

Abstracts

Hannah Kehl/Hella de Haas/Jana L. Peters/Olaf Jandura: Socially Disadvantaged – Digitally Left Behind? A Secondary Data Analysis of Digital Divides in Germany

This paper examines the digital divide between people living in poverty and those not living in poverty in Germany. The theoretical framework is the three-level model of digital divides, which distinguishes between inequality in access, use, and the effects of digital media. Poverty is understood here as a form of social exclusion that limits opportunities for participation. From a media ethics perspective, digital participation is a matter of distributive justice. The secondary data analysis of the Allensbach Market and Media Analysis 2025 confirms that people living in poverty are systematically disadvantaged at all three levels and that inequalities reinforce one another. This corroborates the theoretical assumptions regarding the perpetuation of social inequality in the digital sphere.

Tanja Köhler/Julia Lönnendonker/Johanna Mack: Social Inequality in Journalism. Social Origin and Role Conceptions of Journalism Trainees and Students in Germany

The study examines the social background groups from which journalism trainees and journalism students in Germany originate and how social background relates to their understanding of their professional roles. It is based on a survey of 250 aspiring journalists. The results reveal a socially selective composition among aspiring journalists: the majority come from academic families and have attended college. At the same time, differences in the understanding of professional roles become apparent: respondents from academic families place greater emphasis on the watchdog role toward political and economic elites, whereas respondents from non-academic family backgrounds attach greater importance to participatory, developmental, and advocacy-representational roles.

Alban Knecht/Michaela Moser/Martin Schenk: Discourses on Poverty in Austria. Defamation, Battles of Interpretation, and Counter-Public Sphere

This article examines discourses on poverty in Austria, including their media representations, political battles of interpretation, and the role of counter-public spheres. The central research question is how poverty is portrayed in the mass media and how the Austrian network “Die Armutskonferenz” influences this. Drawing on the theoretical framework of Foucaultian discourse analysis, the article synthesizes findings from media discourses and presents literature-based, practice-oriented measures. The results show that dominant discourses frequently individualize and moralize poverty and distinguish between “deserving” and “undeserving” poor, while the Armutskonferenz has been partially successful in establishing alternative counter-narratives.

Andreas Schulz-Tomančok/Josef Seethaler: Not About Us, But With Us! Opportunities and Challenges in the Portrayal of Poverty in Public Service Broadcasting

This paper examines how ORF addresses poverty and social exclusion. It explores how those affected and experts evaluate the coverage, how it should be structured in the interests of those affected, and what editorial and structural steps are required. Based on a public value perspective, two focus groups and eight interviews with experts and people affected by poverty were conducted and analyzed thematically. The results clearly highlight inconsistencies: poverty is often individualized; diversity, continuity, and platform-appropriate presentation are lacking. Recommendations include participatory formats based on the principle of “only about us, with us,” more diverse editorial teams, new guidelines, as well as accessible and multilingual services.

Kevin Grieves/Marie Lou Hartmann/Carsten Källner/Diana Peña/Liane Rothenberger: Rich, Poor, and Unequal. Media Portrayals of Immigrants Then and Now

This article examines media portrayals of wealth and poverty. It primarily adopts a historical perspective and describes depictions of German immigrants in the United States from 1848 to 1914. Articles were analyzed using a qualitative content analysis based on four categories of wealth (material, immaterial, absent wealth, and utopian visions of wealth). Building on this, a comparison is made with current media portrayals of poverty in relation to migration. It becomes apparent that today the focus is on individual failure, whereas in the past, intangible wealth such as labor and moral integrity was emphasized. Finally, ethical implications are discussed and recommendations for action are formulated.

Maja Jerrentrup: Rhetorical Strategies of Need. Linguistic and Psychosocial Dynamics of Begging Signs

This article examines communication strategies used in begging, focusing on cardboard signs that beggars use to encourage people to donate, even though the contributors cannot expect any immediate material benefit. Based on 42 signs, which are examined from the perspective of media ethics, the article analyzes visual, formal, and linguistic elements and classifies them according to strategies such as emphasizing individual need, building rapport, portraying similarity or inequality of opportunity, and presenting character and attitudes. The begging signs condense messages but also generate self-stereotyping. This creates a communicative effectiveness that links individual self-presentation with the general human condition.

Annika Franzetti: Telling Difficult Stories Simply. How Stories for Children and Young Adults Create Space for Engaging with Poverty

Poverty is part of the reality of life for children and young people because they encounter it or experience it themselves. Confrontation with poverty often touches upon children's strong sense of justice. It is evident that perceived injustice triggers inner conflicts that must be addressed. Current works of children's and young adult literature offer starting points for initiating conversations about this topic with children and young people. It is helpful when authors address both adults and children equally with their stories about poverty. This can lead to enriching discussions for both sides. By comparing four works from different eras, this article demonstrates that contemporary literature in particular invites dialogue about poverty.

Anna Lena Fehlhaber: Trust in Digital Spaces. An Application of Coleman's Concept of Trust to Online Interactions

This article examines the extent to which James S. Coleman's theory of trust can be applied to digital communication contexts. Coleman conceives of trust as a rational decision made under uncertainty, based on the cost-benefit calculations of identifiable actors and on functioning reputation and sanction mechanisms. The analysis shows that Coleman's core principle remains fundamentally valid in digital spaces but must be significantly modified due to digital specifics such as anonymity, platform mediation, algorithmic opacity, and affective-cultural dynamics. From a media ethics perspective, this results in obligations of transparency and accountability for platforms, for example through approaches such as Explainable AI.

Antje Eichler: Is Lobbying Permissible in Academia? On the Legitimacy of Political Advocacy by Universities and Research Organizations

Science is expected to provide the basis for political decisions while simultaneously staying out of politics—such is the stark expectation. While political engagement is a matter of course for many social groups, it is considered foreign to the scientific community. Empirical findings reveal reluctance, a lack of strategy, and conceptual reservations regarding lobbying. This article examines the extent to which academia is permitted to engage in lobbying. Political advocacy is situated here as part of strategic organizational communication, and its legitimacy is discussed from a communication ethics perspective. Preliminary conclusion: It is not academia's engagement in lobbying that poses a problem of legitimacy, but rather its failure to do so.

Benedikt Rauw: Relationship as a Normative Space. Perspectives on Relational Change in Moral Theology and AI Ethics

This article demonstrates that, in both moral theology and AI ethics, moral orientation is increasingly grounded not in isolated or supposedly unambiguous essential characteristics, but in what occurs within relationships and social practices. Building on the shift toward a relationship-oriented sexual ethics and Gunkel’s relational critique of the person/thing dichotomy, the paper argues how normativity emerges through recognition, responsiveness, and institutional attribution. The comparison leads to the conclusion that both debates share a “practice-first” logic and that this is precisely why additional standards are necessary to evaluate practices of recognition themselves and to prevent projection, power asymmetries, and the diffusion of responsibility.