

English Abstracts

Andreas Hepp / Wiebke Loosen / Uwe Hasebrink / Jo Reichertz: Constructivism in Communication Studies: The Necessity of a (Renewed) Debate (Konstruktivismus in der Kommunikationswissenschaft: Über die Notwendigkeit einer (erneuten) Debatte), pp. 181-206

The present discussion surrounding constructivism in communication studies is characterized especially by three questions: Precisely how does constructivist thinking manifest itself in media and communication research? Which foundation does it offer for empirical research? And in which way does this necessitate a shift in existing perspectives and approaches? These questions are addressed in the introduction to this special issue on 'Constructivism in Communication Studies'. First, and with reference to the recent media change, it outlines why it is necessary to (re-)open the discussion on constructivism. On this basis, the trajectories of constructivism in German communication studies over the last 50 years are reconstructed and the different articles of this special issue are located in the discussion. Finally, ideas for a constructivist critique are introduced – a critique which becomes necessary in the light of the fundamental and deep character of recent changes in media and communications.

Keywords: constructivism, change of media and communication, transforming communications, critique, empirical media and communication research, mediatization

Siegfried J. Schmidt: Constructivist Argumentations as Basic Tools for Media and Communication Studies (Konstruktivistische Argumentationen als Reflexionsangebote für die Medien- und Kommunikationswissenschaften), pp. 207-218

This paper seeks to answer the question of what argumentative contributions the present constructivist discourse has to offer to Media and Communication Studies. With regard to the many-voiced status of the present constructivist discourse, we need to decide which variant(s) of this discourse may reasonably serve as the theoretical framework of such a contribution. Hence, theoretical problems have to be solved first, in order to demonstrate why and how specified issues of the chosen discourse variant can substantially support the work of Media and Communication scholars. This paper proposes a strictly process-oriented and non-dualistic variant of constructivism, which clearly builds on the argument that any contact with reality essentially depends on the observer and his/her activities. In conclusion, this paper examines the consequences such an epistemological decision has for the conception, the analysis and the evaluation of basic issues such as truth, knowledge, understanding and culture, in order to answering the question of what we mean when we talk about the construction of reality via the media.

Keywords: constructivist discourse, observer, process-orientation, reality, truth, journalism, culture, contingency, media-culture science, understanding

Ricarda Drüeke, Elisabeth Klaus, Martina Thiele: A Genealogy of Constructivism within Gender Media Studies (Eine Genealogie des Konstruktivismus in der kommunikationswissenschaftlichen Geschlechterforschung), pp. 219-235

During the 1990s, constructivism and its different variants were a much-debated topic in German-speaking Communication Studies, as well as in Gender Studies. Meanwhile, however, constructivist positions seem to be widely accepted. In our paper, we briefly

ponder the epistemological consequences of constructivism, and introduce different constructivist positions that have exerted tremendous influence on the development of the field of Gender Studies within Communication Research. We differentiate between social and interactional constructivism – variants that presuppose a social subject – and discursive and poststructuralist positions, which underscore the importance of communicative action and do not assume an intentionally acting subject. Our goal in this paper is to shed light on the question of how constructivism and its different variants have changed and are still changing research and thinking about the interlinkages of communication, media and gender.

Keywords: gender studies, social constructivism, discourse theory, poststructuralism, development of communication research

Gerhard Vowe: Theoretical Approaches as Communicative Constructions: Options and Consequences of a Constructivist Explanation of the Development of Research (Theoretische Ansätze als kommunikative Konstruktionen. Optionen und Konsequenzen einer konstruktivistischen Erklärung der Wissenschaftsentwicklung), pp. 236-251

Can theoretical approaches be seen as communicative constructions? Using the example of the ‘Media Reality’ approach in communication studies, we show which benefits of approaching the development of theoretical approaches on the basis of a constructivist understanding of science. Firstly, the explanatory possibilities of social constructivism on macro-, meso- and micro-level of interaction are explained. Keywords are generational change, collective knowledge production, opportunistic research logic. Hence, the explanatory possibilities of communicative constructivism will be shown. Here, different concepts of communication can be used, for instance, a language-based or a media-based concept of communication. The chosen approach is, then, consequential to the strategic design of theoretical approaches.

Keywords: theoretical approach, media reality, communicative construction of the social world, social construction of reality, history of communication studies.

Jo Reichertz: On the Role of Communicative Action and the Media in Communicative Constructivism (Die Bedeutung des kommunikativen Handelns und der Medien im Kommunikativen Konstruktivismus), pp. 252-274

This paper aims to point out some important theoretical innovations of the theory of Communicative Constructivism, and seeks to show the benefits of using this concept as a basis of the work in Communication and Media Studies. I start by reviewing the impact-oriented concept of communication, which underlies the Communicative Constructivism. Then, in working through Social Constructivism, I demonstrate why the Communicative Constructivism switches from language and knowledge to communicative action as the basic operation of generating knowledge. In conclusion, I examine the production and interpretation of television programmes in an exemplary manner, and will highlight the advantages of understanding these as artefacts, as communicative gestures of a corporated actor.

