International Symposium "Indicators of Social Cohesion in Social Media and Online Media", April 24 to 26, 2024

Book of Abstracts & Speaker Biographies

My War is Your Special Operation: How Social Media Reinforce and Undermine Social Cohesion Regarding Russia's War in Ukraine

Mykola Makhotykh, University Bern
Aleksandra Urman, University of Zurich

On 24 February 2022, Russia launched a large-scale invasion of Ukraine which since then has been consistently referred to by the Russian authorities as a special operation and not a war. Among the main advantages such framing provides to the Kremlin is the emphasis of power inequality between Russia and Ukraine as well as minimization of concerns of the Russian population about the impact of the war on their lives. Within authoritarian regimes, social media often serves as an alternative public forum. However, the extent to which this remains true in Russia is uncertain, given the legislative measures aimed at suppressing dissenting voices. To explore this uncertainty, we conducted a comprehensive analysis of over 6 million public posts discussing the conflict in Ukraine on VK, Russia's largest social media platform. This analysis spanned a period from before the conflict's escalation to a few months after. Our investigation focused on discerning prevalent narratives surrounding the conflict and understanding user engagement with various frames employed in its discussion. Our findings highlight that discussions primarily centered around Russian military losses, often drawing historical parallels, particularly to World War II. In conclusion, our study suggests a significant transformation in the role of social

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media as a platform for the formation of alternative public spheres in Russia.

Activism and Polarization within the Chinese Digital Diaspora

Meg Jing Zeng, Utrecht University

The talk presents an exploratory inquiry into the Chinese diaspora's political engagement on digital media, covering topics such as activism, journalism, and propaganda. Departing from the conventional nation-state framework, this project employs a translocal perspective to research Chinese-speaking communities online. The scholarly exploration of the Chinese diaspora is important not only because of the vastness of these populations but also their growing importance and visibility in transnational information and political operations. Comprising over 60 million individuals who reside outside the People's Republic of China, the Chinese diaspora represents one of the most extensive and complex migratory phenomena in the global landscape. Empirical findings from the project reveal the crucial role that digital diasporic groups play as a vital platform for cross-border collective actions, news production, and sense-making during a critical event. The study also illuminates the polarized and networked dynamics within the communities.

Dynamics of Destructive Polarization in Mainstream and Social Media*:* The Case of the Australian Voice to Parliament Referendum

Axel Bruns, Queensland University of Technology

The focus of concerns about societal fragmentation in public communication is shifting. Instead of the retreat into echo chambers and filter bubbles that had been assumed in previous research, and which has not been confirmed by empirical evidence, greater emphasis is now being placed on polarisation along issue, ideological, and identity lines. Mild forms of polarisation can be productive, but at elevated levels polarisation variously leads individuals to dismiss alternative viewpoints, to attack political opponents verbally and even physically, and to

embrace and disseminate (dis)information because of its ideological stance rather than its truthfulness. Social media play a particular role as a public space where such dynamics manifest, and activities there are themselves fed by the posting and sharing of material from mainstream as well as fringe media. This keynote introduces destructive polarisation as a particularly pernicious form of polarisation that is distinguished by a number of distinct symptomatic features; it illustrates these features and their consequences with a case study of the Australian referendum for an Indigenous Voice to Parliament in October 2023, which was affected by a particularly destructive and ultimately successful campaign to polarise the Australian electorate.

Drivers of Polarized Media Debates: The Case of (Disruptive) Climate Protests

Michael Brüggemann and Hendrik Meyer,
University of Hamburg and The New Institute
(Joint work with Mike Farjam, Louisa Pröschel, Helena Rauxloh)

Climate protesters and particularly disruptive forms of protests are sometimes blamed as polarizing the climate debate. Support for climate protests in Germany has decreased (More in Common, 2023 survey), after the disruptive protest organization "Letzte Generation" emerged. We test whether disruptive forms of climate protest lead to more polarized climate debates in Germany and explore which actors have been driving this process. We present results of large-scale manual and computational analyses of German media discourses during 2022 and 2023, including both 12,000 news articles and 5,000,000 Twitter posts. Comparing debates surrounding Fridays for Future (FFF) and the Letzte Generation (LG), we investigate whether the discourses vary in their degrees of "discursive polarization", operationalized as the use of extreme frames, toxic and angry interactions. A similar picture emerges both on Twitter and in journalistic coverage: reports on FFF are less toxic and refer to the demands of the movement (climate justice), whereas LG is primarily discussed from the perspectives of the extremism and crime frames. LG protesters, particularly on Twitter, are called terrorists or murderers by antagonists. This aggression is directed against both the

