

Theses of Ph.D. Dissertation

**Phenomena of the late modern media
environment and their interpretation in
media theory**

Kornél Myat

Supervisor: Szabolcs Oláh Ph.D. Associate Professor



UNIVERSITY OF DEBRECEN

Doctoral School of Literary and Cultural Studies

Medial Cultural Studies Subprogramme

Debrecen, 2023

Content

Content..... 2

I. The goal of the dissertation and an overview of the topic 3

Research question 6

Aims of the Thesis 6

My hypotheses are as follows: 7

II. Overview of the utilized methods 9

III. Summary of the thesis results 11

The key characteristics of the late modern media environment 11

Campaigning and participation on online social media platforms 12

Movements in the late modern media environment..... 13

Coordinated actions on social platforms..... 14

Social Media Strategies to Counter Fake News..... 14

Collaborative-Social Media Theory..... 15

Utilization of the findings from the thesis..... 16

IV. iDea certificate 1..... 17

V. iDea certificate 2. 18

I. The goal of the dissertation and an overview of the topic

My thesis focuses on the media environment in today's world, particularly how it has changed since the early 2000s. Technological advancements have significantly impacted the relationship between media and society, as well as the power dynamics of the media economy. My research zooms in on collaborations in online social media, specifically cooperative and competitive strategies. In the past two decades, these collaborations have been observed in various ways, such as content production and sharing, public participation, and solidarity activities both online and offline. The social economy based on online platforms has also adopted a similar collaborative approach. Even professional media content production industries, including news media, are considering the opportunities and challenges of social recycling and user participation. Technology companies are also developing ecosystems that promote social collaborations on their platforms. My goal is to explore and analyze the media environment, specifically how online community participation and collaboration influence content production, sharing, skill-sharing, and collective action.

My work provides valuable insight for those interested in media studies. Specifically, I explore the changes in the relationship between media and society that have come about with the rise of social online spaces. Through this analysis, I challenge and expand upon existing media theories that were formulated prior to the emergence of web 2.0.

My contribution to the field of media studies involves a detailed examination of the characteristics of the modern media environment and a meta-analysis of modern and postmodern media theories. I use case studies to test the explanatory power of existing media theories in a historical context. Ultimately, I aim to establish a media theory of my own.

My research has led me to the conclusion that a new media theoretical framework is needed to accurately describe and explain the behavior of media users in online collaborative spaces. These users are motivated by the pleasure of connection, the need for mutual reinforcement, the ability to share knowledge, selective exposure, the problem of pseudo-news, and filter bubbles and echo chambers.

Overall, my contribution to media studies is a model that builds upon critical meta-analysis of previous theories, provides a conceptual framework for understanding changes in the media environment over the past two decades, and reflects on the collaborative processes by which members of a media-using community share in the skills needed to solve meaningful problems.

As we enter the 2020s, the media environment has taken a different turn with regards to social information sharing. This has led to limitations in the freedom of participation, whereas in the early 2000s and 2010s, there was hope for democratization of public action in online communities. This shift highlights the relevance of my thesis topic, which aims to describe the late modern media environment and analyze

the social communications that occur in its participatory arenas. We are at a turning point, and it is necessary to assess the media theory model describing the late modern media environment from a historical perspective. Fortunately, I was able to observe the emergence of these scenes in the second half of the 2000s when I first formulated my media theory model and was an active media user. In 2023, with an awareness of the time that has passed and the changes that have occurred in the media environment, I can reflect on the effectiveness and limitations of my theoretical model. My research perspective is shaped by coexisting but incompatible attitudes, leading to initial optimism and slow disillusionment, presented within a clarifying interpretive framework. Introducing a temporal dimension in the analysis of the late modern media environment provides an opportunity to move away from simplistic dichotomous categories that often accompany technological innovations, such as media optimist/media pessimist or liberal/conservative type binaries, which have dominated the media environment study over the past two decades.

Thus, the descriptive and explanatory effort, the theorizing, is directed towards the connections that can be explored in the late modern media environment between the ownership of online platforms, the production, sharing and control of platform-dependent media content and the participatory collaboration in online social arenas by posing media studies questions.

Research question

What media studies-relevant factors helped or hindered participatory, collaborative problem-solving in online community arenas in the hybrid, convergent, fragmented, rapidly changing media environment of the 2000s and 2010s?

Aims of the Thesis

My thesis aims to introduce the concept of the media environment in late modernity and proposes an explanatory media theory that can help to understand the fragmented but convergent online social scenes that are emerging in a network of hybrid media. This theory focuses on the collaborative nature of media users, who are instantly connected to each other through these scenes, and applies mainly to the media environment of the 2000s and 2010s. I have named this theory "collaborative-community media theory" and the media environment in which it operates is referred to as the late modern media environment (abbreviated as LMM).