Keywords: communicative constructivism, social constructivism, corporated actor, impact-oriented concept of communicative acting

Peter Gentzel: Practice and Materiality. On the Challenges of Critical Constructivist Communication and Media Research (Praktisches Wissen und Materialität. Herausforderungen für kritisch-konstruktivistische Kommunikations- und Medienforschung), pp. 275-293

This paper analyses the paradigm of constructivism, relating it to current theoretical and empirical developments within social science. I am meeting the demand for describing social and cultural phenomena beyond correspondence-theoretical approaches by critically discussing various forms of constructivism and elaborating on the epistemological position of ‘The Social Construction of Reality’ (Berger & Luckmann). I argue that Berger and Luckmann are epistemologically ‘unscrupulously’ and, subsequently, show analytical weaknesses. This critical discussion forms the backdrop of an unfolding of the position of practice theories and a discussion of their innovative potential to social science research. In this context, the question of how to deal with media as artefacts and technologies is evaluated. I discuss this relationship and analyse it from a communication studies point of view, by means of two prominent analysis concepts, namely the ‘actor-network-theory’ of Bruno Latour and the ‘boundary objects’ approach of Susan Leigh Star from the field of science and technology studies. Finally, I outline central theoretical challenges and analytical perspectives for communication and media research.

Keywords: constructivism, practice theory, actor-network-theory, science and technology studies, boundary objects, communication analysis, media analysis

Hektor Haarkötter: Constructivism or ‘New Realism’? Two Competing Approaches to Epistemology and their Implications to Journalism and Journalism Research (Konstruktivismus oder „Neuer Realismus“? Zwei konkurrierende Ansätze der Welterklärung und ihre Bedeutung für Journalismus und Journalismusforschung), pp. 294-312

The ‘New Realism’ is more than just a catchphrase. It offers the opportunity to reconcile theoretical and methodological standpoints such as realism and constructivism, which have so far been irreconcilable. Ontologically, this occurs through the inclusion of objective reality and observer perspective (‘Sinnfeldontologie’), epistemologically it occurs through the broadening of the concept of empiricism and the reference to the mediality of perception and experience (‘documentality’). This is relevant to journalism and journalism research, because the relevance of reality in journalism is evident. However, this cannot be substantiated adequately through constructivism, although this theory is very popular within Media and Communication Studies. Moreover, the concept of reality is closely related to the concept of truth in journalism; the latter even being standardised by law. A ‘moderate realism’ or ‘soft constructivism’ can, therefore, theoretically substantiate this claim, and thus unify objective factuality and subjectively meant meaning.

Keywords: epistemology, methodology, constructivism, realism, truth

Hagen Schölzel: Composing Political Public Spheres. On Aspects of a Sociology of Communication and Media in Actor Network Theory and the works of Bruno Latour (Die Komposition politischer Öffentlichkeiten. Konturen einer Kommunikations- und Mediensoziologie in den Arbeiten Bruno Latours und der Akteur-Netzwerk-Theorie), pp. 313-329

This paper discusses elements of a compositionist sociology of media and communication in Actor Network Theory (ANT). Drawing on the concept of composition or

compositionism, I relate the quasi-constructivist approach of Bruno Latour and ANT to established ideas of (social) constructivism. I then show the relevance of publics in ANT debates and particularly in Latour's analysis of the so-called Modern Constitution. In addition, I discuss relevant elements of a sociology of communication and media, which several authors in ANT-circles are working on. Finally, I mention a current controversy within these circles which results from ANT's quasi-constructivist approach and which may be the starting point for further research that has the potential to shift the discussion of actor-network-publics closer towards well-established concerns in sociology of media and communication. Actor-network-publics turn out to be hybrid compositions in which controversial issues, media technology and concerned humans are related to each other in specific political articulations.

Keywords: publics, actor network theory, compositionism, Bruno Latour, politics

Andreas Hepp / Uwe Hasebrink: Communicative Figurations. A Conceptual Approach to Researching Processes of Communicative Construction in Times of Pro-found Mediatization (Kommunikative Figurationen. Ein konzeptioneller Rahmen zur Erforschung kommunikativer Konstruktionsprozesse in Zeiten tiefgreifender Mediatisierung), pp. 330-347

Today, digital media saturate all domains of society. However, what are the consequences of such changing media environments to the construction of social reality? This paper aims at offering a conceptual approach which might be used to answer this question in the light of social constructivism. Our starting point is a discussion of the need for an advancement of constructivist thinking in Media and Communication studies. Drawing on the results of mediatization research, we show that the changes within the media environment have different consequences to each of the social domains. In light of this, a conceptual approach is needed that focuses on the meso level; particularly on issues of collectivity and organizations. In a further step, the main trends of a changing media environment are outlined and discussed with respect to their potential consequences to the construction of social reality. Finally, we introduce the approach of 'communicative figurations' in order to investigating these consequences. Hence, the transforming media-related construction of social reality can now be reconstructed empirically as well as theoretically on the meso level.

