

HAMBURG IMPULSES FOR DEPOLARIZING MEDIA DEBATES

Unchecked mediated polarization of debates threatens democracy: The necessary debates between different perspectives can turn into a trench war between hostile groups. How can journalists and moderators in digital networks deal with this situation?

The Hamburg Impulses, jointly developed by academics, journalists, digital community managers and representatives from civil society, aim to provide food for thought. Here is a short list of recommendations.

How journalism can deal with polarized debates:

Impulse 1: Journalism should take up social conflicts and even radical ideas - if these address relevant problems productively and do not violate the fundamental values of democracy.

Impulse 2: Journalistic reporting should focus on the search for solutions to problems in society, instead of merely emphasizing the potential for conflict.

Impulse 3: Journalistic reporting can raise awareness of the dilemmas often present in political decision-making.

Impulse 4: Journalistic reporting should make a clear distinction between verifiable facts and political opinions. False factual claims should be corrected immediately or not quoted at all.

Impulse 5: Journalistic reporting on polarization and conflict should reflect scientific data on controversy and consensus in a society.

Impulse 6: Journalistic storytelling should depict behaviors and contexts in ways that are representative of the respective group rather than to provide misleading representations of the world.

Impulse 7: Journalistic storytelling should not only allow readers to identify with specific perspectives, but also to distance themselves from viewpoints.

Impulse 8: Media organizations can go beyond reporting and develop discussion formats that encourage constructive discussion in their communities.

How digital community management can deal with polarized debates:

Impulse 1: Discussions must be actively moderated so that they do not lead to excessive polarization.

Impulse 2: Polarization in comment sections and on social media is characterized less by echo chambers than by trench warfare between hostile parties. Moderation should try to defuse trench warfare.

Impulse 3: Moderation should be multifaceted: regulating, supportive, encouraging and listening-focused.

Impulse 4: Moderation requires professionalized moderators and resources.

Impulse 5: The success of the moderation should be evaluated. In addition to the reach, metrics should capture the quality of the discussions generated.

Impulse 6: Human moderation has its limits. This is why the supportive use of AI makes sense - as long as it is based on fundamental social and ethical values of the digital discussion space.

Impulse 7: Moderation is only one design feature. In addition, editorial teams should experiment with other interventions that promote thoughtful and factual rather than just quick emotional reactions.

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