Diversity in Media Societies: Theoretical and Practical Implications of Pluralistic Voices in the Media

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Traditional media institutions, including broadcasting and the press, have increasingly recognized the need to make greater efforts to adequately reflect the diversity of society in their content over the past decade. However, in practice, they have yet to effectively address this issue. Individuals with diverse characteristics, such as those with an immigration background, are often stereotyped and face limited opportunities to express their perspectives in the media. Editorial teams sometimes lack the capacity to critically assess their own choices and priorities of topics within the broader context of news media coverage. The selective and often negatively connoted reporting is believed to contribute to the underrepresentation of diverse voices in editorial teams, decision-making bodies, and media content. Transparent and sustainable diversity strategies within media institutions, aimed at combating discrimination and racism within their own organizations, are only starting to emerge slowly and hesitantly.

Selective media images and the limited perspectives and experiences of marginalized individuals hence reconstruct marginalization in society. They can have a negative impact on the pluralism of opinions and shape attitudes towards these marginalized groups. The absence of diversity in the media can thus become a challenge for a society that values its democratic principles and relies on a pluralistic media sector. Ongoing exclusions within the media sector and in public discourse can further perpetuate socio-cultural and societal marginalization, leading to fragmentation effects.

The theoretical and practical implications of the diversity concept are complex and can sometimes be contradictory. From a theoretical perspective, diversity in the media plays a crucial role in a democratic media society as it ensures the representation of diverse voices, perspectives, and ideas. This fosters an informed citizenry and facilitates robust public discourse. Diverse content and structures also challenge existing power dynamics by providing a counterbalance to dominant narratives. They enable marginalized groups to challenge stereotypes, prejudices, and discrimination, empowering them to redefine their own narratives and reshape societal perceptions.

On the other hand, media companies are increasingly recognizing the economic advantages of appealing to diverse audiences. By considering various demographic characteristics, they can attract larger viewership and readership, leading to innovation and economic growth in the media sector. As a result, routines are emerging within media institutions to organize and manage diversity in favor of entrepreneurial goals, often without sufficient involvement and representation of marginalized individuals.

The current state of research often falls short in adequately considering the transcultural and intersecting dimensions of diversity. In this special edition of the *Global Media Journal – German Edition*, an attempt is being made to critically analyze the

content-related, personnel, and structural shortcomings in the media representation of marginalized groups. The aim is to incorporate the multiple perspectives arising from diverse identity positions. At the same time, diversity will be analyzed as a structural category and reflected upon as a theoretical concept. This special edition intends to address the gaps in existing research and contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of diversity in the media, taking into account its complex and multifaceted nature.

Therefore, the following questions will be discussed: What theoretical paradoxes are inherent in the diversity concept, and how could it be redefined? How is societal diversity currently perceived in the media? To what extent do media images contribute to the construction or questioning of social differences and hierarchies? What specific diversity measures are being implemented in journalism and institutionalized media, and what are the consequences of these measures? And finally, how do socially marginalized positions articulate themselves in different forms of media?

The annual conference of the International and Intercultural Communication division of the German Communication Association (DGPuK) provided a platform to discuss these and other questions. The conference, held in October 2022, took place at TH Köln in collaboration with the Institute for Media Research and Media Education (IMM) and the Institute for Information Science (IWS), as well as the Department of Media Education/Didactics at the University of Cologne.[1] This thematic issue of the *Global Media Journal – German Edition* serves as a continuation and deepening of this current topic and the enlightening debates and discussions that took place at the conference.

About the contributions and contributors

The often distorted representation of migrants in media content, coupled with the minimal presence of journalists with migrant backgrounds (currently estimated at around 4%), are paradigmatic of the significant lack of other dimensions of diversity in German media. In their contribution, *Tanja Evers, Steffen Grütjen, Liane Rothenberger, and Milan Skusa* shed light on this issue by examining the relationship between media production and the lack of diversity, with a specific focus on the migrant perspective. They conduct an exploratory study analyzing selected media produced and designed by journalists and media practitioners with an immigration background. The authors explore the goals, motivations, definitions, and audience targeting strategies employed by these media outlets. Additionally, they investigate the challenges and obstacles faced by these media professionals in their day-to-day routine. The authors also address the question of where the boundaries lie between journalistic stance and activism within these media outlets.

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[1]   The   conference   program   can   be   downloaded   here: https://www.th-koeln.de/mam/downloads/deutsch/hochschule/aktuell/termine/f01/tagungsprogramm_diversity _in_media_societies_stand_10-10-22.pdf

Maike Suhr, in her "research agenda," turns her attention towards journalistic entrepreneurs – an area that has received limited research attention but holds significant importance. These entrepreneurial endeavors often operate with more flexibility, less hierarchical structures, as well as fewer constraints compared to traditional media houses. The starting point of Suhr's considerations is the belief that these journalistic innovations may possess a greater sensitivity when it comes to addressing diversity. The article primarily focuses on gender as a category that can be seen as exemplary for other dimensions of marginalization. Suhr proposes a research agenda aimed at further investigating this topical emerging field of journalism, drawing from existing studies and the identified desiderata.

In her essay, *Brigitte Hipfl* explores the theoretical and practical challenges and ambiguities surrounding the concept of diversity, which sums up the theoretical findings of this themed issue of GMJ-DE. She critically assesses the "hype" surrounding the diversity concept and how it is implemented in practice. Hipfl raises the concern that, instead of ensuring equal access opportunities, the concept of diversity sometimes leads to the opposite within (media) institutions. It can become a superficial façade or tokenistic gesture, maintaining existing power structures by positioning minorities in hierarchical roles that ultimately serve the institution rather than empowering minorities. The essay hence questions power relations in the context of diversity in the media. At the same time, Hipfl argues against viewing the oppressed solely as victims. She argues for actively embracing their resistant potential and alternative forms of knowledge production to develop sustainable diversity goals and (media)culture.

Finally, *Iva Krtalić* provides valuable insight into the "engine room" and inner workings of media practice at the largest public-service broadcasting station in Germany, the Westdeutscher Rundfunk (WDR). As the Head of Integration and Content Diversity at WDR, she possesses firsthand knowledge of the processes and challenges faced within a large media institution and its various editorial teams, as well as the challenges and ambivalences associated with the sustainable implementation of diversity within the broadcaster. In her work, she grapples with the question of how the WDR should respond to the increasing diversity of its target audience and society as a whole, while simultaneously shaping the cultural transformation within the organization. She considers it an opportunity that public-service media, like WDR, have a special responsibility and chance to combine both aspects due to their mandate.