

Social Media as a Digital Agora for Political Arguments, Opinions, and Ideas?

International Summer School

15th - 19th July 2019, University of Duisburg-Essen (@Wolfsburg, Mülheim an der Ruhr)

Monday,
July 15th

11:00 - 12:30	Welcome and Get Together
12:30 - 13:30	Lunch
13:30 - 15:00	Patricia Rossini: <i>Beyond Deliberative Norms in Online Political Talk: The Role of Incivility and Intolerance</i> (Lecture 1)
15:00 - 18:00	Workshops 1 - 4
18:00 - 19:00	Dinner
19:00 - 20:30	Christoph Bieber: <i>The End of the Political Public as We Know it? Modes of Campaigning during the Midterm Elections 2018</i> (Lecture 2)
From 20:30	Get Together

Tuesday,
July 16th

09:00 - 10:45	1st PhD Poster Session
10:45 - 11:15	Coffee Break
11:15 - 12:45	Gina Chen: <i>If Incivility Means Everything – It Starts to Mean Nothing</i> (Lecture 3)
12:45 - 13:45	Lunch
13:45 - 18:30	Workshops 1 - 4
From 18:30	Dinner and Get Together

Wednesday,
July 17th

09:00 - 10:45	2nd PhD Poster Session
10:45 - 11:00	Coffee Break
11:00 - 12:45	Workshops 5 - 8
12:45 - 13:45	Lunch
13:45 - 16:00	Workshops 5 - 8
From 16:30	Exploring Landschaftspark Duisburg-Nord

Thursday,
July 18th

9:30 - 11:00	Tobias Rothmund: <i>Temporal and Interpersonal Dynamics in the Formation of Opinion-Based Political Facebook Groups - The case of the German "Refugee Crisis"</i> (Lecture 4)
11:00 - 12:45	Workshops 5 - 8
12:45 - 13:45	Lunch
13:45 - 16:00	Workshops 5 - 8
16:00 - 18:00	Shira Dvir-Gvirsman: <i>Political polarization — Yes? No? Maybe?</i> (Lecture 5)
From 19:00	Dinner at Ziegenpeter

Friday,
July 19th

10:00 - 11:45	3rd PhD Poster Session
11:45 - 12:45	Lunch
12:45 - 14:15	Homero Gil de Zúñiga: <i>Social Media Simultaneous Hydraulic Effects Over Democracy</i> (Lecture 6)
From 14:15	Farewell

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Kultur und Wissenschaft
des Landes Nordrhein-Westfalen



Speaker



Dr. Patricia Rossini: [Patrícia Rossini](#) is a tenure-track Derby Fellow in the Department of Communication and Media at the University of Liverpool, UK. Her research focuses on the interplay between digital technologies and political communication with an emphasis on incivility and intolerance



Prof. Dr. Christoph Bieber: [Christoph Bieber](#) is the holder of the endowed Johann Wilhelm Welker Professorship for Ethics in Political Management and Society at the NRW School of Governance of the University Duisburg-Essen, Germany. His research interests include digital media, ethics, politics, popular culture.



Jun.-Prof. Dr. Annie Waldherr: [Annie Waldherr](#) is assistant professor in the Department of Communication at the University of Münster. Her research focuses on the impact of digitalization on our society by applying and developing computational methods in the social sciences.



Prof. Dr. Homero Gil de Zúñiga: [Homero Gil de Zúñiga](#) holds the Medienwandel Professorship at University of Vienna, Austria, where he leads the Media Innovation Lab (MiLab). His research examines the influence of new technologies and digital media on the democratic process and on people's daily life.



Prof. Dr. Karsten Weber: [Karsten Weber](#) is Co-Head of the Institute for Social Research and Technology Assessment (IST) and Head of the Laboratory for Technology Assessment and Applied Ethics (LaTE) at the Ostbayerische Technische Hochschule (OTH) Regensburg (Technical University of Applied Sciences). Moreover, he is a honorary professor for Culture and Technology at the Brandenburg University of Technology Cottbus-Senftenberg. His research includes ethics of technology, information ethics, social impacts of the Internet, political philosophy of new media, technology assessment, acceptance and usability research.



Dr. Shira Dvir-Givrsman: [Shira Dvir-Givrsman](#) is a Senior Lecturer (equivalent to an Assistant Professor) at Tel Aviv University, Israel, and is leading the Media User Interaction Lab (MUI Lab). Her research includes selective exposure and polarization in the Internet age, public opinion, political violence, and News dissemination online.



