

2.3 Conclusion

In this chapter, I have outlined the two main research areas that this book draws on and contributes to: political participation, and Internet and politics. The anthropological gaze has been seriously under-represented in both research fields. This perspective opens up rich opportunities to explore these research areas both separately and in the places that they overlap, allowing the cultural anthropologist to make the research more diverse and empirical. The anthropological approach is valuable for the production and communication of knowledge for its emphasis on two key factors: comparison and sociality.

Firstly, in research on political participation in the digital age, the comparative perspective of cultural anthropologists means that rather than focusing the research on individual platforms, anthropological investigations tend to trace a certain phenomenon through multiple media, hereby drawing on Marcus' motto *to follow the people, follow the thing, follow the metaphor; follow the plot, the story, or allegory; follow the life or biography; follow the context* (cf. 106ff.). Miller et al. describe this approach as employing "[...] a theory of polymedia that recognises our inability to understand any one platform or media in isolation. They must be seen as relative to each other, since today people use the range of available possibilities to select specific platforms or media for particular genres of interaction" (211).

Secondly, a key characteristic of cultural anthropology is the focus on sociality, deeply intertwined with a firm belief in cultural relativism. This approach enables an empathetic and emic view onto research fields which is often paired with a micro-perspective both of and on the actual participants. In focusing on the actual participants, listening to their stories, descriptions and reasoning, this research opens a hitherto strongly under-researched dimension of diverse motives for and perspectives on political participation as well as Social Media use. Facilitated by the ethnographic method, which provides great depth, this micro-perspective approach tends to undermine popular assumptions around apparent social problems such as the oft-cited political apathy (ger. *Politikverdrossenheit*) or the degeneration of society to a mass of individualised, asocial *smombies*.²⁵ Together, the distinct characteristics of the discipline also mean that cultural anthropologists are well equipped to research areas not necessarily dominated by their peers. In the upcoming chapter, I focus on the websites *LiquidFriesland* and *Betri Reykjavík*, the central research fields in this book.

25 "Smombie" is a portmanteau from the words "smartphone" and "zombie" and became Germany's annual youth word in 2015. It describes a slowly walking pedestrian paying exclusive attention to the screen in hand and not to his surroundings (cf. 'Jugendwort').