflection on extant theories.

This conference aims at addressing the deliberative quality of communication among and between citizens, media and political elites. Within this research context, we welcome both theoretical, empirical and methodological contributions focusing on the deliberative quality of communication. The proposals can address – but are not limited – to the following questions:

- To which extent does ordinary citizens' talk about politics come close to the genuine type of deliberation? Who participates in political talk, who does not and why? Do citizens talk to those with viewpoints that conflict with their own? What are the underlying motives and condition that give rise to homogenous or heterogeneous talk about politics? Which variables affect the quality of informal civic discussions? Do citizens' daily exchanges resemble reasoned and well-argued debates or harsh fights at the expense of proper justification?

- To which extent does the online sphere of political communication promote respectively impede deliberation? Are platform interventions (e.g., Facebook's proposed policy of removing hate speech and fake news) a panacea to improve the quality of online deliberation and to save deliberative democracy?
- To which extent do different features of the media systems influence mediated deliberation? How does the increased polarization and fragmentation of media environments translate into the deliberative quality of the media? How deliberative is the media system as a whole? How deliberative are individual media types, formats, or programs?
- How do political, national and cultural climates shape deliberation? To which extent do different types of the political system affect the deliberative quality within the public sphere? How does the increased polarization of the political environments affect formal deliberation? How do political elites engage with populist actors who decline to engage in reasoned and constructive dialogue?
- Which opportunities and challenges do big data offer for the analysis of deliberation? What are the methodological challenges and pitfalls when measuring deliberation? To which extent, and if so how, may computational methods help in identifying the criteria for deliberation?

Submissions are due by June 15, 2018 (23:59 CET) and must be submitted via the conference website. Abstracts must not be longer than 500 words (excluding title and references). A committee composed of communication and political science experts in deliberation will review each abstract. Only one proposal per first author can be accepted. Notifications of acceptance will be issued in July 2018. Limited funds are available to cover accommodation and travel expenses of conference presenters. In order to host a family friendly conference, the parent and child room of the University of Mannheim can be used for self-provided childcare.

For further questions, please visit the website www.mzes.uni-mannheim.de/DQComm2018 or contact the organizers directly:

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Organizing Committee of The Deliberative Quality of Communication Conference 2018