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protesters and their supporters in the network cluster. LG supporters, on the other hand, mainly call for action against climate change and defend the actions of the movement. In news coverage, only populist right-wing media report about FFF in an extreme and toxic way. Yet, this framing is prevalent in the entire media landscape when discussing LG protests. Qualitative analysis reveals conservative-liberal political actors as origins of the framing of LG as terrorists and extremists. We thus find that right-wing actors in both the political and media spheres manage to dominate the debate in terms of an increasingly extreme framing and increasing toxicity. While media outlets only quote extreme voices and do not necessarily endorse them in their own commentary, journalists are nonetheless to be held accountable for emphasizing certain frames. While LG has provided the trigger for the polarization of the debate, it was then fueled by political-media actors. The study thus shows how a debate polarizes through the interactions of politics, journalism, and digital media use under the influence of the affordances of digital platforms.

Watching the Greens? Predictors and Contingencies of Partisan Online Information Seeking

Cornelius Puschmann, University of Bremen
(Joint work with Helena Rauxloh, Lisa Merten, Sebastian Stier)

Search engines represent an increasingly important point of access for political information (Fletcher et al., 2023). Voters rely on search engines to find information on parties and candidates and trust in them to obtain current news on pivotal issues While there exists ample research addressing individual parts of the search-result-reception process, there is still a comparative lack of studies able to analytically integrate multiple steps of the search process in an ecological research design and to link behavior with attitudinal factors. In our talk, we present early results of a large longitudinal panel study that combines the search behavior of approximately 2,000 German Internet users, captured with automated tracking, with survey data. We investigate the factors that contribute to users' information seeking on specific political parties and candidates, such as (dis)like towards a political actor, political and news interest, as

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well as sociodemographic characteristics. We are able to contribute both on the question of what variables are principally predictive of searching for political actors and predictors of searches for individual actors. Our results suggest that strong emotions towards a candidate are a salient predictor of online information seeking.

Not really – What Experts from Business and Journalism Know about Digital Disinformation

Christian Stöcker, HAW Hamburg

The spread of misinformation is a growing problem in societies that conduct a good part of their communication via digital platforms. In addition to more traditional strategies for spreading misinformation via images, texts and videos, new avenues have recently emerged, including multimodal memes, audiovisual deepfakes and audio disinformation. 25 key actors from large (media) companies in Germany were interviewed in structured guided interviews to answer the following research questions: How do those who are responsible identify online disinformation? What do they know about specific characteristics of disinformation, including new ways of spreading fakes such as audio misinformation or multimodal memes? Preliminary results indicate a lack of knowledge and awareness of the characteristics of disinformation among these key actors. The findings indicate a need for countermeasures and suggest basic strategies to improve disinformation literacy.

Digital Spaces as Challenges for Social Cohesion: Alternative (Social) Media and the Dissemination of Distrust and Conspiracy Theories

Lena Frischlich, University of Southern Denmark

We currently live in an era of digital abundance, where media users have an array of sources at their fingertips for connecting with like-minded individuals and staying informed about global events. The digitization has also facilitated unprecedent access to so-called alternative news media, which position themselves as correctives to perceived mainstream hegemony within their respective socio-cultural and historical contexts.

While alternative news are not a new phenomenon and can even contribute to social cohesion, Western democracies have recently witnessed a proliferation of alternative counter-news, outlets tolerating or even promoting far-right narratives and conspiracy theories. This surge in oppositional digital spaces extends beyond alternative news. In parallel to increased attempts for moderating digital spaces on large-scale platforms, alternative social media including self-positioned counter-platforms are also on the rise. This talk will provide an overview of the new challenges for social cohesion through alternative news and platforms, with a specific focus on the dissemination of distrust and conspiracy theories. Moreover, it will explore strategies to promote democratic resilience within increasingly fragmented digital public spheres.

