medien & zeit

Call for Papers:
Moralization in the media

medien & zeit 2/28

Editors:
Eva Tamara Asboth (Austrian Academy of Sciences)
Gabriele Falböck (University of Applied Sciences St. Pölten, University of Vienna)
Andreas Schulz-Tomančok (Austrian Academy of Sciences)
Stefanie Averbeck-Lietz (University of Greifswald)

Socially recognized and lived norms and values, whether religious, social, familial or institutional, have been undergoing a change since the 1980s. Sociology has provided evidence of this since Ulrich Beck's (2001[1986]) diagnosis of the risk society. The decline of the restrictive and pressure-generating normative in traditional societies was accompanied by the erosion of the morality practice of action constituted by it. Whether on the topic of sexuality, diets, family practices or gender roles - life plans and meaning are individualized and diverse today (cf. also Reckwitz 2017). Social consensus on this is not to be taken for granted. Morality and the "trigger points" associated with it (Mau, Lux & Westhäuser 2024) are therefore not fixed constants, but the subject of communication and negotiation (Schmidt 2015). Moralizations are evident in public debates and discourses and, following social constructivist perspectives (Bergmann & Luckmann, 1999), can be understood as communicative practices (Venema & Averbeck-Lietz, 2017; Becker & Felder 2022).

Especially in times of crisis and change, discourses are needed to cope with the associated uncertainties. The political public sphere outlined by Jürgen Habermas (1962) in an ideal-typical way argues with moral principles. However, it is guided by the triad of truth, normative correctness and authenticity. Claims that are dwindling, especially in digital media and the anonymity that is now possible, such as the changed understanding of language as a medium of perception rather than as a medium of discussion (Habermas, 2022). In the struggle for political legitimacy, moralization is increasingly used as a strategy in the communication process (Hahn & Langenohl, 2021). It is no longer the good argument, but the good in itself that cards are drawn in the game of negotiating correct solutions. Chantal Mouffe (2007) also states that political disputes are increasingly being negotiated with reference to morality. With the assurance of standing up for the good, any opponents are banished to the field of evil (see also Bergmann & Luckmann, 1999).

Moralization, according to the thesis of Clemens Knobloch (2023), fulfills a different function in the present than moral norms in traditional societies. Moralization makes public dissent more difficult, evaluating speakers; up or down inside, and improvises loose, sometimes temporally fleeting or limited communities of values. Where once socially established groups stood up for their interests, there are now loose constellations of actors whose affiliation and emigration can take place without major consequences. The media play a central role in this, as the tonality and emotionality of moralizing media content in the various forms of the public sphere can be designed in such a way that opinions, perspectives, and topics are restricted and participation by certain groups is made impossible (Donges, 2020).

Essential media actors in this public debate are journalists by profession. Journalists also act within institutional norms and concrete everyday actions (Hanitzsch, 2025). Apart from journalism in independent media, partisan media, actors who also refer to themselves as alternative media, are also experiencing discursive relevance (Loudon & Paulitsch, 2025; Fabris & Hausjell, 1991). In addition, there are media professionals, classified by communication studies as "peripheral" journalistic actors, and content creators,

who do not belong to the journalistic core of traditional media houses, but generate content as heterogeneous, individual and collective actors in social media (Nölleke et al., 2025).

The special issue **medien & zeit 2/2028** focuses on the question of what discourses about the 'good and right' have taken place in German-speaking and/or European media over time? Which moralizing practices have developed in which media and actor constellations? What are their functions for public discourse?

