FORUM: QUALITATIVE SOCIAL RESEARCH SOZIALFORSCHUNG

Call for Papers

Special Issue "Digital Images and Visual Artifacts in Everyday Life: Changing Media—Changing Uses—Changing Methods"

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The spread of digital media has brought about new everyday uses of images and other visual artifacts and is significantly changing social life and social communication. Consequently, face-to-face relationships are medialized, and bodily references are transformed, not least in technical interfaces such as interaction with robots. In digital and especially social media, photographs become a means of expression of personal self-presentation and social self-location. Videos are not only presented to document experiences and events but, in their use on portals such as YouTube or TikTok, also prove to be a way of participating in public discourses against the background of visual media. All this has consequences for the theoretical understanding of the interplay of communication, interaction and action. The challenge of developing adequate concepts in view of new social realities is accompanied by the methodological challenge of designing appropriate social science analyses of these constantly changing and newly emerging phenomena.

The discovery of body-related image phenomena and the invention of artificial image media can be traced back to an early stage in the history of mankind. Their detection, invention and constant further development result in manifold possibilities of not only constituting the self, interpreting facts, varying representations, imagining the improbable, engaging in ideography and providing evidence, but also deceiving oneself and others. It is hardly surprising that images are socially exchanged, are used to mark "identities" or negotiate biographies, prove or enable social relationships and are subject to instrumentalization, commodification and standardization. Nevertheless, images and the diversity of visual artifacts still represent a difficult subject—that is, only incompletely understood by social theory or incompletely integrated into existing social theories.

Regarding contemporary uses of technical visual media, various research questions or even desiderata arise. For example, it is necessary to identify and examine the diverse spheres of life and forms of social action, which in their sociohistorical specificity and form owe much to the use of technical image media. This is followed by questions about the bodily reference of social communication and its changes in different media environments. While processes of personal allocation and mutual interpretation in face-to-face relationships are bound to the whole body, technical media make it possible to participate in interactions only with single and maybe altered bodily means of expression. However, image media are also sometimes constitutive for the virtual creation of social situations. This is the case, for example, when emojis are used to imitate facial expressions with the intention to open up an additional level of social framing for communication or when with profile pictures or avatars virtual body images are integrated into digital interaction situations and thus nonverbal communication instruments are expanded with diverse forms of expression. Are new communicative genres, new types of social action and new forms of organization of social interaction and self-emerging in the use of digital images? What is to be

understood by interaction, communication and action under the currently changing conditions? Connected to this is the question of whether new concepts are needed to describe the social use of digital images, concepts that no longer tie the comprehension of the object exclusively to classical concepts but are also able to further develop the latter on an empirical basis.

The diversity of contemporary image media, the complexity of social modes of use and the multitude of social-scientific epistemological interests that are (or can be) ascribed to image phenomena also require fundamental methodological reflections. What is understood by image and visual communication, for example, with regard to the relationship between individual images, image clusters, moving images and other visual artifacts? Which already established methodical-methodological approaches are useful and/or need to be further developed?

With this call for papers, we are asking for contributions in which different, but especially contemporary ways of using digital images and visual artifacts in the social sciences are reflected. Ideally, thematic and methodological aspects should be linked. In other words, the methodological implications resulting from the particularities of the sociohistorical use of media or the respective social-scientific epistemological perspectives should be made clear.

The following topics or the exploration of the following aspects is of particular interest.

Conceptual aspects
- Centration on body images with simultaneous dissolution of boundaries, transformation, and detachment or removal from real existing bodies
- Visual presentation, re-presentation, performance and action (in games, social media, social machines, robotics, etc.)
- Modification of interaction concepts in relation to digital social arenas (relations of copresence versus coreference in virtual spaces, gallery versus front/back stages and respective spectators/publics, mutual image-text and image-image communication, and communities of beholders)

Specific phenomena
- Forms of proving oneself in digital spaces
- Emergence of and dealing with vulnerability and violence in digital spaces
- (Generational and medial) identity norms and formations (e.g., in dating apps or youth cultures)
- Visual biographical construction processes in social media

Methodological aspects
- Single image versus image cluster
- Fixed images versus moving images
- Image-text sequences
- Hermeneutic reconstruction of meaning versus documentary methods versus field analyses with visual/textual grounded theory methodology
- Field ethnography versus a focus on analyses of existing imagery

Publication Process

All abstracts can be submitted in English and/or German. The review process includes the following steps:

1. Abstracts of approximately 300-400 words should be submitted by **September 15, 2023**. They should be sent to the guest editors Roswitha Breckner, Michael R. Müller & Anne Sonnenmoser via digital_images@qualitative-research.net.

2. All abstracts will be peer reviewed, with decisions on acceptance made by the guest editors within one month (**October 15, 2023**).

3. In the case of acceptance, authors are requested to send a full paper to the guest editors (digital_images@qualitative-research.net) (**January 15, 2024**). Please follow the instructions for submitting contributions (https://www.qualitative-research.net/index.php/fqs/submission/checklist).

4. All submitted papers will be subject to a double-blind peer-review process.

5. The publication of the special issue is planned for September 2024.