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SCHOLARSHIP

TOM POSTMES

SOCIAL INFLUENCE IN COMPUTER-MEDIATED GROUPS

UNIVERSITY OF AMSTERDAM, 1997, (ISBN 90-5470-061-0).

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In this dissertation the Social Identity Model of **Deindividuation Effects** (SIDE) is presented and evaluated. The basic assumption of this model is that the salient self and social context are of crucial importance in determining the effects of group members' anonymity on social influence in the group. In its most elementary form, the model states that anonymity will decrease attention to individually identifying characteristics, and increase attention to social context factors such as norms or social identity. Identifiability, on the other hand, will draw attention to individual differences among group members, and can therefore undermine the relative influence of social context. Traditionally it is assumed that anonymity in a group will lead to deindividuation. According to the SIDE model, deindividuating circumstances can cause a stronger impact of the common characteristics of people in interaction (such as a categorisation or social identity) on behaviour, thoughts and attitudes in the group than when each individual can be individuated. The implication is that instead of a removal of all identity, a person is still aware of him - or herself under deindividuating circumstances, but not as an individual. Attention is drawn away from the personal identity (i.e., the self as a unique and distinct entity) and towards the social context, and its relation **to the self**. Thus anonymity will increase the influence of the salient social identity, or otherwise of salient situational norms.

The main focus here is on evaluating the viability of the SIDE model in small group interaction. In small groups the emphasis has generally been on determinants of social influence such as individual characteristics of group members (in terms of composition, leadership and personalities) and structural characteristics of the group (its task, its time span, organisation, etc.). What might be an additional important source of social influence, however, is the social identity of the group. This social identity is a cognitive representation of the learned or situationally salient characteristics of the group, such as the group prototype and group norms. If this social identity is salient in a given situation, these characteristics will influence the behaviour of group members such that they will conform to the group norms and behave more stereotypically. This property of social identity is used in most of the empirical work in this thesis to investigate whether anonymity (in comparison to **identifiability**) can increase attention to the social identity or superimposed categorisation. If such a common identity is available, anonymity is hypothesised to increase social influence to produce more normatively regulated behaviour.

The SIDE model is supported by **a meta-analysis of deindividuation research. Classical deindividuation theory hypothesised deregulation to occur as a result of deindividuation or a reduction of social cues. Results show the opposite effect of regulation to adjust behaviour to normative constraints and demands conveyed in the immediate context. This regulatory aspect implies self-awareness. This is not aware-**

ness of general social norms in relation to personal identity, but awareness of the self in relation to the immediate context, to the social identity.

The studies reported in chapter 3 present more direct evidence for the SIDE model's underlying process **in the context of Computer-Mediated Communication**. Building on a pioneering study of normative influence in anonymous and isolated groups versus identifiable and co-present groups, these studies examined the effects of anonymity in an intra-group context. Unlike previous research, the common element of the group was directly manipulated via a priming procedure. It was shown that anonymous groups conform to this common element, whereas identifiable groups do not: in Study 3.1 the prime moderated the effect of anonymity. Thus in comparison to an identifiable condition, there is more social influence in anonymous groups in a direction that is predictable on the basis of the manipulated context. This social influence in terms of behavioural convergence is accompanied by the inference of a group norm which must have developed through interaction. The underlying process received support. Mediation of the effect by a greater attachment to the group was demonstrated. Thus one effect of visual anonymity is to increase group members' attachment to the group as a whole which in turn increases the social influence evidenced within the group.

The study reported in chapter 6 once more confirms that the social context moderates the effect of anonymity on social influence. This study investigated the SIDE-model's prediction with a more applied purpose: the explanation of the variability of anonymity's effects on gender differences in computer-mediated discussions. The findings here suggest that given the right circumstances, stereotyping can flourish even under conditions of anonymity. Thus the removal of social cues such as individual traits, appearance, and even information about sex or gender cannot guarantee an egalitarian treatment in the group. Where the perception is most stereotyped, this is accompanied by stereotype-consistent **behaviour** in anonymous groups whose stereotypes are activated, but only when the task was conducive to the expression of those stereotypes.

The implications of this thesis for the societal changes due to the widespread computerisation are more removed from the immediate purpose of the studies. It is often suggested that modern technology opens up the possibility of changes in various ways: forms of organising are changed due to alterations in co-operative possibilities and control structures, changes in forms of relating, and new forms of play and leisure. Although changes such as these are real and not denied, they sometimes give rise to a technological utopianism that envisions revolutionary changes in social structures driven by technological innovation. It is certainly true that over the last two decades various productive and social actions have undergone rapid change as a result of computerisation. Yet the social order has adapted disproportionately slowly, where visionaries had expected just the opposite to occur. Thus while technology has invaded aspects of everyday life to a degree believed impossible by technological experts until the 1980s, the dramatic changes in social relations that were prophesied have not materialised.

