

Preface

This special issue of the GPS is designed to cover various research questions regarding the political potential of the Internet. The studies addressed thereby concentrate on diverse uses of the Internet by different societal groups and their political functions and effects. All in all this issue will give evidence that the technical innovation of the World Wide Web has diffused and attained a central position in society and politics. Additionally, a particular political potential has become evident for marginalized causes and groups, which is mirrored by this issue's focus migrant communities, international networks and grassroots movements.

The contribution of Kathrin Kissau and Uwe Hunger deliver insights on migrants' political uses of the Internet in Germany, focussing especially on their relationships to their country of origin and residence, as it is displayed by their online communication behaviour. Thereby examples of different migrant groups will illustrate how the Internet can be used to establish transnational networks, support Diaspora activities or reinforce national "ethnic" public spheres on the Internet.

The potential of the Internet is composed of its characteristic of bringing together people across great distances for communication, contact and cooperation. Susanne In der Smitten will focus on thus emerging political online communities, hereby analysing actors, topics and possibilities of categorization. The discussion of these aspects will lead to a critical evaluation of the communities' prospects of influencing politics. How can online communities gain influence in different political systems? This is the central question the article deals with. It focuses on the situation in Germany, but also refers to international dimensions of the issue where suitable.

Sigrid Baringhorst discusses the characteristics of computer-mediated political participation in the context of the mobilisation of transnational corporate campaigns. Having gained more and more importance since the nineteen-nineties, these campaigns aim at changing attitudes and behavioural patterns in terms of mobilizing citizens.

The characteristics of immigrants' Internet activities and their relevance for integration processes will be discussed by Inna Weiskopf and Kathrin Kissau. In a comparative perspective the authors address the relationship between use of the Internet by Russian immigrants in Israel and Germany and integration. They will thereby focus on similarities in both groups' uses of this technology despite differences in the social and political structures of migrants' lives in their host countries.

Menderes Candan und Uwe Hunger will give evidence as to how the Internet is being used to create and maintain a virtual nationalism. Using the example of Kurdish migrants the paper shows how Kurdish migrants, who are dispersed all over the world, not only use the Internet to connect and discuss Kurdish issues, but to create the institutions for a virtual nation Kurdistan. The underlying question hereby is, whether or not this can be seen as the basis for the development of Kurdish nation state and how online this development influences international political behavior regarding Kurdish claims.

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