Prof. Dr.-Ing. Torsten Zesch: [Torsten Zesch](#) is as an Appointed Professor and chairholder of the Language Technology Lab at the University of Duisburg-Essen in Germany, Co-president of the German Society for Computational Linguistics & Language Technology (GSCL), and Co-director of the Institute for Optional Studies (IOS) at the University of Duisburg-Essen. His research focuses on natural language processing and computational methods in social media contexts.



Björn Ross, M.Sc. : [Björn Ross](#) is a doctoral researcher at the department for Professional Communication in Electronic Media/Social Media. His research interests include Social Media Analytics, Information Diffusion, Social Network Analysis, and Predictive Analytics & Supervised Learning.



Prof. Dr. Tobias Rothmund: [Tobias Rothmund](#) is Professor for Psychology of Communication and Media Use at the Friedrich Schiller University in Jena. His research interests are located in the intersection between personality research, political psychology and mass media communication. Current work addresses topics such as right-wing populism, political ideology and justice sensitivity, justice perceptions in mass media communication, motivated science reception and media violence.



Dr. Gina Masullo Chen: [Gina Masullo Chen](#), Ph.D., is an Assistant Professor in the School of Journalism and the Assistant Director of the Center for Media Engagement, both at The University of Texas at Austin, USA. Her research focuses on the online conversation around the news and how it influences social, civic, and political engagement. She is the author of *Online Incivility and Public Debate: Nasty Talk* and co-editor of *Scandal in a Digital Age*. She is currently writing her third book, *The New Town Hall: Why We Engage Personally with Politicians*. She spent 20 years as a newspaper journalist before becoming a professor.

Description of the Lectures

Lecture 1

Patricia Rossini: *Beyond Deliberative Norms in Online Political Talk: The Role of Incivility and Intolerance*

The internet offers many opportunities for political conversation through synchronous and asynchronous platforms. However, the potential benefits of political discussion online are often dismissed due to the presence of incivility, scholars often question the internet's democratic potential to foster political discussion. My research takes up the popular argument that much online discussion is toxic and hence harmful to democracy. I advocate for a nuanced understanding of the concept of incivility in online discussions, and argue that *uncivil discourse*, in itself, is not sufficient to prevent political talk from being democratically relevant. Uncivil discourse, in which people express themselves with foul language or harsh remarks, should be understood as a rhetorical act. I argue that a much more serious threat to democracy is *intolerant discourse*, where groups of people or individuals are attacked in ways that threaten democratic pluralism. The validity of this theoretical model is demonstrated in the context of public comments in a wide range of political news in two different platforms – news websites and Facebook. The results of my research show that incivility and intolerance can be meaningfully distinguished and are associated with different discursive characteristics -- while incivility is associated with desirable discussion features, such as justified opinion expression and engagement with disagreement, intolerance is likely to occur in discussions about minorities and civil society – exactly when it can hurt democracy the most. This approach advances theory and research on interpersonal communication online because it better theorizes interaction norms in online discussions and their implications for democratic communication.

Lecture 2

Christoph Bieber: *The End of the Political Public as We Know it? Modes of Campaigning during the Midterm Elections 2018*

While preparing the 2018 Midterm Elections campaign fundraising has climbed to a new record high, yet campaign spending remained astonishingly conventional: about two thirds of the stellar 8 billion dollars raised, went into traditional television markets. Digital efforts gained weight, but data collection, campaign websites, apps, digital voter targeting, mass text messages ended up with only 20 % of the cake. The presentation describes the current set of digital (and analog!) campaign efforts in the US and analyses the various activities as elements of "post-modern campaigning" according to Pippa Norris' stages of political communication. It becomes clear, that different modes of addressing the multi-faceted US-citizenry help to fragment, dissipate and (at least) partly disrupt the political public as we know it. Furthermore, it remains unclear, whether there really is a "forth phase of election campaigning" (Römmele/v. Schneidmesser) focusing on more active roles for citizens.

Lecture 3

Gina Chen: *If Incivility Means Everything – It Starts to Mean Nothing*

In this talk, I will argue that we need to theorize what online incivility really is with a goal of developing a more holistic conceptualization of this construct that can be more readily adopted across an inter-disciplinary sphere. Currently, the concept of incivility is varied and, in some cases, so broadly defined that the term incivility itself is rendered almost meaningless. For example, the definition of incivility in the extant literature includes such varied attributes as impoliteness, threats to overthrow a government, lack of cooperation between political actors, disrespectful speech, hate speech, and trolling. I argue that we need to push for a stronger and

narrower definition of incivility so that study of incivility can provide the theoretical contributions that are necessary to advance knowledge in this important area of inquiry.