The implication is that rather than technology being a vehicle for social change, it can be a vehicle for social stasis, too. It can be inferred that technology will not change social relations unless society is willing to change itself. The dreams of technological utopians are "virtual" because society tends to reproduce itself in cyberspace.

ELI SKOGERBØ

PRIVATISING THE PUBLIC INTEREST. CONFLICTS AND COMPROMISES IN NORWEGIAN MEDIA POLITICS 1980-1993.

REPORT NO. 20, DEPARTMENT OF MEDIA AND COMMUNICATION, UNIVERSITY OF OSLO, 1996, (ISBN 82-570-6091-7)

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In recent years, the international debate on media and democracy has been spurred by different factors. First, there has been an increasing liberalisation of markets and reregulation of the communication industries, both nationally and internationally, since the beginning of the 1980s. Liberalisation is here used to denote the process of opening a sector or a market that previously has been reserved for one or a few actors, to competition, e.g., removing the privileges of national broadcasters to enjoy a monopoly situation. Reregulation refers to the process of replacing one type of regulation, e.g., a legal monopoly, with a new one, e.g., regulated competition. In all the Nordic countries, regulated competition has replaced the legal monopoly in the broadcasting sector. The degree of liberalisation in the media sector has varied between countries, but the broadcasting monopolies have been abolished and the degree of privatisation of radio and television channels have increased everywhere. In terms of politics, we have seen a shift in regulatory instruments as well as a shift in emphasis on the underlying political values.

In Norway, the most visible change was the **de facto** abolishing of the broadcasting monopoly in 1982, when the first independent local radio stations were allowed to go on the air. At approximately the same time, similar developments took place in the other Nordic countries. In the following years independent radio stations gained substantial ground, in particular among young listeners, in spite of the many problems concerning their legal and financial basis. Simultaneously, international satellite television channels were introduced for the first time, and, together with local television channels, the era of television monopoly was also put to rest.

During the process of liberalisation, the "new media", such as local radio and television, satellite and cable television were also discussed as means for democratising stale media structures and increasing freedom of choice and diversity, and there has been a reawakening of the eternal debate on the media as the fora for democratic communication. There are, however, a number of more or less conflicting normative theories prescribing the performance of the media in democratic societies, and many and long lists in the literature on which roles the media are supposed to fill as institutions in democratic societies: watchdog over authorities, information providers, communication channels for individuals and groups, entertainers and many other roles. These lists have several problems, some of which are directly related to the fact that the different roles or function they set out are grounded in different models of democracy, and they are not necessarily compatible with each other.

The thesis combines insights from theories on media and democracy with empirical analyses of media policy and structural developments of the media. The study has

several objectives: first, it discusses justifications for regarding the media as democratic institutions with specific obligations towards the public. Second, it applies these justifications as standards for evaluating the development of political objectives and regulatory instruments in the media sector; and third, it confronts the empirical results of Norwegian media policies in specific areas, press policies and local broadcasting, with the objectives and evaluate the development.

The first question that was explored was formulated as follows: How has the role of the media been constituted in the political history of ideas, and which are the central conflicts in the contemporary debate? This question is discussed in the first part of the study where a systematic discussion of theories and approaches that are used to found and justify the media as democratic institutions that need specific protection and support through regulations is provided. The classical debates on liberty of expression are examined with a particular focus on how the right to express opinions developed into a political right that has become both one of the most basic, but also one of the most contested ideas in normative political theory. Then, the revival of the citizenship concept is treated, particularly in its role as a justification for regarding the media as public services, avoiding defining them as businesses alone. The role of the media as channels and fora of the public sphere is discussed in this context. The third tradition that is discussed is the debate on participation and access, which for many years was at the centre of the discussion of communicative democracy. This discussion provides the starting points for the empirical analysis set out in part III.

The conclusions from the theoretical discussion are used as starting points for the empirical analysis. The analysis is structured around some "critical turning points" in Norwegian media politics between 1981-1993. In this part the research question can be formulated as follows: How were the objectives that guided the media political reform set out, changed and justified by the political parties that took part in the process, and what were the results of the reform process? Were shifts of governments instrumental to the shifts of goals and the use of instruments? To what extent can the changes in Norway be compared with changes in the other Nordic countries and how can similarities and differences be explained? The main conclusions of the analysis can be summed up as follows: concerning the arguments used by the Labour Party, the Party that has been in power most of the period, there has been a marked turn towards justifying media reforms with reference to the need to increase liberty of expression and freedom of choice at the expense of justifications, such as participation or the quality of the social and political debate. This corresponds to other analyses concluding that the Party has changed its ideology in a more liberal direction. The other political parties maintained their arguments and values throughout the period. Further, shifts in governments from Socialist to Non-Socialist produced major changes in media policy, whereas shifts in the opposite direction did not have the same effect. This conclusion applies to Norway and Sweden. Third, when evaluating the structural effects of the local broadcasting reforms in Norway, the most surprising conclusion was the degree of pluralism and diversity that was maintained during the decade.

ANDREJ ŠKERLEP

THE SOCIAL CONTEXT OF COMMUNICATION PROCESSES.