Science Communicators, Flat Earthers or Fitness Coaches? Who is Citing Academic Publications in YouTube Video Descriptions?

Katrin Weller, GESIS – Leibniz Institute for the Social Science

While distinguishing facts from fake in online environments becomes increasingly difficult, still relatively little is known about user communities' practices in providing proof for their claims. One way in which this happens is by referencing published papers. In our example, we take a closer look at YouTube channels that reference research publications in their video descriptions, exploring patterns of topical foci and popularity.

Based on an extensive dataset collected we offer a unique insight into the intersection of digital media and academia. Quantitative exploration of the data combined with manual annotations of channel types reveal a variety of contexts in which academic research is quoted on YouTube. We placed one specific focus on uncovering what type of YouTube channels engages with scientific publications and were able to identify actors from within academia as well as a variety of users from other non-academic contexts. However, there is a notable variation in the popularity of these channels, with professional YouTubers and commercial media entities often outperforming in terms of viewer engagement metrics like likes, comments, and views.

In addition to presenting findings from our analysis we reflect on the role of referencing research in social media beyond this specific usage scenario. Results are based on joint work with Olga Zagovora.

Let's talk it out: Getting LLM to Talk to Each Other as a Tool to Understand Conversations and Interaction Online, Offline, and on Different Platforms

Ethan C. Busby, Brigham Young University
[remote presentation]

Advances in artificial intelligence tools offer great promise in the study of complex human attitudes, behaviors, and interactions. Increasingly, social scientists are interested in using these AI processes as part of their broader toolkit to understand important and complicated social phenomena. I discuss the potential of one type of AI tool – large language models (LLMs) like OpenAI's ChatGPT and Google's Gemini – in studying human conversations and interactions in a variety of settings. I overview both initial findings from our team on different studies simulating human interaction in different contexts and describe lessons learned in using AI tools in this research paradigm. Ultimately, our work in this area suggests that LLMs have the capacity to dramatically expand researchers' ability to understand complex human interactions across platforms. They have the capacity to open up areas of research and a broad scope previously not available to social scientists. At the same time, these efforts require a clear-eyed understanding of LLMs and their limits. I end with a discussion of the implications of these studies for the study of interpersonal interactions, democratic deliberations, and online conversations in the age of social media.

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Do you see what I see? Emotional Reaction to Visual Content in the Online Debate about Climate Change

Luca Rossi, IT University of Copenhagen
[remote presentation]

In this presentation, we explore the visual echo chamber effect in climate change communication. We leverage the ongoing monitoring activities of both progressive actors and counter actor groups involved in the online public debate surrounding climate communication. Our focus is on whether visual content possesses unique characteristics that enable it to bridge ideologically diverse communities, showing the same visual content to ideologically opposed communities. While we overall confirm a "visual segregation" of these communities, we do note a small amount of shared visual content. Interestingly, when we examine the emotional reactions elicited by this shared visual content, we find that they often diverge significantly, suggesting that pre-existing ideological positions heavily influence interpretation and framing of visual content.

Social Media and Polarization: From Opinions to Identity

Petter Törnberg, University of Amsterdam

Politics around the world appears to have entered an era of unprecedented political polarization. Scholars point to the role of social media, with influential notions such as echo chambers and filter bubbles suggesting that social media polarizes by isolating us from opposing views, making us more extreme through repeated exposure to one-sided arguments. However, while this "isolation paradigm" has long been dominant, it is questioned by mounting empirical evidence. This talk argues for the need of a new paradigm – with new theory and methods for understanding online polarization. Viewing polarization through language, we first go into an online echo chamber, exploring 20 years of conversation in the far-right online community Stormfront. Second, we examine the content of cross-ideological interaction on mainstream social media. We show that social media polarization is characterized neither by ideological isolation nor rational arguments, but rather by community formation combined with intense intergroup conflict. We

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develop a "conflict paradigm" of polarization research, drawing on scholars like Emile Durkheim, Randall Collins, and Muzafer Sherif. Social media drives polarization not by isolating us in ideological echo chambers, but by throwing us into a political war in which we are forced to take sides – thus shaping a tribalized form of political life.

