

Comparing Media beyond the Nation State: A German-Russian Workshop on Diversity, Migration and Journalism

Abstracts

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Prof. Dr. Klaus Beck (Berlin): “Regional Press Diversity in Germany and Austria 1995-2015”

The “Newspaper Crisis” has been widely debated across several western countries with a market driven capitalistic press system. The significant decrease of newspaper circulations, the changes in the advertising markets, and the competition of online media in everyday media usage are the main factors discussed concerning the quality press. However, for local and regional political information and public discourse printed and e-papers of the traditional publishers remain most important, at least in Germany and Austria.

In our upcoming research project we will investigate in a bi-national comparison how the economic and journalistic concentration or diversification of regional press markets has influenced the journalistic diversity both in certain daily newspaper’s content and in different press regions, and how the different national press policies (within an European Context) have influenced press structures and performances.

Dr. Ruslan Bekurov (St. Petersburg): “North-Ossetian Media about Migrants: Analysis of Journalistic Attitudes”

The research focuses on media coverage of migrants issues in Russia on the regional (local) level. The author examines the case of the Republic of North Ossetia-Alania (Russian North Caucasus), which has recently become host to large number of migrants from South Caucasus according to the statistics of the North-Ossetian Migration Service. We conducted interviews with more more than 40 journalists of the leading regional media: daily newspaper «Severnaya Ossetia», monthly magazine «Famous», online media outlet «15 Region» and the oppositional website «Gradus». We also interviewed 132 migrants of different age groups and different background on their media usage. The author aims at analyzing the approaches of journalists in covering migrant issues as well as migrants’ attitude towards this coverage.

Dr. Svetlana Bodrunova, Dr. Anna Litvinenko (St. Petersburg): “Mining Russian and German Twitter: mediatization of discussion on migrants and its mixed-method assessment”

Hybridization of media systems represents today not only a process in practice but also a theoretical framework allowing for unification of political studies of Internet and more traditional media&political studies. Twitter as a part of a hybrid media system can allegedly become a ‘crossroads of discourses’ due to its openness, de-hierarchization, and spontaneity. This would be especially relevant for transitional democracies where media systems have no strong tradition of balanced reporting. But it is still a question whether the hypothesis of dependence of national hybridization trajectories on national socio-political contexts (Adam&Pfetsch 2011) is true for Twitter; thus, case studies as well as comparative ones are needed to test if platform parameters, national context, or the issue features influence them most.

Within hybridization research, intermedia agenda setting (McCombs 2005) is one of the most important research areas; both structural and content features are to be studied. For that, Germany vs. Russia constitute a nearly perfect couple, with significant amount of differences as well as that of similarities. (Anti)migrant discourse is chosen as the agenda issue under scrutiny. The research design is focused, first, on the Russian case study (discussion on anti-migrant bashings in Moscow region of Biryulyovo in October 2013) and, second, upon the ‘calm’ period of discussion in Russia and Germany. Methods of research include automated web crawling and web graph analysis, framing analysis via semantic coding and vocabulary analysis, and interpretation of descriptive statistics.

Prof. Elfriede Fürsich, Ph.D. (Boston/Berlin): “From International to ‘Glocal’ Communication Studies: Shifting Research Perspectives in Comparative Research”

This presentation evaluates the challenges and opportunities encountered when applying transnational approaches to media research. The central aim is to encourage communication scholars to take a decidedly “glocal” perspective when analyzing media phenomena across borders. In the first part, common assumptions of contemporary comparative research are criticized. A special focus is on interrogating problematic perceptions of social and historic context, the avoidance of issues of power, and the lack of ethical considerations. In the second part, a framework is developed that allows for an epistemological and methodological repositioning by taking aspects of space and place into account. Its main intention is to inspire researchers to probe their own research “topography” while producing research that does not cement given media systems but matches the transnational aspirations of a globalizing media industry.