FACULTY OF SOCIAL SCIENCES, UNIVERSITY OF LJUBLJANA, 1996.

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This dissertation examines the social context of communication processes through detailed investigation of two distinct social theories developed by two well-known contemporary social scientists, Niklas Luhmann and Jürgen Habermas. The theory of the former is examined in the first part of the dissertation; the later in the second part. The choice of these two theoreticians is grounded on the argument that among all contemporary social scientists only Luhmann and Habermas define communication as a basic theoretical category on which they build their respective theories of society. The author examines these two social theories from the perspective of communication studies, which means that he analyses primarily the aspects that are relevant for the understanding of communication, mass media, public opinion and public sphere in a wider context of society. As the two theoretical models in question are embedded in discordant theoretical foundations, the author grounds his analysis on constructivist epistemology and its claim that scientific theories are always theoretical constructs which include cognitive blind spots. This epistemological position enables the author to establish critical distance towards the analysed theories and to combine, in conclusion, their elements in his own thesis concerning the duality of social context of communication processes.

The first part of the dissertation focuses on the theory of social systems developed by Luhmann. The opening chapters probe the theory of open systems and the theory of self-referential autopoietic systems in order to introduce basic categories of systems theory, especially concepts of the system, organisation, feedback, autopoiesis, self-reference, structural coupling, cognition, information and communication. The author detects the discord between Maturana, who first introduced the idea of autopoietic system, and Niklas Luhmann, who applied this idea to the theory of autopoietic social systems.

In the following chapters, which examine Luhmann's theory in detail, it is argued that Luhmann's model of autopoietic social systems contains basic contradiction. According to Luhmann, social systems consist exclusively of communication processes, but at the same time he claims that individuals as active participants of communicative interactions are excluded from social systems. Author presents thorough analysis of Luhmann's theory of meaning, information processing and communication. In spite of his critique, author recognises Luhmann's constructive contribution to social theory and communication studies in his analysis of functional differentiation of modern societies, especially his elaborate theoretical articulation of the relation between social subsystems (economic, political, legal system, etc.) and formal organisations (formally organised social institutions). Luhmann shows how social subsystems and formal organisations, operating in their inner environment, autonomously develop generalised symbolic media (money in economy, power in politics, justice in legal system, etc.), special programs and specialised semantics (expert languages), that de-

termine not only the structure of communication of the participants, but open for them specific cognitive perspectives on reality as well. It is shown how this theoretical approach is subsequently used by Marcinkowski for constructing the model of mass media as a publicity subsystem that performs the function of observation for other subsystems. At the end, Luhmann's old and new versions of his model of public opinion are investigated.

The investigation of Habermas' theory acts as a counterweight to Luhmann's anti-humanist thesis of exclusion of individuals from social systems. In Habermas' theory the emphasis is on the active individuals whose personalities evolve in interpersonal relations. Habermas' theory of communicative action and pragmatics of speech acts is presented in detail. To author, Habermas' theory of validity of statements and his idea of communicative rationality are very important, but adopts Wellmer's weak interpretation of Habermas' idea of reaching agreement on the ground of rational arguments. Habermas' division of society in two fundamental dimensions, lifeworld and system, is seen by the author as crucial. On the one hand, Habermas adopts phenomenological notion of lifeworld that he defines, with reference to Schutz, as the symbolically structured sphere of everyday life; Habermas adds the controversial claim that actions in this sphere are oriented mostly towards reaching agreement. On the other hand, Habermas imports and reinterprets Parson's idea of economy and politics, and designates them as the sphere of the system, in context of which actors act instrumentally. Author exposes several false simplifications and contradictions in Habermas' theoretical structure. In order to show underlying idealisation in Habermas' idea of lifeworld based on mutual understanding, the author devotes a chapter to Bourdieu's theory of social differentiation and symbolic struggles. In spite of his critique, author adopts Habermas' model of public sphere and his idea of basic tendency of public discourses towards rationality and consensus. Author concludes his examination of Habermas with a close look into his current version of the theory of public sphere and public opinion, in which Habermas overcomes some of the contradictions of his previous theories.

In the concluding chapter author develops his thesis about duality of social context of communication processes in modern societies by combining and reinterpreting elements of previously analysed theories. He adopts and reinterprets Habermas' idea of two basic dimensions of society - lifeworld and formally organised system. Author defines lifeworld as the sphere of interpersonal relations, i.e., the sphere of informal interpersonal and group communication which oscillates between co-operation and conflict. Lifeworld is confronted with the sphere of formally organised social institutions, which are embedded in functional subsystems and operate according to their own inner logic, centred on the fulfilment of institutional functional requirements. Modern formally organised institutions are constituted around formal roles and programs that require instrumental action. The formally organised and institutionalised sphere of society is from the author's point of view better analysed in Luhmann's theory of social systems. In this way author develops the thesis about duality of social context of communication processes, which consists of lifeworld and formally organised social institutions.