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Editorial

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Editors of the Weizenbaum Journal of the Digital Society

ABSTRACT

The five papers in this issue of the Weizenbaum Journal of the Digital Society examine processes of digitalization from a perspective that encompasses political economy, political science, psychology, and communication science. In turn, the contributors explore the relationship between digitalization and capitalism, the role of civic tech initiatives, the regulation of political micro-targeting on social media, the use of fictive accounts of historical figures on social media, and concepts for the participatory development of research agendas.

This first issue of the third volume of the Weizenbaum Journal of the Digital Society combines insights from political economy, political science, and communication science to examine the dynamics of digitalization processes.

In the first of five research papers, Timo Seidl analyzes the relationship between digitalization and capitalism, arguing that three revolutionary processes are underway, namely, the emergence of platforms, big data, and artificial intelligence. Seidl reviews the research literature on capitalism and digitalization to link these three processes to commodification and the disruption of social relations.

The work of Lea Frentzel-Beyme, Merle Holtze, Jessica Szczuka, and Nicole Krämer addresses the phenomenon of historical figures being brought onto social media to create "parasocial interactions." The authors examine the possibility of using this approach for history education, analyzing an Instagram account created for Sophie Scholl, a resistance fighter against Germany's National Socialist regime, to associate parasocial interactions with interest in the historical figure. Notably, many of those interacting with the account were unaware of its fictional nature.

Next, Thorsten Thiel, Sebastian Berg, Niklas Rakowski, and Veza Clute-Simon focus on the pandemic-era #WirVsVirus civic hackathon, which received support from the German government. The authors examine how civic hackathons articulate different political representation claims. The #WirVsVirus hackathon helped civic tech initiatives articulate their interests vis-à-vis the state even if it failed to fulfill all participation promises.

In this issue's fourth research paper, Martin-Pieter Jansen and Nicole Krämer examine the possibilities for regulating political micro-targeting activities on platforms. The study considers disclosure labels as one potential solution to this quandary, building on findings from a factorial survey that analyzed the perception of different types of disclosure labels for micro-targeted advertisements on Facebook. Soberingly, disclosure labels did not increase the credibility of sources or the perception of source trustworthiness. Most participants did not recall the disclosure labels at all. The authors engage this finding in their discussion of alternative approaches to regulating micro-targeting.

In the final research paper of this issue, Josephine Schmitt and Samuel Simon discuss ways of integrating citizens and the public into the development of research agendas. They suggest the concept of participatory, agile, co-creative academic research based on the innovation "Double Diamond" framework. Using a research institute as a case study, they demonstrate how researchers can use the continuous alternation between collecting and condensing findings from various sources (e.g., expert workshops, citizen surveys, data mining) to develop an understanding of relevant topics and questions for research. They discuss these findings in relation to the need and value of participatory approaches to research on digital transformation.

We wish you an inspiring reading.