

**merzWissenschaft | medien + erziehung  
call for papers 2017**

**extended deadline: 27<sup>th</sup> February 2017**

**Social Science Research between Digital Humanities and Subject Orientation**

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the merzWissenschaft Editing Team (JFF)**

*merzWissenschaft* 2017 is working to stimulate scientific reflection on the challenges and consequences associated with the application of computer-based procedures in social science research and to anchor such reflection in media literacy discourse. The objective is to formulate a position regarding the application of digital procedures in scientific activities and in doing so to address the question of how digital and computer-based media literacy research is, can be and should be. The spectrum to be considered ranges from new data collection methods (e. g. integrated in apps) to the use of Big Data Analytics to evaluate large and small and possibly personalized data inventories in order to derive findings, up to and including the question of knowledge exchange and availability. The focus is on both original media literacy research and research in the relevant involved disciplines (Communication Sciences, Education, Sociology, Psychology, Information Science, etc.).

According to Schrape (2016) the term 'Big Data' refers generally to projected expectations of both utopias and dystopias. Given this tension between expectation and apprehension, existing publications in the field of media education are concerned primarily with the question of what conclusions are to be drawn for media-educational practice. However, Big Data Analytics are being attributed a new epistemological access to social process. It is postulated that Data Mining approaches are able to represent and analyze societal processes objectively and independent of theoretical presuppositions, and that these approaches can thus be considered superior to established methods of social science research. This highlights the differences between 'data-driven' and 'theory-driven' scientific approaches, also marking a threshold beyond which digital processes are not solely aids or tools for scientific activities. The question is much more to what extent these procedures conflict with central principles of social science research in general and media literacy research in particular such as the subject orientation and unique adequacy of data collection methods. Correspondingly, social science research as well as media education as a scientific discipline must confront such approaches in a critical-reflective manner in order to confirm their theoretical and methodological repertoire and when necessary to adopt data-driven approaches or to reject them with sufficient justification.

Such critical reflection is a necessary concern when investigating the extent to which central theoretical concepts (e. g. normative orientation towards subject self-determination) are compatible with the implications of the digital procedures and/or where conflicts occur in this context. Here an important foundation is the encounter with human images and the subjectivization processes in the relationships between people, digital (media) systems and institutions as well as companies. The opposing poles of this current discourse are evident on the one hand in the prospect of computer-assisted humans as human-machine hybrids (or cyborgs), in which the technologies employed expand the abilities of the human to act. Such concepts contrast with theoretical traditions that regard computerized evaluation and decision-making procedures as limiting the human being's scope of action. Between these poles is the position of the co-constitutive intermeshing of humans and technology, where the qualities of both humans and technologies are emergent in practice. In this view, the ability to act is not (only) expanded, but rather qualitatively transformed. Thus representation of and reflection on the question of which theoretical approaches and basic assumptions are to be employed is an absolute prerequisite for the determination of a media-educational position. This is in particular the case since the platforms and technologies themselves already create or contribute to the creation of reality and are never neutral with respect to the objects relevant for media literacy research in particular

and social science research in general. This also has an impact on the associated discussion and helps determine which questions and processes are at the focus of social scientific observations.

At the same time the question arises as to who has access to relevant data inventories and to what extent independent research is possible using such data, since precisely that data generated in day-to-day media activity is not freely accessible (for good reason). Nevertheless digital service providers can accumulate an extensive amount of data that they can then evaluate using the appropriate methods. The inherent questions of disparate conditions and prerequisites for commercial and academic research require particular reflection and critical consideration in the societally relevant area of media literacy education.

*merzWissenschaft* 2017 would like to call for theoretical or empirical articles that address the topic areas outlined above from the point of view of social science research and which can thus be instructive for media education. Here topics may cover the following possible areas:

- What challenges are associated with media literacy issues in scientific activities with respect to digitalization?
- What theoretical and normative questions arise in connection with the relationships among humans – media – society with respect to digitalization as a basis for media literacy research and practice?
- How does the current development of continuing digitalization impact the concept of being human in research as well as in media-educational approaches?
- What new digital practices and methods are developing in media literacy research and/or in related disciplines? How are these related to central premises of the formation of theory such as orientation of actions, subject orientation, etc.? How are they to be regarded in terms of normative concepts such as media literacy and media literacy education?
- What current empirical findings have already been made through the novel use of digital technologies in media literacy research and/or in related scientific areas?
- What consequences are to be expected from the scientific encounter with the relationships among humans – digital media – society for the development of media literacy models?

*merzWissenschaft* provides a forum advancing scientific analysis in media education and promoting progress in the theoretical foundation of the discipline. In this capacity *merzWissenschaft* is calling for qualified papers from various relevant disciplines for the continuing development of expert discussions on media literacy.

### Of interest are original papers:

- With an empirical or theoretical foundation
- That present new findings, aspects or approaches to the topic
- That are also explicitly related to one of the subareas or topics outlined above or that explore a separate topic within the scope of the overall context of the Call.

Abstracts with a maximum length of 6,000 characters (including blank spaces) can be submitted to the *merz*-editorial team ([merz@jff.de](mailto:merz@jff.de)) until no later than February 27, 2017. Submissions should follow the *merzWissenschaft layout specifications*, available at [www.merz-zeitschrift.de](http://www.merz-zeitschrift.de) (at merz → für autoren und autorinnen → style guide merz). Please contact Susanne Eggert, tel. +49 89 68 989 152, e-mail: [susanne.eggert@jff.de](mailto:susanne.eggert@jff.de) with any questions.

### Summary of Deadlines

- February 27, 2017: Submission of abstracts to [merz@jff.de](mailto:merz@jff.de)
- March 20, 2017: Final decision on acceptance/rejection of the abstracts
- June 12, 2017: Submission of papers
- June 12 to July 24, 2017: Assessment phase
- August/September 2017: Revision phase (with multiple cycles, when appropriate)