

Introduction: Navigating the Complexities of Media, Politics, and Society in Contemporary Research

The current issue of the *Media Studies* journal brings together a diverse range of scholarly works that delve into critical and contemporary topics at the intersection of media, politics, technology, and identities. Through this collection, we aim to provide a comprehensive overview of how various dimensions of media consumption, political engagement, social practices, and identity formation are being reshaped in the modern era. This special issue reflects on how media practices and political dynamics intersect with everyday life, shaping public opinion, political participation, identity construction, and even humanitarian actions in a digitalized world.

In the opening paper, Berto Šalaj offers a significant contribution to the debate surrounding the lowering of the voting age. By synthesizing empirical research from Austria, Scotland, Germany, and Norway, Šalaj addresses the normative arguments for and against lowering the voting age from 18 to 16. His analysis suggests that arguments in favor of lowering the voting age are more robust and empirically supported than those against. The study not only provides a comparative perspective across different political systems but also sheds light on the potential benefits of encouraging younger populations to engage in political processes earlier, which may enhance democratic participation and civic engagement in the long term.

Andrija Henjak and Bartul Vuksan-Ćusa explore the factors that shape public attitudes towards COVID-19 and the measures taken against it. Their analysis, grounded in data from the beginning of the pandemic's second wave, reveals that factors such as age, political awareness, trust in media, and attitudes towards the political system play significant roles in shaping public perception. Their findings highlight the crucial influence of media trust on public opinion, providing insights into the broader dynamics of political communication and crisis management in times of global uncertainty.

The evolving landscape of media consumption is further examined by Tanja Oblak Črnič, Katja Koren Ošljak, and Dejan Jontes, who focus on how adolescents navigate news consumption in a rapidly changing digital environment. Their study identifies six distinct news repertoires among young audiences, demonstrating the ambivalence and complexity of teenage media preferences during the COVID-19 pandemic. This research underlines the significance of understanding cross-media practices and the personalized "news media assemblies" created by young people, highlighting how biographical disruptions, such as those experienced during the pandemic, can profoundly influence media habits.

The tension between journalistic ethics and market-driven practices is critically examined by Stela Lechpammer, Igor Kanižaj, and Boris Beck, who investigate the use of clickbait in Croatian journalism. Based on interviews with editors and journalists from major Croatian newspapers, their study reveals the financial motivations behind the use of sensationalist headlines. Despite the short-term benefits of increased readership, the authors argue that such practices could undermine the quality and credibility of journalism in the long term. Their findings also highlight the problematic divide between

the standards applied to print and online editions, calling into question the sustainability of current journalistic practices in a digital-first era.

Matej Mikašinović Komšo provides a unique perspective on the radical right's perception of journalism, focusing on the 4chan forum's subforum "Politically Incorrect." Through qualitative content analysis, Komšo identifies a profound distrust in contemporary journalism among radical right-wing users, who often view it as propaganda subordinated to elite interests. This study reveals a radical reinterpretation of journalistic roles, emphasizing a "citizen as journalist" ethos and a combative stance towards mainstream media narratives.

Hrvoje Špehar explores the concept of Europeanization in the context of political integration and the mediatization of politics. Špehar's work offers a genealogical examination of Europeanization, discussing how the concept has evolved from institutional integration to the shaping of collective identities and public policies. His analysis further investigates how contemporary European politics is influenced by the politics of spectacle, identity creation, and strategic communication, reflecting on the transformation of the European political landscape in a mediatized world.

Gender identities in the digital age are critically analyzed by Mirela Holy, Marija Geiger Zeman, and Nikolina Borčić, who focus on non-binary influencers on Instagram. Their study reveals how these influencers challenge binary gender stereotypes and highlight the fluidity and diversity of gender experiences. Through language, style, and multimedia content, non-binary influencers use social media platforms to subvert traditional norms, creating new discursive spaces that foster visibility and acceptance for marginalized identities.

The dynamics of digital humanitarian action are examined by Mijo Bežovan, Antonio Karlović, and Robert Mihaljinec. Through a mixed-methods approach, the authors analyze how digital platforms can facilitate community cooperation and meaningful collective action. Their findings suggest that digital activism, when conducted transparently and collaboratively, can transcend "slacktivism" and yield tangible societal benefits.

Finally, Douglas Hochstetler investigates the Strava app as a form of social media for endurance athletes, exploring both the benefits and ethical challenges it presents. Utilizing a philosophical approach, Hochstetler examines how digital tools like Strava shape user experiences and interactions, offering insights into the intersections between technology, community, and personal fulfillment in the digital age.

This special issue of the *Media Studies* journal thus offers a rich tapestry of research that explores the multifaceted ways in which media, politics, and society intersect in our rapidly changing world. By bringing together these diverse studies, we hope to provide readers with a deeper understanding of the complexities and challenges that define contemporary media landscapes and political dynamics.

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