

Program

4 - 5th March 2021 | NRW Forschungskolleg & Düsseldorf Institute for Internet and Democracy | Düsseldorf, Germany



Day One: 4th March 2021 (UTC+1)

1.00 pm	Check-In
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1.10 pm	Welcome Notes <i>Stefan Marschall</i> <i>(Vice President for International Relations and Science Communications at the University of Düsseldorf)</i> <i>Martin Mauve</i> <i>(Spokesman of the NRW Forschungskolleg Online Participation and board member of the Düsseldorf Institute for Internet and Democracy)</i>
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1.20 pm	Session 1: Governing the Comment Section <i>Chair: Christiane Eilders</i> What It Means to Be a Good (Online) Host – Community and User Engagement at ZEIT ONLINE <i>Julia Meyer (Zeit Online)</i> ZEIT ONLINE hosts one of the largest news communities in Europe and organizes a number of online and offline engagement formats, including a festival for young audiences and My Country Talks, a platform for political dialogue. In our presentation, we will talk about the value of these initiatives, how we manage them on such a large scale, and the role they will play for the future of our journalism.
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2.00 pm	<i>Breakout session</i>
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2.10 pm	RHETORiC – Reducing Hate with Editorial Tools for Online Reactions and Comments <i>Michiel Nuytemans (Tree Company) & Steven Verlaak (Digital Lead at Mediahuis)</i> The objective of RHETORiC is to provide tools for news editors and consumers to detect and counter polarisation on news websites and support civil discourse through interface elements and semi-automatic moderation of textual and visual comments. Because we believe that comments are not necessarily the endpoint of a story, broader strategies of user engagement are explored by developing engagement strategies and participatory news formats. RHETORiC is a Belgian consortium consisting of the public broadcaster VRT, Mediahuis (publisher of leading news brands in the Benelux), The University of Leuven, and innovation companies Tree company, Textgain, and Wieni.
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2.50 pm *Breakout Session*

3.00 pm *Break*

3.10 pm **Session 2: User Comments from a User and Moderator Perspective** *Chair: Marc Ziegele*

How to design good moderation

Andrew Losowsky (Voxmedia)

Coral was created as a collaboration between Mozilla, The New York Times and The Washington Post, in order to improve the comments on some of the world's biggest news websites. As the Head of Coral, Andrew Losowsky will share how they approached the problem, what they've built so far, and what it means to focus on the experience of moderators as much as that of the commenters.

3.50 pm *Breakout Session*

4.00 pm **A Love-Hate Relationship: How People Feel about Online Discussions**

Gina M. Masullo (University of Texas at Austin, USA)

Drawing from 10 focus groups in five countries, this talk pulls together what people feel is rewarding about the discussions that take place on online platforms – and what they find is lacking. Participants from Brazil, Germany, Malaysia, South Africa, and the United States showed remarkable commonality in what they like about online talk – (i.e., feeling connected to others and their community, getting help when they face problems). But they were equally congruent in what troubles them about online discussions – a lack of privacy, truthfulness, and civility. This talk offers suggestions for improving online discussions based on these findings and this broader area of research.

4.40 pm *Breakout Session*

4.50 pm *Break*

5.00 pm **Keynote: Social Media for Societal Outcomes: Reflections on a Global Research Agenda**

Alex Leavitt (Senior Researcher at Facebook)

In the past five years, social media platforms have rapidly deployed a number of research initiatives and product interventions to address misinformation and related media ecosystem issues. This talk will cover some of the sociological, technological, legal, and philosophical difficulties that need to be overcome across all platforms with implementing solutions to these societal issues. It draws on core challenges for research on international media ecosystem contexts, signal and control usability, systems of expertise and governance, policy implications, and global programs. Alex Leavitt, a senior UX Researcher at Facebook, will cover a number of his collaborative research and product development projects focusing on the societal impact of social media platforms and conclude with key and pressing research questions for academic and industry researchers in the coming years.

6.00 pm **End of Day One**



Day Two: 5th March 2021 (UTC+1)

9.00 am	Check-In	
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9.10 am	Session 3: Civil Society Perspective	<i>Chair: Dennis Friess</i>
	Digital Democracy Can Be Hacked! <i>Philip Kreissel (Social Media Analyst at #ichbinhier)</i>	
	The talk will focus on how extremists and opportunist groups use flaws of social media and other digital participation platforms in order to promote their agenda. Beside this, the talk will also cover ideas how to counter those organized online behavior.	