To develop this theoretical model, I describe the basic media of the late modern media environment according to their operational logic and media economic characteristics. I also give examples of online social collaborations among media users, and analyze the media consumption arenas, content production, and content consumption. In order to achieve my goal, I also critically analyze existing media theories that can be used to describe the historical phenomena of LMM. Through this meta-

analysis, I aim to lay the foundations for a hybrid media theory that combines several theoretical approaches.

My hypotheses are as follows:

1) In the realm of LMM, the interconnectedness of media content production and distribution gives rise to an unprecedented space for participatory power compared to other logics. I base this on the work of theorists such as Negroponte, Rheingold, and Jenkins, who advocate for the emergence of a participatory society.

2) I believe that the online community of LMM is home to media users who are active, conscious, and critical. Their media use and cooperative tendencies differ from those described by modern theories of effects and limited theories of effects.

3) I also hypothesize that Web 2.0 technology has created new online public spheres since the mid-2000s. These spheres offer a constantly evolving space to meet various media user needs (such as communication, entertainment, information, preparation, collaboration, and public activity). Through media user participation and collaboration, these spheres can also become spaces for addressing social problems, public issues, and community initiatives.

4) However, I assume that community preparation and collaborative solutions can only occur to a limited extent, in small groups and in specific topics.

5) I believe that the participatory theory of communication (Horányi, 2009), the ritual model of communication (Carey, 1989/1992), the use-exhaustion model (Katz et al. 1974/2007), and the study of participatory culture initiated by Henry Jenkins (Jenkins, 2006, 2013, 2015) are valuable starting points for developing a collaborative-community media theory. However, it is also necessary to expand upon them.

II. Overview of the utilized methods

In my thesis, I proposed two hypotheses that require a critical analysis of LMM. To accomplish this, I will conduct a meta-analysis of media theory constructs that are applicable to LMM. My aim is to identify elements that can dynamically describe and explain the attitudes of participation and cooperation in media use possible within the framework of LMM, as well as the constraints of these attitudes by asserting the temporal dimension.

To test hypotheses 3 and 4, I will use the case study method. In four extensive case studies, I will examine various levels and forms of community problem-solving on the online platforms of MSM. These case studies are thematically diverse, but they are communicative for a media theory that seeks to describe and explain online community agency. I have processed these case studies to provide a historical dimension and present a picture of the operational characteristics of LMM, the associated media user habits and expectations, and their research interpretations that are constantly changing. To explore the relevant phenomena of LMM from a media research perspective and to prepare the case studies empirically, I will use the methods of semi-structured expert interview and content analysis. The case study method will help me test my insights from a meta-analysis of the relevant literature. This qualitative method will allow me to closely examine phenomena that can be accessed through deep drilling, but for which no adequate explanation can be obtained from previously developed media theories.

Finally, hypothesis 5 requires me to develop a conceptual and theoretical framework to describe the functioning of LMM more precisely. The collaborative-community media theory presented at the end of my thesis will be the theoretical contribution of my thesis to media studies.

III. Summary of the thesis results

The key characteristics of the late modern media environment

The study analyzed the structure of media, trends in media consumption, the role of media content and users, and publicity. It provided an overview of the late modern media environment, its organization, functioning, and the main challenges it faces. The media landscape is a network of hybrid, convergent media, with online social platforms causing a significant shift in the industry. Traditional media platforms like TV, radio, and print are adopting hybrid and convergent content delivery methods, with online social and content-sharing platforms being the common intersection. On-demand streaming services are also becoming increasingly popular. The entry of online platforms and social media has changed the media market's composition, with tech giants like Facebook, Google, Twitter, and TikTok gaining dominance in their respective fields. These companies distribute institutional and user-generated content, while media users actively create, consume and distribute content. The role of central content-producing media companies is becoming limited, and media users validate online spaces through collaborations. Fake news on social media is a significant concern for tech giants, who are using various means to curb this phenomenon. The analysis showed that the role of television remains dominant in the domestic media market, and online media users have a passive content consumption attitude. Hungary's media system is conservative and partly centralized, influenced by political and economic interest groups.