- We are therefore looking for contributions that take a theoretical, empirical and methodological view at the currently vague use of the term party media/alternative media/activist media as well as moralization as a communicative practice.
- Ethical and legal questions are also of interest: To what extent do codes exist in the media, where do the limits of what can be said lie? What limits are set for moralizing communication, when does it tip over into other forms of communication such as insult or hate speech, and how can it be distinguished from these? Which formulations are tolerated by whom and which are not? Who is responsible and liable for the content?
- To what extent do moralization and emotionalization play a role in digital channels and what intentions do content creators work with?
- Whether moralizing discourses take place only in declared party media/alternative/actionist media or whether a form of attitude and campaign journalism can also be detected in declared independent media?
- What role and self-images do journalists have in party media/alternative media/activist media? To what extent do they emanate from a mature audience and what attributions do they have to the target group?
- Which topics and associated values and norms are addressed acutely and/or over longer periods of time in media-mediated moralization discourses? Are there different thematic and normative manifestations in different decades?
- Which narratives are used in selected moralization discourses and how 'good/bad' or 'good/evil' dichotomies are communicatively constructed?
- In addition, contributions to (strategic) attitude communication by corporate actors and organizations are welcome.
- The question of how to approach the qualitative and/or quantitative research of moralization debates methodologically, or what methodological considerations have been made in this regard, is also relevant.

Submissions are welcome in German and English. Submitted abstracts (no more than 500 words and a meaningful title) outlining an expected contribution will be reviewed by the editors of the issue. On this basis, the authors will be invited to write complete contributions (max. 7000 words including title, abstract, keywords, tables and bibliography). All complete contributions will be subjected to a double-blind peer review.

Deadline for abstracts: 28.2.2027
Deadline for Full Papers: 30.9.2027
Date of publication: July 2028
Please send submissions to cfp@medienundzeit.at

References:

Beck, U. (2001[1986]): Risikogesellschaft. Auf dem Weg in eine andere Moderne, Frankfurt am Main.

Bergmann, J. / Luckmann, T. (1999): Kommunikative Konstruktion von Moral, 2 Bde, Wiesbaden.

Donges, P (2020): In: A. Lorenz / Ch. P. Hoffmann / U. Hitschfeld (Hrsg.): Partizipation für alle und alles? Fallstricke, Grenzen und Möglichkeiten, Wiesbaden, S. 283-298.

Fabris, H.H. / Hausjell, F. (1991): Die vierte Macht: zu Geschichte und Kultur des Journalismus in Österreich seit 1945. Wien.

Habermas, J. (1962): Strukturwandel der Öffentlichkeit, Frankfurt am Main.

Habermas, J. (2022): Der neue Strukturwandel der Öffentlichkeit, Frankfurt am Main.

Hahn, C. & Langenohl, A. (2021): Protestkommunikation: Konflikte um die Legitimität politischer Öffentlichkeit, Wiesbaden.

Hanitz, Th. (2025): Journalistische Rollen, In: Th. Hanitzsch / W. Loosen / A. Sehl: Journalismusforschung, Baden-Baden, S. 485-505.

Knobloch, C. (2023): Über Moralisierung, oder: Wir, die Guten. In: Zeitschrift für Politik, Vol. 70, Nr. 3, S. 318-339.

Loudon, S. / Paulitsch, L. (2025): Alles Journalismus, oder was? Zur Abgrenzung einer Profession und ihrer Rolle für die Demokratie, Wien.

Mau, S. / Westhäuser, L. / Lux, T.: Triggerpunkte. Konsens und Konflikt in der Gegenwart, Frankfurt aam Main..

Mouffe, Ch. (2007): Über das Politische. Wider die kosmopolitische Illusion, Frankfurt am Main.

Nölleke, D. / Hanusch, F. / Maares, Ph. / Löhmann, K. (2025): Periphere Akteure im Journalismus, In: Th. Hanitzsch / W. Loosen / A. Sehl: Journalismusforschung, Baden-Baden, S. 565-584.

Reckwitz, A. (2017): Die Gesellschaft der Singularitäten. Zum Strukturwandel der Moderne, Frankfurt am Main..

Schmidt, A. (2015): Moralvorstellungen in der öffentlichen Debatte. Konzeptionelle und methodologische Überlegungen zu Relevanz und methodischer Umsetzung. In: Studies in Media/Communication (SCM), 4(2), S. 69-134.

Venema, R. / Averbeck-Lietz, S. (2017): Moralizing and Deliberating in Financial Blogging. Moral Debates in Blog Communication during the Financial Crisis 2008. In: A. Hepp / A. Breiter / U.Hasebrink (Hrsg): Communicative Figurations, London, S. 241-265.