The Dynamic Journalistic Intermediation Model (DJIM) – Approaches to Social Cohesion in the Networked Public Sphere.

Jakob Ohme, Weizenbaum Institute for the Networked Society

This talk introduces the Dynamic Intermediary Model - D(X)IM - to address how knowledge flows have evolved with digital platforms, shifting from a dyadic to a triadic communication model by incorporating an intermediary. This intermediary, which can be a journalist, influencer, political actor, or another platform actor, provides services to the sender and receiver of a message, thereby transforming traditional direct communication. The model is adaptable, with "X" representing various potential intermediaries. It aims to better understand information diffusion in digital environments by recognizing the intermediary's role in altering the sender-receiver dynamic. D(X)IM applies across different communication levels (macro, meso, and micro) and is designed for empirical research using diverse methodologies. It focuses on instances of platform communication, mainly where communication is "unsuccessful," to explore the impact of intermediated communication. The talk provides a research agenda and examples of how D(X)IM can be applied to study development of social capital in platform environments.

Polarization in the German Twittersphere – an Analysis of Twitter Trends between 2021 and 2023

Eckehard Olbrich, Max Planck Institute for Mathematics in the Sciences
(Joint work with Armin Pournaki, MPIMIS, and Felix Gaisbauer,
Weizenbaum Institute)

We investigated polarization on Twitter by analyzing both the interaction structure as well as the content of trending topics of the German

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Twittersphere over two years (March 2021 until June 2023). First, we computed a sentence-embedding-based topic model using BERTopic (Grootendorst 2022) and embedded the trends in a 2D space using UMAP (McInnes, Healy, and Melville 2018) based on their user overlap. In this embedding we observed clusters of thematically similar topics - in particular political topics are tightly knit together. Second, we analyzed (1) whether trends in a topic were polarized, i.e. that the corresponding retweet network exhibited two clusters using a force directed layout and (2) to which extent the polarization with respect to different topics is aligned. Analyzing the user alignment between the most retweeted accounts ("opinion leaders") and the most retweeting accounts ("multipliers") we found that both groups are highly aligned across different topics and fall into two clusters: a more Left and a more Right leaning cluster. Our findings contrast with recent findings on the polarization of the society based on data from the European Social Survey (Lux, Mau, and Jacobi 2021) where such an alignment was not observed between migration, climate change and LGBTQ* issues. We will discuss possible explanations for this discrepancy.

Affording Conspiracism. Particularities of Conspiracy-Related Communication Across Platforms

Annett Heft, Weizenbaum Institute for the Networked Society and Free University of Berlin

Social media platforms and various digital communication venues are central infrastructures for distributing conspiracy-related content online. Such content is frequently linked to distrust in societal institutions and political elites. The digital platforms on which conspiracy-related communication occurs can be expected to fulfill different functions due to varying platform architectures, governance concerning communication and interaction norms, and the users they attract. The interplay of platform features and their appropriation within distinct user groups shape the styles and functions of communication. We address the question of how varying user cultures on different platforms shape the communication style and functions of conspiracy-related content by examining texts relating to the "Great Replacement/White Genocide"

and "New World Order" conspiracy theories. By investigating word choice, language style, and author stance in a longitudinal sample of 4chan, Twitter, and alternative media texts ranging from 2011 to 2021, particularities, convergence, and possible spillovers between the platforms are analyzed.

The Social Media Observatory as a DIY-Infrastructure

Felix V. Münch, Research Institute Social Cohesion at the Leibniz Institute for Media Research | HBI, Hamburg