Prof. Dr. Dmitrii Gavra (St. Petersburg): “BRICS Journalism Comparative Project: Background and Design”

The question of a media system is a pivotal issue in studies of media and communication in rapidly changing national economies and cultures faced with globalization. *Comparing Media Systems* by Hallin and Mancini (2004) has become for scholars and students alike one of the most quoted books in the field, at least in Europe. Parallel to this is the perspective opened up by *Normative Theories of the Media: Journalism in Democratic Societies* (Christians et al. 2009) which has precipitated the move of the canonical *Four Theories of the Press* (Siebert, Peterson and Schramm 1956) from a pervasive framework-building status to the field's history of ideas. A broader context for all this is provided by the tide of internationalization and de-westernization of the field (Curran and Park 2000; Thusu 2009). However, as shown by Nordenstreng (Nordenstreng 2010) the concept of media system itself remains unclear and hazy: “A lot of homework remains to be done...” This project is an exercise towards doing that homework. An important contribution to comparative media studies was made by the late Swedish scholar Jan Ekecrantz (2007). He discussed the evolution of media/society models from the traditional quadrant of politics-economics-technology-culture to a post-modernist culture-audience version and proposed an “integrated institutional model” which would accommodate the changing sociopolitical situations (pp. 78-79). And he did this in the context of post-communist Russia, including “the neo-authoritarian state and the clash of media civilizations” (pp. 91-93). In the same spirit, Nordenstreng (2010b) points out that the old way of viewing Russia as something special is no longer so valid. Also, an overview of the media in contemporary Russia (Nordenstreng and Pietiläinen 2010) shows that, despite setbacks in the movement from autocracy to democracy, the overall picture is not totally gloomy. Indeed, the Russian media system is in flux. The same flux metaphor is also applicable indeed to China – a perspective highlighted by Colin Sparks (2010). Actually Ekecrantz (2007) was also led from examining Russia to considering China. Moreover, Sparks' important essay raises critical questions about the theoretical basis of comparing media systems.

The comparative perspective of the global media landscape is no doubt high on the scholarly agenda, but most scholars approach it from a particular national or regional angle. The angle of the present project was originally Russia – with China as a point of comparison. What this project proposes is to widen the angle to three other countries, India, Brazil and South Africa, opening up perspectives on the consolidation of democracy in large developing countries on different continents. This selection of countries follows a new coalition in global politics, which started a few years ago between Brazil, Russia, India and China – known as “BRIC” – and in 2011 was extended to also include South Africa, making it “BRICS”. These countries

combine different types of economic and political development, offering more promising prospects for critical analysis of media systems than taking them separately.

Objectives

From this background, the research objectives of the project are given as follows: First, the project will critically examine the *theoretical concepts* of a) role of media and journalists in democracies, and b) freedom and independence of media by placing the BRICS countries within a global context. Second, the project will investigate the *empirical situation* of a) professional orientation of journalists and b) education of journalists in the BRICS countries in a comparative context.

The professional orientation of journalists is a topical issue particularly under conditions of development and socio-economic transition as shown by Ramaprasad (2003) and Pasti (2007). Comparative research is carried out in the all BRICS countries. The education of journalists is an issue which attracts relatively much public and political attention in most countries but has not been widely studied, except in Europe (Terzis 2009). UNESCO (2007) has also promoted model curricula for the developing countries, and the 2nd World Journalism Education Congress in South Africa in 2010 presented an update showing the way ahead. The BRICS countries offer a challenging case for comparative analysis in this topic, too, as was shown by the example of comparisons between journalism education in South Africa and Brazil (Wasserman and De Beer 2010). An overall hypothesis of the project suggests that the group of BRICS countries provides an intriguing platform for studying media systems, with both differences and similarities in their socio-economic development and political structures.

Prof. Dr. Margreth Lünenborg (Berlin): “Migration and the Media: Developing an Integrative Research Design”

Since the 1990s, the amount of research dealing with migration and the media has increased tremendously – internationally as well as in German language communication research. It is this piece of work which challenges established research designs referring to the nation state. Described as global processes of mobilities (Adey 2010, Urry 2007, Cresswell 2006) people, goods and money as well as information, news, visuals, and narratives cross borders and circulate in transnational and transcultural spheres, while these spheres themselves are highly constituted by media and media discourse.

To understand the role and relevance of media in processes of global mobilities it is necessary to go beyond the traditional distinction of at least three research approaches in communication studies – analysis of media production, media content, and media use and reception. These three distinct lines of inquiry are available in media and migration studies as well. I will argue for a more integrative research design especially due to digital, interactive,

and network-based media. To understand the relevance of media and media discourse in ongoing processes of migration (whether forced or voluntary) I suggest to combine the analysis of media discourse produced and distributed by the traditional, professional media institutions with media practices of migrants, which enable them to articulate hybrid cultural identities (Madianou/Miller 2012). In combining both perspectives and focusing on their relations, research on media and migration could offer innovative impulses for communication research understood as a network-based circulation of information, visuals, and narratives beyond the nation state.

