Online but still not taking part?
A multi-method investigation of the online participation divides in Germany

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Approach

1. **Forms and definition of online participation**
   - Systematic literature review
   - **Goal**: Explore topic, generate first propositions, encourage dialogue
   - Journal article: *First Monday* (published July 2014)

2. **Drivers of participation**
   - Representative survey
   - **Goal**: Quantify online participation drivers and identify profiles of online participants
   - Conference paper: ICA14

3. **Patterns of participation**
   - Qualitative Study: Focus groups and online communities
   - **Goal**: Differentiation of online participation along 7 social milieus
   - Conference presentation: Connected Life 2015
   - Journal article: *Social Media + Society* (under review)
The Dissertation Committee

Miriam Meckel

- corporate communication, social media, (digital) journalism, CMC, philosophical understanding of the Internet

Anabel Quan-Haase

- social networks, social media, social capital, digital humanities, scholarly digital communication, Internet studies, CMC, serendipity
Article 1: Forms of Participation
Increasing Relevance

ProQuest results from 1990

Lutz, Hoffmann, & Meckel (2014)
Topical Areas

Economic/Business

Health

Culture

Political Participation/Civic Engagement

Literacy/Divide

Education

Lutz, Hoffmann, & Meckel (2014)
Online participation

The creation and sharing of content on the Internet addressed to a specific audience and driven by a social purpose.

Lutz, Hoffmann, & Meckel (2014)
Article 2: Participation Divide(s)
Current OII Study

Who produces content online?

Different forms of content

- Skilled Content
- Social & Entertainment Content
- Political Content
...And the winner is

Champagne Celebration Template

Your name

Model 3!
Article 3: Participation in Different Milieus
Intro and Overview

- Research in the tradition of digital divides research
- Milieu perspective absent in digital inequalities research
- Drawing on Bourdieu as theoretical framework
Qualitative Study

- **Focus groups** and **online communities**: 12 groups with 8 participants per groups

*How do citizens from different Internet milieus define and conceptualize online participation and engagement? Does the everyday understanding match the academic understanding?*
Cooperation with Sinus: Internet milieus

**Digital Outsiders**
- Internetferne Verunsicherte
- Ordnungsfordernde Internet-Laien

**Digital Immigrants**
- Verantwortungsbedachte Etablierte
- Postmaterielle Skeptiker
Cooperation with Sinus: Internet milieus
Group 1: Natives

- **Pragmatic approach** towards online communities
- Online participation more pronounced than in groups 2 and 3
- But there are also some **skeptics**

*I am not actively participating on any Internet site or platform, because I try to stay away from the virtual world as much as possible and not miss the real life. I only use the internet when i need information; communicate with friends, or want to buy or sell something (Patrick; careless hedonist)*
Group 1: Natives

- Lage differences between milieus
- **Facebook task** suitable to crave out the differences, e.g., between careless hedonists and digital sovereigns

Well, i see ads, new photos of family and friends. What I also see are short videos of my favorite series «Berling tag und Nacht». (Vanessa; careless hedonist)

My start profile basically replaces the daily newspaper, because through selected connections I receive updates and news reports. (Denis; digital sovereign)
Group 2: Immigrants

- Somewhat more interaction than in group 1
- Large variance in participation intensity and scope
- Age effects affect the forms/domains of participation

My interests, information and appointments in my function as a youth adviser in the Alps association can be found on the homepage www.alpenverein-hochtaunus.de. [...] I’m actively engaged on this site because I myself and my son (in the youth group) climb and because I can best give my tasks in youth work to interested families via the homepage. (Sibylle; responsible established)
Group 3: Outsiders

- Intense interaction, sometimes on a very personal level
- Largest variance in how the tasks were solved
- Most active users in online communities, but also most skeptical ones

I’m very often on Deutschlandradio Kultur. That’s enough, I don’t need anything else. (Joachim; law-and-order Internet amateur)

I equate registering with active action in the sense of engagement. (Thorsten; law-and-order Internet amateur)
Main Findings and Take Aways

Large milieu **differences** in participation

High status ≠ high engagement

**Cultural aspects** very important

**Bourdieu**’s theory useful in this regard
Discussion: Writing a Cumulative Dissertation
Pros and Cons

- Dependence on **review process**: quality control vs. uncertainty

- **Coherence** of work: giving structure vs. over-structuring the thesis

- **Disciplinary cultures**: having tangible output at time of dissertation vs. lacking a grand oeuvre in the form of a book

- **Authorship**: substantial parts might be co-authored vs. it’s all mine

=> Very context-specific decision
Thanks for your Attention

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References