This contribution puts up for discussion the basic concept, ethical and legal considerations, technical implementation as well as resulting tools and data collections of the Social Media Observatory (SMO) of the Research Institute Social Cohesion (RISC) at Leibniz Institute for Media Research | Hans-Bredow-Institute (HBI). Since 2020, the SMO has been developed as an open science research infrastructure. It focuses on (the support of) long-term monitoring of public communication on selected platforms and online news media to answer social science related research questions. Based inter alia on systematically compiled lists of public speaker categories, such as parliamentarians or media organizations, it collects statistics as well as content data to study the German social media discourse in comparison to mass media. Aggregated results are made accessible via interactive dashboards. Raw data is published as ID lists for reproduction or shared with researchers upon request. The SMO further provides various tools, curated datasets, and documented workflows, for instance, to run thematic ad-hoc data collections. It furthemore maintains a curated knowledge base in wiki format to enable other researchers to perform systematic social media observations on their own. In summary, the SMO as a centralized infrastructure within the RISC provides a facilitating entry point into large-scale data analysis for social media research. Our answer to the challenges of (big) social media data research is to support scholars using our infrastructure services in a do-it-yourself (DIY) fashion, enabling them to build their own solutions. Based on more than three years of experience following that mission, we will share how the SMO supports typical research design decisions,

data collection, and analysis steps throughout the social media research process.

"Kernkraft? Ja, bitte!": Changing values on nuclear energy in the social media

Gregor Wiedemann, Research Institute Social Cohesion at the Leibniz Institute for Media Research | HBI, Hamburg

Nuclear power has been one of the most controversial forms of energy production in Germany for decades. The role of nuclear power in the energy transition is therefore a constant subject of social and political debate. In 2000, a SPD-Green government decided to phase out nuclear energy for the first time. In 2010, a CDU/FDP government extended the lifespan of nuclear power plants. Following the reactor disaster in Fukushima, the decision to phase out nuclear power was taken again in 2011 - this time on the basis of a broad political consensus. Although the phase-out has now been completed, the public debate is once again polarizing around the question of what role nuclear energy should play in Germany in the future. Against this background, we examine the social media discourse on Twitter over the last decade and focus on the evaluation of political positions on nuclear power and the associated argumentative use of social values. The aim of analyzing value references in the justification patterns of public positions is to understand the dynamics of constant change in the nuclear power debate. It is precisely this change that makes the topic particularly interesting for the question of thematic polarization in social media and whether/how this is forced by particularly dedicated actors.

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Speaker Biographies

Mykola Makhotykh, University Bern

Mykola Makhortykh is an Alfred Landecker lecturer at the Institute of Communication and Media Science, where he studies the impact of algorithmic systems and AI on politics- and history-centred information behaviour in online environments. To achieve this goal, he combines traditional social science methods (e.g., content analysis and focus groups) with novel computational approaches (e.g., deep learning and agent-based testing). His other research interests include trauma and memory studies, armed conflict reporting, disinformation and computational propaganda research, cybersecurity and critical security studies, and bias in information retrieval systems.

Aleksandra Urman, University of Zurich

Dr. Aleksandra Urman currently is a Postdoctoral Researcher at the Social Computing Group, University of Zurich. Previously, she successfully defended her doctoral dissertation on the comparative aspects of political polarization on social media at the University of Bern. Her research is dedicated to investigating the societally-relevant effects of digitalization, with a specific focus on pressing issues such as polarization, far-right radicalization, algorithmic harms, and societal and information inequalities. In her work, she combines novel computational techniques with established social science methodological approaches.

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Meg Jing Zeng, Utrecht University

Dr. Meg Jing Zeng is an Assistant Professor of Digital Methods and Critical Data Studies at Utrecht University. Her research concerns the sociocultural implications of digital technologies. Jing has written extensively on digital media platforms, focusing on topics such as misinformation, youth culture, and online activism.

Axel Bruns, Queensland University of Technology

Axel Bruns is an Australian Laureate Fellow and Professor in the Digital Media Research Centre at Queensland University of Technology in Brisbane, Australia, and a Chief Investigator in the ARC Centre of Excellence for Automated Decision-Making and Society. His books include Are Filter Bubbles Real? (2019) and Gatewatching and News Curation: Journalism, Social Media, and the Public Sphere (2018), and the edited collections Digitizing Democracy (2019), the Routledge Companion to Social Media and Politics (2016), and Twitter and Society (2014). His current research focusses on the study of public communication in digital and social media environments, with particular attention to the dynamics of polarisation, partisanship, and problematic information, and their implications for our understanding of the contemporary public sphere; his work draws especially on innovative new methods for analysing 'big social data'. He served as President of the Association of Internet Researchers in 2017–19.