Dr. Kamilla Nigmatullina (St. Petersburg): “Dynamics of Political Meanings: Discourse Analysis of the Coverage of the Ukrainian Conflict in the Russian Media”

The research is aimed at finding value shift in understanding of several key categories of social and political discourse covered in Russian media during the Ukrainian conflict. These are: war, crisis, human rights, freedom, power and state, revolution, church. The sample included 3 magazines of different ideological orientations. We extracted all articles that covered Russian-Ukrainian conflict from September to December 2014. Content-analysis revealed value weight of each category; further analysis of semantic connections showed value environment of covered categories. At the last stage we compared meanings of key categories in media with academic definitions in recent editions of relevant dictionaries. The results show that there was a certain shift in understanding of the analyzed categories in media; and the main trend is narrowing of the meanings of the examined terms.

Prof. Dr. Carola Richter (Berlin): “The Ambivalences of Calling for ‘De-westernization’ in Media System Research”

The prominent calls for de-westernizing media research in the 2000s had been stimulated by an uneasiness about transferring western normative categories to non-western countries. It has been claimed that even allegedly analytic categories have a normative component, thus by applying them to non-western countries at best mis-reading or at worst orientalizing the “rest” beyond the west. However, at the same time debates about specific “Islamic” public spheres or Chinese values rather seem to cater to a justification of specific forms of political media control instead of providing more case-sensitive analytical categories. This presentation, which is meant as an intervention or a commentary, will draw from research experiences in Arab countries, in particular Egypt, in order to shed light on the ambivalences of attempts to de-westernize media system research.

Dr. Anna Smolyarova (St. Petersburg): “Ethnic Media as Actors in the Public Sphere: Evaluating Counterpublics through the Example of Russian Language Media in Germany”

The fragmentation of society is reflected in the fragmentation of the public sphere that triggers fears about the violation of public dialogue and public mechanisms of the decision-making process (Dahlgren 2005, Fenton and Downey 2003). Media targeting diasporas and immigrants are often described as actors of the counter-public sphere (Stephenson 2000, Dawson 1995). Nevertheless, ethno-cultural differentiation is not the only one indicator of the variety that characterizes the German society nowadays. The ethnic character of the audience is not enough to claim the counter-public character for this type of actors in the national public sphere.

The status of these media can be explained with the concept of the multiple public sphere (Dahlgren 2005, Asen 2000, Wimmer 2005, Couldry and Dreher 2007, Squires 2002). Ethnic or immigrant media should be studied as possible public sphericules (Gitlin, 1998) constituting the national public sphere, contrasting to the approach that states the opposition of the dominate and counter public spheres. My research focuses on the criteria that allow to distinguish between public sphericule as a part of the public sphere and a counter-public sphere.

Dr. Laura Sūna (Berlin): “Media appropriation of political conflicts: Transnational Identity of Latvian Diaspora in Germany”

The paper discusses following questions: how can media appropriation of political conflicts shape migrant identity construction process and which identity aspects are negotiated in this context? Which mediated identity resources and meaning horizons are important for the constitution and articulation of identity within a diaspora?

Based on the results of a qualitative study on transnational identity of Latvian diaspora in Germany, it can be shown, how the appropriation of extreme political issues like the political conflict in the Ukraine (re-)activates specific identity aspects like national belonging, that are rather unimportant living abroad. For Latvian diaspora this conflict activates collective memory of soviet occupation after the Second World War and strengthens among others national belonging. Paper shows how hybridity of transnational identity is negotiated via appropriation practices of Latvian, German, Russian and British media.

Dr. Florian Töpfl (Berlin): “Reinvigorating the Four Theories: Toward a Discourse Approach to the Study of Media and Politics”

Scholars have recently called for questions of meaning and ideology to be brought back into comparative media research. This article heeds that call by delineating a discourse approach to the media and politics. The idea is to reinvigorate research in the – currently marginalized – tradition of Siebert, Peterson and Schramm’s classic *Four Theories of the Press* by repositioning it within the epistemological framework of discourse theory. To illustrate the benefits of such an approach, a case study of the dominant media-politics discourse in Russia in 2012/13 is presented. The findings are marshaled to unravel three seemingly paradoxical observations on the Russian media landscape and to illustrate how three major criticisms leveled against the Four Theories tradition can be addressed.