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Online Digital News Platform of Regional Bloc BIMSTEC

Authors

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Abstract

One of the critical regional blocs in South Asia, the Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation (BIMSTEC), has hardly had any presence or pronouncement in the conventional mainstream media which exists in each of the member countries. Recent geopolitical developments in the BIMSTEC region coupled with the ramifications of the Covid-19 global pandemic have not only highlighted the need for improved and noticeable political cohesion among the governments of the member countries but also signalled the need for ground-breaking development of BIMSTEC on the media scene. This paper proposes that regional blocs such as BIMSTEC can challenge the monopoly of the mainstream media in each member country by forging into the media landscape with its own new digital entity. While this is difficult to imagine, primarily because there is no precedence to this idea or execution of similar thoughts, it is nonetheless not impossible for regional blocs to build consensus among their member states and jointly create an identity of their own on the global media landscape. Riding on innovation and technology and meaningful and appropriate representation of the human workforce from all member states, BIMSTEC can create an online digital news platform which not only establishes its newsworthiness in the international media landscape but also builds bridges among all key stakeholders of the member countries and its aspiring population. This paper argues that such an initiative taken by a regional bloc in South Asia can lead the way for several other regional blocs to stay closely knit, build internal bridges among member countries and address the needs and aspirations of a larger community of people, which is well beyond the national boundaries. Such a digital news platform of a regional bloc in South Asia will have the potential to promote political cohesion and economic diplomacy to further regional cooperation and build unity among the member nations to achieve common goals and aspirations of their people. This paper aims to highlight the positives of such an intervention in the global media landscape where the zeal to generate digital content 24X7 online can promote pro-activism involved in pushing ministries, governments and diverse stakeholders to engage and indulge, which can have a cascading effect whereby synergies created and pursued advertisement generation can combine together with the editorial content to keep the momentum going. The paper argues that such an online digital platform of a regional bloc in South Asia can not only revive the forum for partnership and cooperation among governments and policymakers, but it can also be a meaningful platform for the public in general of all member countries to learn and understand the opportunities that remain embedded in such a collaboration. The paper argues that online digital platforms of regional blocs can be the way forward to help us reimagine the study and the making of media and technology policies across the global-local spectrum, thereby gaining a better and more nuanced

understanding of intersections across levels, resulting in better cohesion and cooperation among governments and people.

Key Words

online, BIMSTEC, digital, South Asia, regional bloc, geopolitics, economy, news

Why we need epistemic rights

Authors

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Abstract

The starting point of this panel presentation is the deepening divisions within our societies that derive from internal and external forces. As democracy is, by definition, the rule of the people, its basic requirement is equality in the act of ruling: for there to be equality in decision-making, people should share the same information and knowledge and understand the value and significance of this knowledge. In this article, the concept of epistemic rights is introduced. Epistemic rights refer to the requirement that society should guarantee that truthful information and knowledge are made available to all its citizens and that they have the competence to use these for their own benefit and that of society as a whole.

As background, this contribution first offers a short historical review of the communication rights movement, which can be seen as paving the way for epistemic rights. The overview points to the fact that today's communication rights movement might be overly fragmented, making it unlikely that enough common ground can be found to mount a coordinated campaign.

The contribution concludes with a discussion on the need for epistemic rights: It is not enough to speak about communication rights in today's increasingly complex world and concentrate only on the media as the leading institution that should right the wrongs. Instead, all epistemic institutions—institutions dealing with knowledge, information, understanding, and truth—must be brought into the analysis. These include education systems, libraries, different cultural institutions (e.g., museums and theatres), and public services, all of which form, disseminate, and reproduce our daily normality and represent social and cultural continuity and stability. By linking the problems of information and communication to a wider societal context and to the present predicaments of other epistemic institutions (education, public services, cultural institutions, etc.), the concept of epistemic rights might offer the common ground we lack and help in overcoming the divisions currently plaguing the efforts that advocate for various rights in today's era of digital disruption.

Key Words

Epistemic rights, communication rights, communications policy, digitalization

Public Service Media as enablers of epistemic rights

Authors

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Abstract

Growing concerns in recent years over threats to the foundations of democratic societies posed by misinformation, hate speech and other problems associated with digital communications have led to renewed calls for greater protection of epistemic rights within policy, advocacy and academic fora. Institutionally mandated to promote citizenship, public service media (PSM) organisations have an important role to play in supporting epistemic rights. This contribution suggests four main conditions are required for this and in doing so we introduce the concept of epistemic injustice as a key to understanding the role PSM.

First, PSM are premised upon strong political commitment. At a time when this political commitment is dwindling, it is imperative that civil society, academia and international organisations continue to make the case for PSM strong. Second, we argue that PSM need to evolve with the times, and be allowed to use new transmission means, build new platforms and innovate. Third, we argue that PSM have to move beyond supporting epistemic rights, as they have traditionally been bestowed, and contribute to epistemic justice, by questioning the existing power structures of knowledge. Finally, PSM need to work together with other educational and cultural institutions towards the creation of an epistemic commons, countering the privatisation of communitive spaces and striving to make knowledge accessible to all.

This paper argues that PSM need to be explicitly regulated to support epistemic rights and promote epistemic justice. For PSM to act as trustworthy sources of information, support epistemic rights and promote epistemic justice, PSM have first and foremost to be able to function free from direct political and commercial pressure, be accountable to supervisory bodies and the public at large, be transparent and responsive, and sustainable legally as well as financially so that they can evolve and survive. PSM, as a fundamental epistemic institution, are critical to enabling citizenship and supporting democracy, and can help remedy many of the injustices that today's seemingly plural media environment exhibits and often amplifies.

