

Is Social the New Public?

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The opening keynote of this conference explores three basic questions: Do new Web-based definitions of “social” (as in “social media”) overwrite former conceptions of “public” (as in public media)? Can social media be regarded as a site of struggle to define what public space is? And how are social media involved in the transformation of particular domains? The boundaries between public, private, and corporate in the ecosystem of connective media are increasingly fuzzy. The ubiquitous implementation of social media transforms public space and public institutions just as it impacts notions of privacy. Self-evident public spaces, such as journalism and public television but also law and order or activism, are currently reconfigured as a result of techno-commercial mechanisms inscribed in social media platforms. What are these dynamics of social media logic and how do they affect the nature of mediated publicness? We propose to examine the social Web as a contentious dialogical space: a blend of old and new media tactics in the procurement of public debate; a mixture of offline and online interventions in the social order; a clash of civic, corporate, and state forces over the question what constitutes publicness. This keynote tries to capture the theoretical debates at stake in the various fields highlighted during this conference: journalism, social activism, (public) television, urban space, and politics.