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Michael Brüggemann, University of Hamburg

Michael Brüggemann is Professor of Communication Science, Climate, and Science Communication at the University of Hamburg. He is PI at the Cluster of Excellence CliCCs (Climate, Climatic Change, and Society) and chairs the program "Depolarizing Public Debates – Developing the Tools for Transformative" at The New Institute.

Hendrik Meyer, University of Hamburg

Hendrik Meyer is researcher at the Institute for Journalism and Communication Studies, University of Hamburg. He is engaged in data collection and analysis within the Cluster of Excellence CLICCS (Climate, Climatic Change, and Society) and served as coordinator of the program "Depolarizing Public Debates – Developing Tools for Transformative Communication" at The New Institute.

Cornelius Puschmann, University of Bremen

Cornelius Puschmann is Professor of Communication and Media Studies with a focus on digital communication at ZeMKI, University of Bremen. His research interests include digital media usage research, methods of automated content analysis, and the role of algorithms for communication and information diversity.

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Christian Stöcker, HAW Hamburg

Prof. Dr. Christian Stöcker, born in 1973, is head of the master's program Digital Communication at the Hamburg University of Applied Sciences (HAW) as well as several research projects that focus on questions regarding the interaction between digital media technology and the public sphere. He previously worked for more than 11 years as an editor and head of department at SPIEGEL ONLINE's editorial department. Stöcker holds degrees in psychology (diploma) and cultural criticism.

Lena Frischlich, University of Southern Denmark

Lena Frischlich (PhD in Psychology, University of Cologne) is an Associate Professor at the Centre for Digital Democracy at the University of Southern Denmark. Before that she served as an interim Professor for Communication at the Ludwig-Maximilians-University in Munich, (2020-21 and 2023). Between 2018 and 2023, she was the leader of the junior research "DemoRESILdigital: Democratic resilience in times of online-propaganda, fake news, fear and hate speech" at the University of Muenster, Germany. She researches the staging and effects of manipulation-oriented political online communication and aims at understanding how resilience against such manipulation attempts can be fostered.

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Katrin Weller, GESIS – Leibniz Institute for the Social Science

Katrin Weller is scientific director of the GESIS department Data Services for the Social Sciences. Prior to that she was leading the team Digital Society Observatory as part of GESIS' Computational Social Science department (2015-2024). In 2021-2023 she also was co-lead for the new team "Research Data and Methods" at the Center for Advanced Internet Studies (CAIS) in Bochum. She was a Digital Studies Fellow at the Library of Congress, Washington D.C. Her research focuses on online platform data as new types of social science data and covers aspects such as data quality, research ethics and research data management.

Ethan C. Busby, Brigham Young University

Ethan Busby is an Assistant Professor of Political Science at Brigham Young University, specializing in political psychology, extremism, artificial intelligence, and computational social science. His research relies on various methods, using lab experiments, quasi-experiments, survey experiments, text-as-data, surveys, artificial intelligence, and large-language models. He studies extremism in democracies, including what extremism is, who people blame for extremism, and what encourages and discourages extremism. This work considers extremism in the public and at the elite level and both a general approach to extremism and several specific kinds – including racial extremism, partisan extremism, and populism.

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Luca Rossi, IT University of Copenhagen

Luca Rossi is Associate Professor of Digital Media and Networks at the Department of Digital Design of IT, University of Copenhagen. He coordinates the Human Centered Data Science research group, and he is member of the Networks Data and Society (NERDS) research group. He teaches Network Analysis and Digital Media Analysis. His interdisciplinary research applies computational methods to the study on online social phenomena such as online participation, online activism, political campaign, and election studies. He has been active in the development of software to support computational research such as coornet – to detect online coordinated behavior - and multinet – to analyze multilayer social network.

Petter Törnberg, University of Amsterdam

Petter Törnberg is Assistant Professor in Computational Social Science at the University of Amsterdam. He studies the intersection of AI, social media, and politics, and draws on computational methods and digital data for critical inquiry. His recent books include "Intimate Communities of Hate: Why Social Media Fuels Far-Right Extremism" (with Anton Törnberg), and "Seeing Like a Platform: An inquiry into the condition of digital modernity" (with Justus Uitermark; in print.)