Key Words

public service media, epistemic rights, citizenship, national media policy

Nordic illusion and challenges for epistemic rights in the era of digital disruption

Authors

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Abstract

Traditionally, the Nordic countries have demonstrated a specifically Nordic model of media and communications policies and communication rights. However, in the last decades, these countries' related developments have started to differ and they have demonstrated varying practices not only in responses to digital challenges but also in other media policy areas.

In addition, the Nordic freedom of speech regulations differ also historically which leads in differences in legislations and their implementation, while at the same time the Nordic countries share similar goals and cooperate.

This paper contributes to the study of epistemic rights by addressing how the Nordic countries support freedom of speech and dialogical rights during the digital era through regulation and other media policy measures. Considering also their historical backgrounds, we examine the differences and persistent similarities in the Nordic countries' practices through three example cases. First, we examine the regulation of online audiovisual media, demonstrating national path dependencies in content moderation legislation. Second, we explore disputes between public-service and private media related to media content and subsidies, which are both essential in supporting the public's rights to varied information and social dialogue. Third, we discuss national policy responses to online hate speech that challenge freedom of expression and dialogue.

Finally, we suggest a critical reassessment of the Nordic media model to ensure continued support of epistemic rights in the digital media age, as neither the model, nor the epistemic rights, should be taken for granted. While the common histories of the Nordics can be reasonably recognised, the Nordic media model must now be reassessed according to their differences. Such a reassessment also requires the critical observation of the Nordic countries' ability to support citizens' epistemic rights in the age of digital platforms and disruption. While the principles of freedom of expression and dialogue are highly valued in legislation, they are not upheld in practice unless also other conditions for a viable, free, and diverse public sphere are guaranteed. Continued support for epistemic rights and the media welfare model demands a constant re-evaluation and political will in the changing digital media environment. Neither the support nor the imagined perfection of the media welfare-state model should be taken for granted.

Key Words

epistemic rights, Nordic media model, communications policy

Balancing rights to information and right to data protection in the digital era: the case of China

Authors

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Abstract

The discussion of epistemic rights is closely linked to the creation and dissemination of knowledge, and data, despite often being treated as a commodity, is actually a form of knowledge. This paper examines the academic debate on access to digital data in China and the Chinese state's policy on data, demonstrating the lack of consideration of epistemic rights in regulating access to digital data in China and the interplay of global tendencies and local particularities. This paper makes the following main points:

First, the concept of epistemic rights has not drawn the attention of Chinese academics, while the closely related concept of the right to information is approached from a legal perspective, one that stresses the consumer's right to obtain public information and digital platforms' data rights.

Second, the right to data access has not been treated as an independent right but as part of the debate on data property rights and the right to information.

Third, in the government's data strategy policy, data is defined as a new factor of production that is key for national economic development (besides land, labour, capital and entrepreneurship). Recently, China's data access policy has shifted from a focus on the sharing of original data to the sharing of data products and from the trading of data ownership rights to the trading of the right to hold data resources, the right to process and use data, and the right to manage data products. Establishing a three-level (i.e. national, regional and industrial) data exchange market system is the next step in academic research and in the policymaking agenda.

Finally, the lack of attention to epistemic rights and an overly narrow definition of data has undermined alternative explorations of the implications of the public good nature of data, even though conditional open access to public data and the equality of non-public data access are now recognised principles in both academic research and the policymaking agenda.

Key Words

China, right to information, data protection

Media and communication policy transformations and the concept of space-making

Authors

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Abstract

This paper proposes 'space-making' as a central concept in media and communication policy. Space has been a relevant category in Global Media Policy for decades and is often connected to digitalization and globalization pressures (Asthana, 2013; Schlesinger, 1993). Scholars have often used the concept of space to explain how media and communication policies aim at creating collective spaces (Schlesinger, 1994) or to point towards democratic deficits criticizing it as 'elite space' (Schlesinger, 1999, p. 268). Others showed how spatial discourses of the state reflect within media and communication policies as an international field of study (Asthana, 2013), often manifesting in policy transfer mechanisms (Simpson, 2012). On the contrary, localism (Ali, 2017) has been proposed to study media policy as critical for local communities. These conceptual works examined the dialectics between space and media and communication policies.

Similarly, we draw from the sociology of space and understand space as a social product, reflective of hegemonic struggles, where hegemony is part of a multidimensional (perceived, lived and conceived) process accompanied by strategic practices. (Lefebvre, 1991, Cox, 1989). We show that for policy actors working in contexts of changing media and communication policies, the sense of space-making as a purpose in media and communication policy is critical. Here, we examine the connection between ideologies of space and agency in media and communication policy-making. We examine these connections based on data from 121 semi-structured interviews with media and communication policy actors (governmental, industry and activists) working in situations where their national and regional entities in Latin America were undergoing media and communication policy reforms. The interviews were transcribed, and using grounded theory (Glaser, 1978; Charmaz, 2008), we coded the data iteratively in NVIVO. After we established the concept of space as relevant in the data, we asked a) what ideas, beliefs and values policy actors in the field articulate around space as a purpose of media and communication policies; b) to what extent do those ideas connect to a sense of (recovering) agency?

The notion of space-making is articulated in multi-faceted ways in the data set. Interviewees describe media and communication policy-making as an opportunity to (a) create counter space, (b) re-appropriate space, (c) create contradictory space, and (d) imagine a new space. All these ways in which policy actors envision space-making suggest opportunities for transformations that open pathways for emancipation from hegemonic structures and ideas, fulfillment of the right for cultural spaces, and instigating national resistance to homogenization tendencies. The accounts shed light on socio-cultural aspects in media and communication policy studies that are often

understudied but critical for understanding transformation processes in media and communication policies.

Key Words

Media and communication policy transformation, sociology of space, space-making, hegemony,