Campaigning and participation on online social media platforms

In the 2014 parliamentary election campaign, social media played a major role, especially on Facebook through paid advertising. The campaign reflected the existing political power structure and was conservative in terms of tools and intensity. The same trend continued in the 2018 and 2022 elections. The parties and politicians' overall campaign activity and approach determined the campaign activities introduced on online social media and the user activities that were organized in response. Facebook was widely used by domestic users, making it an essential factor in shaping public life. Online community platforms did not play a prominent role in the campaign. Television remained the primary medium, with outdoor elements such as billboards and citylights. Smaller parties' hopes of benefiting from online community platforms were overestimated, as they realized that merely being open to technological innovation wasn't enough. Instead, the logic of online participation should be applied to offline activities to reap the benefits. The 2014 election campaign showed that online community platforms do not work as a political communication panacea for attracting masses of voters to cooperate cheaply and effectively. Nor have they been a breakthrough when used as a marketing tool. The online community platforms of the mainstream media (MSM) also had limited functions as new spheres of the public sphere. None of the political actors was interested in channelling the views of voters into the power-based political discourse. Despite this, online social platforms have shaped the relationship between political actors and voters. They have facilitated effective information,

communication, and collaboration between citizens, increasing the power of the public sphere. However, these platforms also filter information based on users' content consumption habits, which can lead to media users avoiding news that does not interest them or conflicts with their opinions. Civilians sometimes mobilize huge crowds through their collaborations in online community spaces. The larger institutionalized parties can mobilize significantly as beneficiaries of the party funding system and do not need to make innovative use of online social media platforms. The memes of the Two-Tailed Dog Party and the Milla movement were quickly distributed to online media users as late modern multimedia content, providing ammunition for the opposition communication machinery during the campaign.

Movements in the late modern media environment

In my dissertation's second case study, I explored the potential of online movements by analyzing international initiatives and the Milla movement. Online activism, particularly in community arenas, has been a heavily researched field in modern media. Some believe in the positive impact of technology, seeing online collaboration as a means of renewing civic political participation and society. Twitter and Facebook have played significant roles in political actions and movements, such as the Arab Spring and Occupy movements. However, it is clear that online community spaces alone cannot transform political culture and institutions. Only through the efforts of media users can online initiatives influence the political agenda. The issue of slacktivism highlights that

loosely connected online movements can only have real impact if they professionalize. The rise and decline of the Milla movement exemplifies the challenges of organizing a heterogeneous mass base with no clear common goal or professional organizational background.

Coordinated actions on social platforms

In my thesis's third case study, I investigated the participation and cooperation of a small group of individuals in a movement centred around a specific topic. Specifically, I analyzed the actions of a group of small investors known as *WallStreetBets*, who were organized on the Reddit platform in 2021. The group purchased a large number of GameStop shares with the intention of limiting speculation by hedge funds. The events gained widespread attention, and economic and political decision-makers debated the group's behaviour and the potential impact of coordinated actions by online communities on market developments. The Reddit platform provided a space for the group to discuss their investment strategies and efficiently share information. The community's activity resulted in significant financial gains and losses, leading to a significant discussion on anti-speculation regulations and the role of online communities in the stock market.

Social Media Strategies to Counter Fake News

In the fourth case study, I examine the issue of fake news during the COVID-19 pandemic. Specifically, I focus on the role of social media in preventing the spread of fake news. My research conducted in early 2020 revealed that social media's information flows are inherently unable to

judge the truth of the content being communicated, making it difficult to effectively counter fake news. To address this problem, platform operators have implemented measures such as filtering algorithms, educational content, professional fact-checking and verification bodies, and regulations to limit the spread of fake news on social media. However, my analysis has shown that stopping the spread of fake news is a complex issue that requires the involvement of other social subsystems beyond the media. Educating media users is a crucial priority. What is important for the subject of my thesis is that combating the spread of fake news on social media can be achieved through conscious and cooperative use of these platforms. While social media can contribute to the problem, it can also be used to mitigate it. As a platform, it can convey preparedness to help identify fake news and collectively and critically process content.

Collaborative-Social Media Theory

In my fourth thesis chapter, I establish the groundwork for a cooperative-social media theory. The theory provides a conceptual framework for exploring the online community realm of LMM. The two primary motivations that define LMM's online arenas are participation in skills that facilitate media users' collaboration in communities and the resulting collaboration itself. The collaborative social media theory is functional, descriptive, and non-normative, based on the collaboration of media users. Its main claim is that LMM's online arenas are spaces where information, values, attitudes, cognitive schemas, and dispositions are

circulated through interactive, multimedia, platform-independent media content. The purpose of media use is to participate in cultural goods encoded in dispositions and share them through communication with other media users. The online community spaces of LMM facilitate this through the ritualized flow of content.

Utilization of the findings from the thesis

Through my exploration of LMM and the development of a collaborative-community media theory, I aim to challenge the prevailing modernist constructs in media research. These constructs currently dominate public discourse on media and shape the policies surrounding online community spaces.