9.50 am	<i>Breakout Session</i>	
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10.00 am	How Civil Society Shapes the Future of Online Discussions – An Overview <i>Hanna Gleiss & Nadine Brömme (Das NETTZ)</i>	
	Hate speech online has become a socially broad topic. Civil courage in digital spaces is more urgent than ever. Many civil society initiatives are committed to ensuring that everyone can move freely and securely on the Internet. Which approaches against hate speech and for constructive debates do exist? What are the most pressing challenges for these initiatives and what needs to be done? How can we work together more effectively (politics, platforms, research...)? Das NETTZ links actors, builds bridges and passes on demands from the civil society to decision-makers in politics and in tech platforms.	

10.40 am	<i>Breakout Session</i>	
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10.50 am	<i>Break</i>	
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11.00 am	Session 4: Online Discussions from a Law Perspective	<i>Chair: Frank Dietrich</i>
	Hate Speech, Law Enforcement and Civil Rights: The Struggle for a Cohesive Approach <i>Anna-Lena von Hodenberg (Managing Director at HateAid)</i>	
	Discussions – social or political – nowadays take place online. Every citizen can exercise his or her right to freedom of expression and participate in discussions. But this freedom comes with a challenge: How can national law be enforced online? Law enforcement on the Internet has been almost undetectable in recent years. Executive and legislative bodies are not sensitised to the issue of digital violence, are not properly prepared and are often overwhelmed. As a result, the Internet is perceived as a legal vacuum and those affected are left helpless, while perpetrators can carry out illegal acts with impunity. A way must be found to allow online law enforcement and civil rights to coexist. HateAid is trying to fill that vacuum in Germany.	

11.40 am	<i>Breakout Session</i>	
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11.50 am **Parliaments, Courts, Companies: Who Sets the Rules for Online Discussions (and Who Should)?**

Matthias C. Kettemann (Senior Researcher at the Leibniz Institute for Media Research /Hans-Bredow-Institut)

States have the primary responsibility to respect, protect and implement human rights. In online just as in offline spaces, the legislator has to provide norms ensuring that communications threaten neither individual rights nor destabilize social cohesion. Online communication platforms have a secondary responsibility not to violate human rights and to provide redress mechanisms when they do. Most have developed private normative orders that are progressively specific. Some platforms pursue financial or political goals and orient norms toward these. Others have attempted to establish legitimacy for their private norms by engaging with outside stakeholders in the norm production processes. As all relevant online discussion spaces are privately owned and many affect the aggregation and articulation of ideas essential to democratic decision-making, these private norms have public impacts. This is when courts come in. These have to navigate between the freedoms of platforms, the rights of users and the free and democratic fundamental social order. Understanding how the rules for online discussions interact is thus key to normatively framing the future of democracy and society in hybrid communicative spaces.

12.30 am *Breakout Session & Instructions Poster Session*

12.45 am *Lunch Break & Virtual Poster Session*

Fridays for Future Meets Citizen Science

Laura Ferschinger, Anna Soßdorf, Witold Mucha, Viviana Warnken, Viktor Burgi & Philipp Krach (University of Düsseldorf)

Interactive Moderation in Comment Sections

Marc Ziegele, Dominique Heinbach & Anke Stoll (University of Düsseldorf)

We love to disagree - How Polarizer.io offers a platform to disagree safely

Iwan Ittermann & Jan Wilk (Polarizer)

KOSMO – KI-Assisted Collective-Social Moderation of Online Discourses

Marie-Kathrin Siemer, Moritz Ritter (Liquid Democracy), Roland Wehking (Institute for Participatory Engineering), Marc Ziegele & Katharina Gerl (University of Düsseldorf)

Support Decision-making through Collaborative Evolution of Proposals

Björn Ebbinghaus (University of Düsseldorf)

2.00 pm **Session 5: New Approaches for Online Discussions**

Chair: Tobias Escher

Why One-to-One Online Discussions are the Future of Online Discussions

Sabine Mehnert (Project Manager at Diskutier Mit Mir / Discuss with Me)

The Internet is an indispensable part of everyday life, particularly for younger generations. However, the internet is also perceived as a space of polarization with exposure to hate speech and other forms of aggression common in many-to-many communications. Especially political and controversial topics seem prone to attract unwanted attention in comment sections and on social media. This may reinforce a tendency towards the use of private messengers, where users engage mostly with like-minded peers. This talk presents the approach followed by Diskutier Mit Mir ("Discuss with Me"), offering anonymous one-to-one discussions, allowing participants to discuss topics they disagree on, while providing them with a safe digital space. Starting out with some theoretical background, the talk will present the basic idea of Diskutier Mit Mir as well as conceptual and technological challenges encountered during the development process.

