University of Zurich UZH

IKMZ – Institute of Communication and Media Research

The IKMZ Speaker Series presents:

Networked Communication, Activism, and Social Change: The Rise of Networked Counterpublics
Professor Brooke Foucault Welles
Northeastern University

Monday, October 29, 2018
16:15-17:15
Room AND 4.06

Abstract
The proliferation of social media has given rise to widespread study and speculation about the impact of digital technologies on politics, activism, and social change. Key among these debates is the role social media play in shaping the contemporary public sphere, and by proxy, democracy in the US and around the world. Maligned by some as "slacktivism," I will argue social computing platforms such as Twitter create unique opportunities for traditionally excluded voices to challenge the terms of public debate. Counterpublics, or the alternative spheres of debate created by marginalized voices, have long played the important role of highlighting and legitimizing the experiences of those at the margins as they push for integration and change in the mainstream public sphere. Using evidence derived from quantitative and qualitative empirical methods, I will demonstrate how networked counterpublics and hashtag activism are increasingly complementing offline counterpublic spheres to change the terms of mainstream public debates about race and gender in the United States.

Bio
Brooke Foucault Welles is an Associate Professor of communication and network science at Northeastern University in Boston, MA, USA. Combining network science methods with social science theories, Dr. Foucault Welles studies how online communication networks enable and constrain behavior, with particular emphasis on how these networks facilitate the pursuit of individual, team, and collective goals. Much of her work is interdisciplinary and collaborative, with co-authors from computer science, political science, digital humanities, design, and public health. Her recent research includes a series of studies of the transformative power of networked counterpublics, techniques for the longitudinal analysis of communication networks, and tools that help youth activists identify and leverage networked resources to create social change.