English Abstracts

Melanie Magin / Miriam Steiner / Dominique Heinbach / Sarah Bosold / Alice Pieper / Eva-Maria Felka / Birgit Stark: Search Engines on Trial. Results from a Content Analysis Comparing the Quality of Different Search Engines [Suchmaschinen auf dem Prüfstand – eine vergleichende Inhaltsanalyse der Qualität von Trefferlisten], pp. 495-516

From a user's perspective, search engines are vital to unlocking the Internet. Filtering the flood of information and identifying relevant content, search engines are intermediaries with a similar function and social responsibility to that of journalism. It is, therefore, crucial to investigate the quality of search engine result pages (SERPs), which have widely been neglected by communication studies so far. Drawing on the findings from a user-focused content analysis, we examine the usability, relevance, structural diversity and topicality of five different search engines' result pages relating to controversial relevant, yet controversial issues. In doing so, we explore if search engines are able to provide for users' diverse roles; i.e., the role of the consumer on the one hand, who focuses on the SERPs' usefulness, and the role of the citizen on the other hand, who adjusts to social values. The results show that Google's SERPs are of a higher quality than those of Bing, Ixquick, Lycos and Ask. However, with regard to the structural diversity, Google falls somewhat behind its competitors.

Key words: search engines, quality, content analysis, search engine result page (SERP), usability, relevance, diversity, actuality

Senja Post: Communication Strategies in the Contradictory over Aircraft Noise. On the Influence of Hostile Media Perceptions, Media Self-Efficacy and Opinion Climates in Politics and Society. [Die Kommunikationsstrategien der Kontrahenten in der Fluglärmdebatte. Einflüsse der Wahrnehmung einer feindlichen Berichterstattung und der Meinungsklimata in Politik und Öffentlichkeit], pp. 517-534

According to the model of reciprocal effects, news coverage of conflicts affects the conflicting parties – it influences their communicative actions and thus impacts on the dynamics of the conflict. As actors with a high involvement, the conflicting parties usually perceive media coverage as hostile towards their own position (hostile media perceptions). According to the hypothesis of 'corrective actions' (Rojas 2010), hostile media perceptions mobilise opposing parties in making attempts to counter-balance the allegedly hostile media coverage. My study puts this assumption to the test by discussing the results from an online survey of opposing parties in the German conflict over aircraft noise (the opponents of aircraft noise resemble n = 82; 47 %; the proponents of air traffic n = 48, 33 %). The results show that with regard to the proponents of air traffic, the corrective-actions hypothesis can be confirmed. Communicative actions are intensified, the more they see themselves confronted with hostile media coverage, and the more they perceive a low level of media interest. However, for the opponents of aircraft noise, the hypothesis can be disproved, for they communicate more intensively, the more they perceive a high level of media interest.

Key Words: hostile media perception, corrective actions, reciprocal effects, presumed media influence, public conflicts, online survey, conflict dynamics

Matthias Händler: What is an Image? A Semiotic-Constructivist Perspective. [Was ist ein Bild? Eine Antwort aus semiotisch-konstruktivistischer Perspektive], pp. 535-556

This paper examines what a combination of radical constructivism as suggested by Ernst von Glasersfeld with the semiotics of Charles S. Peirce can offer to image theory. My main thesis is that the image as a medium stimulates the viewer to adopt a self-referential, i.e. memory-based stance. Within this double categorization, I suggest that expression and content must each be recognized. An image is, therefore, considered a functional unit in the form of an iconic, i.e. a perception-like sign. In scholarly debates, the question of whether every image is necessarily a sign or not is discussed controversially. This paper takes the view that every image viewer needs to learn what an image is, and this process includes an object categorization for the image carrier and an iconic categorization for the image object. Moreover, these categorizations necessarily include sign processes which are determined and established on the level of human cognition rather than human communication.

Key words: image theory, self-referentiality, sign concept, iconicity, semiotics, radical constructivism, Charles S. Peirce, Ernst von Glasersfeld

Klaus Beck: Harry Pross – The Economy of Signals and „New Communication Politics". [Harry Pross – Signalökonomie und „neue Kommunikationspolitik"], pp. 557-575

Harry Pross (1923-2010) is well-known for his „Berlin Model" which paved new ways of academic education in professional journalism in Germany. His theoretical work seems underestimated and only partly adopted in the field of Media and Communication Studies. In fact, contemporary reviews as well as current textbooks of the discipline demonstrate a widespread neglecting of his writings. Analysing his writings and his philosophical background, this article focusses on Pross' contributions to the study of political communication. The contributions of his approach are theoretically based on semiotics and the sociology of culture. Pross' professional work as a leading political journalist and editor of his time is rooted in his theoretical thinking and vice versa. My study reveals that his key terms and concepts are not only based on theory but they are, indeed, relevant to and instrumental for current problems of media and communication. Central to his economy of signals and the theoretical foundation of „new communication politics" is the problem of autonomy and heteronomy of (not only public) communication.

Key words: history of media and communication studies, journalism education, Berliner Modell, primary, secondary and tertiary media, symbol, semiotics, economy of signals, ritual, time, communication politics

Rudolf Stöber: Criticising Ethics and the Ethics of Criticism. Reflections on the Moral of Academia and on the Ethics Codex of the German DGPuK. [Rudolf Stöber: Kritik der Ethik – Ethik der Kritik. Anmerkungen zur Moral in der Wissenschaft und zum Ethik-Kodex der DGPuK], pp. 576-589

Drawing on the current debate about ethics within the DGPuK, this paper examines the compatibility of ethical norms and academic freedom. I discuss the Ethics Codex in its contexts, arguing for a revision that aims to reducing it and freeing it of its ambiguous

potential. We need to make the Ethics Codex self-evident in substance, decreasing its orientation towards subtle, isolated cases. Indeed, the expression of specific formal norms might be more useful than a redundant stating of legal requirements. However, I argue for categorically giving preference to academic freedom rather than academic criticism.

Key words: ethics, ethics codex, DGPuK, academic ethics

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