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Jakob Ohme, Weizenbaum Institute for the Networked Society

Dr. Jakob Ohme leads the "Digital News Dynamics" research group at the Weizenbaum Institute in Berlin, exploring the impact and dissemination of professional journalism on digital platforms versus other sources like influencers or AI. His work emphasizes the changes digital and mobile communications bring to news consumption and political engagement, particularly across different generations. Jakob Ohme is dedicated to advancing digital methodologies in political communication and journalism research, notably through the innovative use of digital trace data. He's also a Co-Principal Investigator in the #DSA40 Collaboratory, focusing on collaborative access to platform data under the EU's Digital Services Act.

Eckehard Olbrich, Max Planck Institute for Mathematics in the Sciences

Eckehard Olbrich is group leader at the Max Planck Institute for Mathematics in the Sciences (MPI MiS), Germany. He received the PhD degree in theoretical physics from TU Dresden, Germany in 1995. From 1995 to 2000, he was a postdoctoral researcher at Max Planck Institute (MPI) for the Physics of Complex Systems. From 2000 to 2004 he worked as a research fellow at University of Zürich mainly on the time series analysis of EEG data. Since 2004 he has been a senior researcher at the MPI MiS. He is working on several aspects of complex systems theory with a focus on applications in computational social science. He is the coordinator of the HORIZON Europe project SoMe4Dem (Social Media for Democracy – Understanding the Causal Mechanisms of Digital Citizenship).

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Annett Heft, Weizenbaum Institute for the Networked Society and the Free University of Berlin

Annett Heft heads the research group Dynamics of Digital Mobilization at the Weizenbaum Institute for the Networked Society, Berlin, and is a senior researcher at the Institute for Media and Communication Studies, Freie Universität Berlin. Her main research fields are the comparative study of political communication in Europe, with an emphasis on digital public spheres and right-wing communication infrastructures, transnational communication, as well as quantitative research methods and computational social science.

Felix V. Münch, Research Institute Social Cohesion at the Leibniz Institute for Media Research | HBI, Hamburg

Felix Victor Münch is an interdisciplinary researcher in computational social science. Currently he works as a Postdoc Researcher at the Leibniz-Institute for Media Research | Hans-Bredow-Institut in Hamburg, where he is a Principal Investigator of the (Social) Media Observatory (SMO), which he has co-founded, conceptualised, and built as a research facilitator and service infrastructure for the Research Institute Social Cohesion (RISC). With a B.Sc. in Physics (LMU, Munich, Germany), an M.A. in Journalism (LMU and German Journalist School, Munich, Germany) and work experience in online media brand communication their main fields of interest are network science, online (social) media, natural language processing, and theories regarding the public sphere.

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Gregor Wiedemann, Research Institute Social Cohesion at the Leibniz Institute for Media Research | HBI, Hamburg

Dr. Gregor Wiedemann works as Senior Researcher Computational Social Science and head of the Media Research Methods Lab (MRML) at the Leibniz Institute for Media Research │ Hans-Bredow-Institut (HBI). His current work focuses on the development of methods and applications of natural language processing and text mining for empirical social and media research. Gregor Wiedemann studied political science and computer science in Leipzig and Miami, USA. In 2016 he received his doctorate from the Department of Computer Science (NLP group, Prof. Gerhard Heyer) at the University of Leipzig for his thesis on automation of discourse and content analysis using text mining and machine learning methods. Afterwards he worked as a postdoc in the Department of Computer Science (Language Technology group, Prof. Chris Biemann) of the University of Hamburg.

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Context Collapse Moderation

Jan Rau, Research Institute Social Cohesion at the Leibniz Institute for Media Research | HBI, Hamburg

Jan Rau is a researcher in the Media Research Methods Lab at the Leibniz-Institute for Media Research | Hans-Bredow-Institut, working on its (Social) Media Observatory, a project for the Research Institute Social Cohesion. His research to date has centred on topics including echo chambers and polarization, public opinion manipulation, right-wing extremism, and the role of digital media as a counter-public. He holds an MSc in the Social Sciences of the Internet from Oxford University and has worked with the Institute for Strategic Dialogue, the Computational Social Science Department at GESIS – Leibniz-Institute for Social Science and Princeton University.