2.40 pm	<i>Breakout Session</i>	
2.50 pm	No Plan Survives Contact with Reality – From Scientific Theory to Real Users <i>Christian Meter & Alexander Schneider (University of Düsseldorf)</i> In this talk we present our learnings from transitioning a scientifically engineered discussion platform into one used by everyday normal users.	
3.30 pm	<i>Breakout Session</i>	
3.40 pm	<i>Break</i>	
3.50 pm	Session 6: Online Discussions beyond Forums Argument Technology: Theory, Engineering & Deployment <i>Chris Reed (University of Dundee)</i> The establishment and growth of computational models of argument over the past 25 years has been a uniquely fruitful collaboration crossing disciplinary boundaries from humanities, through social and computational sciences, to engineering. More recently, argument mining in particular has enjoyed phenomenal success, exploding from nothing to a worldwide industry in barely half a decade. Despite ingenious theoretical creativity and ground-breaking innovative collaborations, the area has, however, largely struggled to deliver products and applications to end users. Why should this be? What are the challenges and dynamics that have stymied better uptake, and what can be done to improve this translational aspect? This talk draws on the experiences from the Centre for Argument Technology in the development of philosophical and linguistic theory, in the engineering of integrative and interoperable systems, and in deploying with a variety of partners. The goal is to unpack some of the connections between formal and human argumentation, and to explore the challenges and opportunities laying ahead of the field of argument technology.	<i>Chair: Martin Mauve</i>
4.30 pm	<i>Breakout Session</i>	
4.40 pm	Towards Crowd-Scale Pareto-Optimal Decision-Making <i>Marc Klein (MIT)</i> The world's most pressing problems are straining the limits of our current largely hierarchical decision-making processes, because they inherently require input from a wide diversity of experts and stakeholders. Social computing technologies have the potential to engage very large numbers of people, but fail badly however when applied to collective decision making about complex and contentious problems. This talk will give an overview of three research projects I have been pursuing to fill this gap: the Deliberatorium (for crowd-scale idea generation), the Bag of Lemons (for crowd-based idea filtering), and complex negotiation (for finding Pareto-optima agreements in domains with many options and participants).	
5.20	Closing remarks <i>Martin Mauve (Spokesman of the NRW Forschungskolleg Online Participation and board member of the Düsseldorf Institute for Internet and Democracy)</i>	
5.30	End of Conference	

Further Information

The Conference “Future of Online Discussions” is going to take place from 4th – 5th March 2021. It is jointly organized by the *NRW Forschungskolleg Online Participation* and the *Düsseldorf Institute for Internet and Democracy* (DIID) at the University of Düsseldorf. Both institutions have a strong interdisciplinary focus on online participation research. Due to the ongoing pandemic the conference is going to take place via the online tool Webex (<https://www.webex.com/downloads.html/>). Please make sure you download the app in advance to ensure proper function (it is also possible to use the service via browser, but the app works much better. Please consider that *Linux* systems do not function with the app but the browser).

We ask speakers to provide a talk of 20 minutes including a presentation which should be shared via the shared screen option (sessions will not be recorded). The speaker’s presentations will be followed by a chaired discussion of 20 minutes. After every discussion we do break out sessions of 10 minutes where we randomly select 6-7 participants in separate online rooms. We would deeply encourage everybody to attend these “virtual coffee breaks” to enable more informal forms of discussion. There will also be breaks of 10 minutes after every session to use the bathroom or provide yourself with snacks and drinks.

During the extended lunch break we are planning to have a virtual poster session. We will upload all posters on the conference website in advance. All poster presenters will also introduce the poster shortly before the break. During the break all participants have the chance to visit the different breakout rooms where poster presenters looking forward to talk about their research. You can find all Posters [here](#).

We will get back to all registered participants with further information few days prior to the conference. We kindly ask everybody *not* to share that information with others in order to avoid disturbance by unregistered people.

Please see the conference website (<https://diid.hhu.de/en/food/>) and our twitter account (@diid_hhu) for updates. We are looking forward to see you. If you have further questions please contact the program coordinator: Dennis Frieß (dennis.friess@hhu.de).