Lecture 4

Tobias Rothmund: *Temporal and Interpersonal Dynamics in the Formation of Opinion-Based Political Facebook Groups - The case of the German "Refugee Crisis"*

We investigated political communication in Facebook (FB) groups during the so-called "refugee crisis" in Germany. We gathered data from twelve public FB groups (N = 51.177 participants). Six of these groups were concerned with providing support for incoming refugees (e.g., Refugees.Welcome.Regensburg), and six of the groups were concerned with criticizing and opposing the German government for its way of dealing with the situation (e.g., Resign Merkel & co.). News feeds of the groups were analyzed between June 2015 and March 2017. The goal of this research is to showcase how data from public FB groups can be used to investigate the formation of political action groups and which methodological problems arise in doing so.

Lecture 5

Shira Dvir-Gvirsman: *Political polarization—Yes? No? Maybe?*

TBA

Lecture 6

Homero Gil de Zúñiga: *Social Media Simultaneous Hydraulic Effects Over Democracy*

This talk addresses the complex and sometimes opposing effects that distinct uses of social media may exert over democratic processes. On the one hand, social media and second screening function as positive mechanisms for individuals to keep up with public affairs issues and discuss important topics within a public sphere. On the other hand, the use of social media elicits the proliferation of the 'news finds me perception,' which in turn leads to deleterious effects over democracy. All in all, these concurrent lines of research highlight what we may call the social media simultaneous hydraulic effects over democracy

Description of the Workshops

Workshop 1

Annie Waldherr: *Introduction into Agent-Based Modeling with NetLogo*

A major concern in political communication is to explain emergent, collective social phenomena such as the dynamics of public opinion, collective attention, and collective action. Agent-based modeling (ABM) offers an analytical approach to study the mechanisms bringing about such emergent patterns. The basic idea is to let heterogeneous agents interact in a virtual environment according to simple rules and this way generate, from the bottom up, the regularities that we can observe at the collective level.

This workshop will give an introduction into the basics of agent-based modeling and simulation. With the help of selected examples, students will learn how to design, implement, run, and analyze ABMs with NetLogo. The workshop starts with introductory lectures and tutorials, and then gives students the opportunity to draft and discuss their own models in small working groups.

Students participating in this workshop should bring their own laptops and download and install NetLogo previous to the first session:

<https://ccl.northwestern.edu/netlogo/>

It is also recommended to go through the Tutorials #1 and #2 offered in the NetLogo User Manual: <https://ccl.northwestern.edu/netlogo/docs/>

Recommended Reading:

Epstein, J. M. (2008). Why model? *Journal of Artificial Societies and Social Simulation*, 11(4), 12. <http://jasss.soc.surrey.ac.uk/11/4/12.html>

Sherry, J. L. (2015). The complexity paradigm for studying human communication: A summary and integration of two fields. *Review of Communication*, 3(1), 22-54. <https://dx.doi.org/10.12840/issn.2255-4165.2015.03.01.007>

Workshop 2

Patricia Rossini: *Social Media Research Methods: An introduction using R*

Social media is now a ubiquitous part of everyday life. People are routinely using social media to communicate with friends and family, follow the latest news, and to participate in politics. As a consequence, researchers have been increasingly interested in understanding the use, nature and effects of social media in everyday life. The scholarly interest on social media use gives rise to a need to think carefully about ethical considerations and methods for studying these channels, as well as the limitations of this type of research.

This workshop focuses on social media research methods and overviews a variety of computational methods for collecting and analyzing data from social media platforms. It also discusses the implications and limitations – both technical and ethical – of conducting research on social media. The workshop will cover both the theoretical foundations of social media research and the practical skills for collecting and analyzing data. This course is meant for any student with an interest in researching human behavior on and around social media platforms, such as Facebook and Twitter.

Course Goals/Objectives

- Explore ethical considerations of online research
- Examine the unique challenges and opportunities of research involving social media use.

- Learn methodological techniques for social media research
- Learn techniques for data collection, cleaning and basic analysis

Course Outcomes

- Understand the ethical considerations unique to social media research methods
- Understand the relationship between research questions, methods, and available data
- Articulate strengths and weaknesses of methodological approaches
- Learn how to collect publicly accessible social media data using R
- Learn techniques to clean, visualize and analyze social media data using R

Requirements:

- Laptop computer with RStudio installed (free software)

Workshop 3

Gina Chen: *What is Online Incivility?*

This workshop has two main goals:

1. To conceptualize what online incivility is, I am looking here for students to come up with a fresh definition of incivility, not merely adopt one of the many varied definitions in the literature. The idea is to draw from published research to inform their thinking but really push themselves to make conceptual distinctions between related concepts, such as incivility and impoliteness, incivility and hate speech, incivility and intolerant speech, uncivil and civil disagreement. This will involve theorizing a strong conceptual definition with theoretically rooted justifications, as well as theorizing what incivility is not.

