

ID: MSCA-19-Picone03

Discipline: Journalism

Title: Rethinking public values across European dataspheres

Abstract: The project investigates the potential of European dataspheres for integrating and fostering public values in a media context characterized by platform economies, datafication and a crisis of trust in the public sphere. European media industries find themselves increasingly dependent on US-based platforms such as Facebook and Twitter for the distribution of their content. This includes news media, thereby impacting institutions such as journalism and public service media that are said to be the “lifeline of democracy” (Fenton, 2010). The commercial logics of platforms increasingly conflict with the strong European tradition for public service media and its orientation towards public value. This clash becomes especially apparent when looking at processes of datafication within media production, where data and metrics increasingly influence editorial decision-making, prediction and valorisation of audience attention.

Datafication in its current form challenges the European public sphere, as its commercialism and “surveillancism” influence the way people connect to common interests in Europe (Hepp et al., 2016). This crisis of the public sphere includes issues of disinformation or fake news (Vargo et. al 2018), polarization (Tucker et al., 2018), filter bubbles (Pariser, 2011) and echo chambers (Flaxman & Rao, 2016). However, much of these claims are focused on the US context and while there has been ample research on public spheres in Europe, little attention has been paid to the underlying dataspheres and the ways in which data and metrics influence the everyday mediated lives of audiences.

Given these considerations, this project will contribute to the development of a European model of dataspheres based on public value creation by answering three research questions: 1) What are the challenges to public values in the context of a public sphere crisis affected by platform economy and datafication? 2) How are public values understood and associated to the datafication of media and audiences? 3) How can public values be operationalized in data processes, algorithms and platform practices of media organizations?

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