



IKMZ Speaker Series

Propaganda in the digital society? Alternative news and the pollution of the information ecosystem

by *Lena Frischlich, University of Münster*

Monday, 12th April 2021

16:00 – 17:00

Zoom [*Link will be communicated*]

We live in a digital society. The ongoing evolution of the networked public sphere creates multiple new opportunity structures—for political participation and democratic engagement as well as for the spreading of manipulation-oriented communication such as disinformation or extremist propaganda. Although propaganda is nothing new, the digitization has fundamentally transformed the preconditions, audiences, and potential effects of propaganda and related phenomena.

One phenomenon that has recently gained increased scientific and public attention is the global upraise of so-called alternative news media. Alternative news media position themselves as “correctives” to a hegemonically interpreted “mainstream” media system and have been accused to spread falsehoods and conspiracy stories, therewith contributing to the pollution of the digital information ecosystem. Different actors have even called for their regulation – often in the absence of comprehensive data on alternative news’ content and their effects. In this talk, I will review qualitative, quantitative, and computational evidence gathered throughout the last years to describe the content, consumption, and consequences of alternative news use in Germany.

Dr. Lena Frischlich currently works at the Department of Communication at the university of Muenster where she leads her own junior research group entitled “DemoRESILdigital: Democratic resilience in times of online-propaganda, fake news, fear and hate speech”. Between 2020 and 2021 she was an interim professor for media change at the Department of Media and Communication at the Ludwig-Maximilians-University in Munich. Before starting to work in Communication science, Frischlich has obtained a PhD in psychology at the University of Cologne in 2016. In her research, Frischlich studies how media change and technological innovation create new opportunity structures for manipulation oriented digital communication such as





extremist propaganda, hate speech, and disinformation and how these opportunity structures can be leveraged to support democratic resilience. Amongst others, her research has been funded by the European Union, the German federal ministry of the Interior, as well as the North Rhine Westphalian ministry of culture and science. In the last years, her work has been published in peer-reviewed journals such as *New Media & Society*, *Digital Journalism*, and *Political Communication*. In 2020, Frischlich has been elected as first communication scholar into the young college of the North Rhine-Westphalian academy of science and the arts.