2. To design an experiment to test this new conceptualization. This will involve coming up with a way to operationalize this new definition and test it on relevant outcome variables, such as emotional responses (i.e., anger, hostility, sadness), behavioral responses (verbal aggression, retaliation), and attitudes (toward those involved in the uncivil exchanges, toward the platform where the exchange took place, toward perceptions of polarization, etc.)

Plan for workshop (Times are approximations)

During each step, students will meet with me on an ad-hoc basis as needed to confer.

Monday:

15:00

30 minutes for students to discuss research backgrounds, interests, so I can form them into two groups

16:00 – 17:00

Each group will develop a typology of incivility and related concepts (impoliteness, civility, hate speech, intolerance) based on the literature I supplied (and their own thinking). Based on the typology each group creates, group members will develop their own definition of incivility and related concepts (impoliteness, civility, hate speech, intolerance, or any other concepts they see as relevant).

Tuesday:

14:00 – 16:00

Groups will refine their conceptual definitions as needed. Then each group will use their conceptual

16:00 – 18:00

ideas to generate a main research question(s) to test the concept, including what dependent variables they would expect to change.

Each group will come up with an experimental design and ideas for proposed stimuli to answer their main question(s).

18:00

The groups will come together, and each group will informally present their research design to the other group and Gina Chen.

Workshop 4

Karsten Weber: *Ethics in Social Media and in Social Media Studies*

Monday, July 15

15:00 – 16:00

- Short introduction of participants.
- Introductory presentation by Karsten Weber on ethical issues concerning social media as well as on ethical questions with regard to research in and with social media.

Discussion of possible further ethical issues which are relevant for research in and with social media.

16:00 – 18:00

- Short presentations of the participants (three minutes, three slides) of their research projects and the ethical questions arising in the projects.

Tuesday, July 16

14:00 – 17:00

- Discussion on similarities of the projects regarding ethical issues and formulation of two to three ethical issues to be further explored.

Formation of two to three groups (according to the number of topics identified).

- Group work: Finding answers (at least) to the following questions:
 - What is necessary to deal with the ethical issues previously identified?
 - Are there already codes of conducts, ethical guidelines and the like that can inform research in and with social media?
 - What are the ethical assumptions (like ethical theories, conceptions of human beings, moral values, norms, and principles, hierarchy of values, norms and principles ...) of those ethical frameworks?
 - What ethical requirements do such frameworks place on empirical research in and with social media?
 - How can these ethical frameworks be applied to one's own research problem?
 - How might this limit the use of research methods?

Participants need to have Internet access for research and should use the tool 'Ethics Canvas' to identify, for example, stakeholders, their interests and similar aspects of the ethical problem. They should prepare a presentation lasting about twenty minutes and can use 'Ethics Canvas', Powerpoint

slides, white boards, brown boards, and any other presentation equipment available.

17:00 – 19:00

- Presentation of the results of the group work.
- Concluding discussion.

Knowledge / Preparation Requirements

- Preparation of a very short presentation (three minutes, three slides) of own research project.
- Familiarization with the 'Ethics Canvas' tool (WWW: <https://www.ethicscanvas.org/>, Handbook: <https://www.ethicscanvas.org/download/handbook.pdf>).

Workshop 5

Shira Dvir-Gvirsman: *Social media as an instrument of destruction: How social network sites affect the democratic process*

While in their early stages of development, social media were depicted as equalizers that promote the democratic process. Today, harsh criticism is directed at social media conglomerates by both the public and the academic world. How did this metamorphosis occur and is the resulting criticism justified? Do phenomena such as fake news, bots, echo chambers and algorithmic curation destroy our democracies from within—and if so, are social media to blame?

When addressing these issues, we will adopt a broad theoretical perspective that highlights the psychological and sociological roots of the above phenomena, while accounting for the ways in which new technologies can facilitate known social dynamics.

Students will be encouraged to work in small multidisciplinary teams, reflecting the various angles of the problems faced. Each team will be charged with producing either a research design or a research-based

policy paper targeting one specific phenomenon, outlining its possible effects on the democratic process.