Keywords: media change, mediatization, social constructivism, figuration, media environment

Wiebke Loosen / Armin Scholl: Journalism and (Algorithmic) Construction of Reality. Epistemological Observations (Journalismus und (algorithmische) Wirklichkeitskonstruktion. Epistemologische Beobachtungen), pp. 348-366

Today algorithms are deemed to have a power similar to that of journalism to produce public spheres and constructions of reality. The debate relating to this proposition allow us to observe how questions, which have formed the core of journalism research, are now being reformulated. Such questions concern the definition of what underpins information in society and in the news, the definition of relevance, the appropriateness of selection processes, the idea of objectivity and how items offered as information relate to 'reality'. The epistemological challenge of the reality of the mass media (to Communication Studies) has, therefore, waxed virulent again, given the new indexes of the changed conditions for communication in society. We use the possibilities of construc-

tivism when observing the debate about the significance of algorithms for producing a public sphere/reality and propose a view of professional journalism and algorithmically generated information not as two separate sites for constructing reality but as interwoven with and relating to each other.

Keywords: algorithms, constructivism, journalism, epistemology, constructivist epistemology, media reality

Margreth Lünenborg: From Communicative Forms to Contingent Hybrids. On Constructivist and Performative Perspectives in Journalism Studies (Von Mediengattungen zu kontingenten Hybriden: Konstruktivistische und performativitätstheoretische Perspektiven für die Journalistik), pp. 367-384

Historically, journalism owes its authority to giving valid information about social reality from the use of specific forms as genres. However, this authority has doubtlessly become fragile. To examine this development and explain some of the reasons this article discusses the impact of constructivist theory on the development of a genre theory in Journalism Studies. While in the beginning, forms were mostly discussed in practical guides for future journalists, the constructivist theory of media forms offered a complex model of communication. Forms were understood as regulating, structuring and standardizing expectations of media texts for journalists and audiences alike. This article draws on discussions of communicative forms in social constructivism as a predecessor of radical constructivism. The assumption of a sharp distinction between factual and fictional journalistic forms, which produce an unambiguous reference to reality, then becomes theoretically and empirically problematic. Processes of hybridization are dissolving distinct journalistic genres – institutionalized communicative forms become contingent hybrids. Based on a constructivist analysis, this paper argues for an inclusion of the performative dimensions of forms. In such an understanding, any form is emerging in its performance as iteration and re-signification of established conventions.

Keywords: journalism, communicative figuration, media forms, radical constructivism, social constructivism, genre, hybrid forms

Hendrik Michael: A Media Genre-based Approach to Observing the Blurring of Boundaries between Journalistic Formats, using the Example of ‘Fake News Shows’ (Ein mediengattungstheoretischer Modellentwurf zur Beobachtung der Entgrenzung journalistischer Formate am Beispiel von „fake news shows“), pp. 385-405

In Media and Communication research, there is a lack of approaches and models for analysing the ongoing blurring of boundaries in journalism and the hybridization of journalistic formats. However, constructivist media genre theory offers promising approaches that might be of use to an analysis of the current situation. My paper aims at laying the ground for theoretical and empirical approaches to constructivist research of journalistic genres. Using the example of ‘fake news shows’, this study poses questions concerning journalistic genres and sets out to explore the potential of a constructivist perspective. Such an approach can help to describe and understand the hybridization of journalistic formats and the blurring of journalism’s functional boundaries. Constructivist theory, indeed, conceives media genres as communicative proposals that ought to be analysed within the circular structures of media communication. I develop an original model design, putting it to the test by analysing two recent formats which are proto-

typical examples of mixed journalistic and satirical content in TV; namely 'The Daily Show with Jon Stewart' and 'Last Week Tonight' with John Oliver.

Keywords: media formats, journalistic formats, hybridization, satirical content

Christoph Neuberger: A Suggestion for a Pragmatic Theoretical Framework of Journalistic Objectivity (Journalistische Objektivität. Vorschlag für einen pragmatischen Theorierahmen), pp. 406-431

The question of whether the journalistic norm of objectivity can be fulfilled is a steady cause for heated debate. This paper aims at providing a better understanding of the social conditionality of genesis, verification, distribution and acceptance of knowledge in journalism. Any sceptical objections to the assumption that absolute certainty is obtainable are met and responded to by employing a somewhat softer concept of knowledge. I understand knowledge to be justified by good reasons, and such reasons only exist if methodological standards are met that apply in a certain context. In the context of 'journalism', standards will be discussed throughout different phases of the knowledge process and throughout different levels of justification. Finally, I analyse how the media change and thus, how the changes of the public sphere may cause an erosion of the institutional order of knowledge.

Keywords: knowledge, objectivity, journalism, constructivism, realism