IV. iDea certificate 1.



UNIVERSITY of
DEBRECEN

UNIVERSITY AND NATIONAL LIBRARY

UNIVERSITY OF DEBRECEN

H-4002 Egyetem tér 1, Debrecen

Phone: +3652/410-443, email: publikaciok@lib.unideb.hu

Registry number: DEENK/397/2023.PL
Subject: PhD Publication List

Candidate: Kornél Myat

Doctoral School: Doctoral School of Literary and Cultural Studies

MTMT ID: 10053269

List of publications related to the dissertation

Hungarian book chapters (2)

1. **Myat, K.:** Részvétel, problémamegoldás, közösség: Partecipációs kiindulópontok a késő modern médiakörnyezet tanulmányozásához.
In: Konstruált világok : A jelenségek kommunikatív leírása. Szerk.: Demeter Márton, Typotex Kiadó, Budapest, 141-150, 2014. ISBN: 9789632794167
2. **Myat, K.:** Milyen új szempontokat adhat a kommunikációs partecipációs felfogása a késő modern média vizsgálatához?
In: A kommunikatív állapot : Diszciplináris rekonstrukciók : Horányi Özséb 70. születésnapjára. Szerk.: Bajnok, Andrea; Korpics, Márta; Milován, Andrea; Pólya, Tamás; Szabó, Levente, Typotex Kiadó, Budapest, 394-400, 2012. ISBN: 9789632796710

Hungarian scientific articles in Hungarian journals (4)

3. **Myat, K.:** Közösségi együttműködés a technológián innen és túl: Robinhood hordája és a Wall Street-i elitklub összecsapása?
Jel-kép. 1, 61-74, 2022. ISSN: 0209-584X.
DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.20520/JEL-KEP.2022.1.61>
4. **Myat, K.:** Remény, forradalom, kiábrándulás?: Politikai aktivitás a közösségi média színterein.
Médiakutató. 16 (3), 81-96, 2015. ISSN: 1586-8389.
5. **Myat, K.:** A késő-modern médiapolisz filozófiai alapvonalai: Roger Silverstone Médiaerkölcs (Media and Morality) című könyvéről.
Médiakutató. 12 (2), 109-114, 2011. ISSN: 1586-8389.
6. **Myat, K.:** Médiaelméletek és a késő-modern médiakörnyezet: Miért nem jók a modernista megközelítések a késő-modern médiakörnyezet vizsgálatához?
Médiakutató. 11 (2), 47-63, 2010. ISSN: 1586-8389.

Foreign language scientific articles in international journals (1)

7. **Myat, K.:** Upgrade Democracy 2.0?: Participation, Online Decision-Making, and Problem Solving on the Online Platforms of Late-Modern Media Environment.
Acta Univ. Sapientiae, Communicatio. 3 (3), 33-48, 2016. ISSN: 2393-0438.



V. iDea certificate 2.



**UNIVERSITY of
DEBRECEN**

UNIVERSITY AND NATIONAL LIBRARY

UNIVERSITY OF DEBRECEN

H-4002 Egyetem tér 1, Debrecen

Phone: +3652/410-443, email: publikaciok@lib.unideb.hu

List of other publications

Hungarian books (1)

8. András, H., Bokor, T., **Myat, K.**, Pelle, V., Tóth, A., Tóth, T., Székely, L.: Kommunikáció az információs társadalmak korában: Egyéni, szervezeti és társadalmi szintű változások azonosítása és leírása : Kutatási terv. Budapesti Corvinus Egyetem, Budapest, 33 p., 2017.

Hungarian scientific articles in Hungarian journals (3)

9. **Myat, K.**: A pragmatika színes esernyője: Tátrai Szilárd: Bevezetés a pragmatikába című könyvéről.
Jel-Kép. 1-4, 119-122, 2012. ISSN: 0209-584X.
10. **Myat, K.**: A (média)erőszak vége?: egy vita margójára.
Jel-Kép. 29 (3-4), 99-103, 2010. ISSN: 0209-584X.
11. Bokor, T., Demeter, M., Huszár, O., Kéri, R., **Myat, K.**: Műhelybeszélgetés egy kommunikációelméleti könyv kapcsán: Egy kommunikációról szóló diskurzus lehetséges vázlatpontjai. Terestyéni Tamás: Kommunikációelmélet, a testbeszédtől az internetig című könyvéről.
Jel-Kép. 28 (3), 83-87, 2009. ISSN: 0209-584X.

The Candidate's publication data submitted to the iDEa Tudóstér have been validated by DEENK on the basis of the Journal Citation Report (Impact Factor) database.

29 August, 2023