Workshop 6

Torsten Zesch and Björn Ross: *Hands-on social media analytics: Analyzing discussions on Wikipedia*

Wikipedia offers researchers unique insights into the collaboration and communication patterns of a large self-regulating community of editors. The main medium of direct communication between editors of an article is the article's talk page. In this workshop, we will show how Wikipedia's talk pages can be parsed into a structured format of separated comments and how various research questions can be addressed using statistical methods and social network analysis (SNA). To this end, we will present an open-source parser tool called GraWiTas which we developed ourselves and demonstrate how its output can be used with the statistics software package R and the network visualization tool Gephi. We will also show how comments on talk pages can be classified with Natural Language Processing (NLP). The workshop is meant for participants with an interest in social media analytics, but a strong background is not required. We will show a prototypical workflow of gathering / mining data and then analyzing it. The workshop will be hands-on: participants can perform all steps on their own computers.

Workshop 7

Tobias Rothmund: *Can digital communication tools be useful in settling moral conflicts in society?*

Many of the pressing political conflicts are difficult to resolve because they are fueled by conflicting moral convictions. Digital media often

intensify these conflicts rather than resolving them by stimulating uncivilized forms of communication (“hate speech”), the spread of misinformation (“fake news”), or the provision of ideologically homogeneous spheres (“filter bubbles” or “echo chambers”). This workshop has three aims. First, we want to get a shared understanding of the psychological underpinnings of moral conflicts. Second, we discuss theoretical approaches of how to resolve moral conflicts. Third, we develop a How-To research agenda for developing digital tools that assist in resolving (rather than) intensifying these moral conflicts.

Workshop 8

Homero Gil de Zúñiga: *The influence of digital communication on socio-political attitudes and behaviors: Analyzing multi-country survey data*

The influence of media and digital technology over society has been largely addressed by many disciplines. For instance, sociology, political science, and of course, communication have all been instrumental in this pursuit. Nevertheless, few studies have the opportunity to shed light on these digital influence effects across societies. This workshop aims to help palliate this shortcoming. Taking advantage of a multi-country representative survey panel data set from 19 societies worldwide, this workshop will allow participants to collaborate with me in a new research project. Together, we will a) discuss different theories that may be of importance in learning the connection between digital media (i.e., social media) and socio-political attitudes and behaviors; b) will develop a theoretical model to be empirically tested, c) will work on the measurements and instruments to operationalize our variables of interest; d) will test the validity and reliability of such construct, and finally, e) will empirically test our model.

Social Program

Dinner and Get Together in the Wolfsburg
Monday evening, July 15th

At the first evening, we would like to give you the opportunity of meeting fellow participants and attendant speaker. After a dinner at the Wolfsburg (venue) we will organize an informal Get Together.

Get Together
Tuesday evening, July 16th

After dinner it will be time to exchange impressions and further get to know each other. For all those who would like to move on after dinner, we will organize an informal tour to Düsseldorf exploring the "Altstadt" night life.

Exploring Landschaftspark Duisburg-Nord
Wednesday afternoon, July 17th

One of the must-sees in Duisburg is the [Landschaftspark Nord](#) (Landscape Park Duisburg Nord) where former industrial buildings have been remodeled and can be visited. The British daily newspaper "The Guardian" even chose the park as one of the ten most beautiful urban oases in the world. We are glad to invite you to explore this beautiful landmark within a guided tour. Afterwards, you are welcome to spend the evening at the [Finkenkrug](#) in Duisburg. This pub is known for its large choice of beer from all over the world.

Dinner at the Ziegenpeter
Thursday evening, July 18th

Thursday evening, we will go out for a buffet-dinner at the [Ziegenpeter](#) in Duisburg. The restaurant follows the philosophy "Accomplishing more together" and place great importance on social and environmental sustainability.

PhD Postersessions

1st PhD Poster Session

Tuesday, July 16th

Chair: Jan Philipp Kluck

1. Angelika Maier
2. Diana Schneider
3. Aline Franzke
4. Laura Solzbacher
5. Poornima Belavadi
6. Manuel Cargnino
7. Daniel Röchert
8. Alexander Voß

2nd PhD Poster Session

Wednesday, July 17th

Chair: Manuel Cargnino

1. Laura Burbach
2. Patrick Halbach
3. Jan Philipp Kluck
4. Marike Bormann
5. Vanessa Hirschhäuser
6. Anke Stoll
7. Tim Schatto-Eckrodt
8. Isabelle Freiling

3rd PhD Poster Session

Friday, July 19th

Chair: Daniel Röchert

1. Nils Frederik Tolksdorf
2. Scarlet Siebert
3. Farbod Aprin
4. Andreas Nanz
5. Franziska Pradel
6. Malte Bonart
7. Junyan Zhu
8. Fabienne Lücken

Of course, participants can change the above order in agreement with other presenters.