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Scandalogy: An Interdisciplinary Field

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ANDRÉ HALLER / HENDRIK MICHAEL / MARTIN KRAUS

Scandology. An Introduction to an Interdisciplinary Field

April 2016 was a special month for scandal research. On April 3rd, journalists revealed the so called ›Panama Papers‹, confidential documents of a Panamanian offshore company, in a concerted campaign. The Panama Papers were rather special: Journalists all over the world, connected in the International Consortium of Investigative Journalism (ICIJ), investigated and published the documents in a joint venture. The scandal itself affected persons and organizations in various countries – a global scandal was born. In the following days the telephones in Bamberg rang constantly. Journalists wanted to hear our opinions about the Panama Papers. Thereby most of them became aware of an event which took place for the first time: the 1st International Conference in Scandology at the University of Bamberg.

In retrospect, it was a twist of fate that the Panama Papers were disclosed only a few days in advance of the academic event. We were often ironically asked by journalists and colleagues if the conference team intervened in the scoop for strategic reasons, which we declined of course. However, coincidentally, while an international consortium of investigative journalists uncovered a global scandal, an international network of experts in scandal research gathered for the first time in Bamberg.

The Panama Papers show us one thing: Scandals are a social phenomenon which does not stop at borders. In addition to that, scandals do not exclusively take place in politics and economics but can basically occur in every social field. The scope ranges from doping scandals to scandalous movies, from scandal authors to judicial scandals. In the field of literature we already notice a diverse and interdisciplinary scandal research (BARTL/KRAUS 2014).

In many cases social fields are overlapping and constitute the scandal: Political scandals are often no pure ›political‹ affairs but occur sometimes when politicians and economic leaders illegally make deals. Most scandals take place when there are transgressions in hidden sub-fields (THOMPSON 2000) which are then revealed. Consequently, other actions can become a scandal in public, for instance when grievances are scandalized (KEPPLINGER/EHMIG/HARTUNG 2002). This type of scandal can also be seen when politicians make controversial statements which can then be the starting point of a scandal (EKSTRÖM/JOHANSSON 2008). A special type of scandal is intentional self-scandalization (HALLER 2014), which occurs when an actor deliberately provokes to produce a scandal to obtain public attention. Groundbreaking works were especially written in political and communication science: Robert M. Entman's *Scandal and Silence* (2012) explains the production of political scandals in the USA; Hans Mathias Kepplinger's works on scandals in the media and their effects (2012) and Steffen Burkhardt's book (2006) on media scandals are some of the most prominent works in scandal research. The conference ›Scandalization and Victimization by Media Coverage‹ at the German Sport University in Cologne brought communication researchers together in 2015. A subsequent book (LUDWIG/SCHIERL/VON SIKORSKI 2016) showed the outcomes of the presented studies. Nevertheless, interdisciplinary research on scandals still remains neglected.

The question if grievances lead to public outrage is an indicator for the specific scandal culture (HONDRICH 2002) of a society. For instance, sex scandals can end political careers in the USA; the recent case of Anthony Weiner illustrates this point. Nevertheless, the case of Silvio Berlusconi shows us that there is a different mediterranean scandal culture. In Germany power scandals as well as misconduct concerning German history and political culture are typical types of scandals (ESSER/HARTUNG 2004). However, scandal cultures are mutable – although by a long process. In 2016 we witnessed the rise of Donald Trump to become the 45th President of the United States, which could be seen as a turning point as regards our concept of scandalization: His racist and misogynist comments and his insults against minorities in general have not weakened him.

Maybe Trump is the result of a general tendency in popular culture to emphasize the role of »the outsider who speaks it as it is«. But this begs the question if public discourse as a whole in civil society has not irrevocably changed: Are we witnessing a transformation of scandal culture in the US

(and other Western societies)? If so, what are the reasons for this and what are the consequences for dealing with future scandals and affairs? Trump's actions on the campaign trail cannot only be explained by intentional self-scandalization, as the leaked audio footage of the notorious ›Access Hollywood‹ tape illustrates.

Trump's scandals have shown that traditional reporting on scandals has deficits: Deliberate provocations by Trump produced enormous publicity but do not appear to be explainable as strategic patterns of communication (HALLER 2015). Often, journalists are limited to describing and criticizing scandals instead of thematizing a lack of reaction by the public. Thus, one may argue that academic research and journalism should be more sensitive to characteristics of specific scandal cultures. In this sense our book attempts to contribute to a better understanding of scandals.

To acknowledge such wide-ranging changes within our media and political systems, the 1st International Conference in Scandalogy pursued two main targets: First, to present and discuss recent findings on the social phenomenon of scandals. Second, to strengthen the networking of scandal research beyond the boundaries of certain scientific fields. The conference took place on April 7th and 8th at the University of Bamberg and was organized by the Institute for Communication Science and the Institute of German Studies. The cooperation of both departments shows that scandals are not exclusively a topic for social sciences. The scope of papers presented at the conference proves this claim:

The collected volume opens with an unusual but at the same time fitting contribution to a pressing issue by our first keynote speaker ROBERT M. ENTMAN. In the light of Entman's longstanding research on political scandals and the media he offers insightful remarks on the campaign and presidency of Donald Trump. In this brief statement Entman proposes a first explanation why the established logic of political scandalization does not appear to apply anymore with Trump.

Our second keynote speaker STEFFEN BURKHARDT provides a concise overview over scandal research and scandal theory in the network society. His argument addresses the increasing interconnectedness of scandalized actants, the media as agents of scandalization and the public as passive spectators as well as active participants in the act of scandal production. Burkhardt draws on concepts from literature studies when he relates the dynamics of the mediated scandals to the narrative structures of classical drama. To illustrate this, Burkhardt proposes the ›scandal clock‹ not only

as a metaphor for the stages of scandalization but also as a foil for conducting systematic research on scandals in Western societies.

Our third keynote speaker MARTINA WAGNER-EGELHAAF elaborates further the concept of scandals as narratives. She presents an alternative approach to scandal research by looking at the rich history of Western literary thought and poetics and what it can contribute to the interdisciplinary field of scandalology. For a few decades, literature scholars – as well as critics, authors, and publishers etc. – have tended to emphasize the ability of (modern) literature to be scandalous. The scandal potential of literature has become an often-praised quality feature of literature itself. But, in order to arouse really relevant scandals, more than just non-conformist aesthetics are necessary. Wagner-Egelhaaf takes a closer look at prominent scandals in literature history and identifies the factors that attributed to the significance of these cases. Furthermore, she contributes to the understanding of scandals as dramatic plays and narratives.

The work of MONIKA VERBALYTE on the other hand shows the underlying principles of public outrage based on emotional responses to scandals. Her theoretical assumptions connect the research fields of communication and sociology with psychological emotion research. The author draws on emotion theory to contribute to a better understanding of the political scandals. This combination of approaches can lead to remarkable benefits in emotional theory as well as in scandal theory. Verbalyte compares and contrasts two theoretical perspectives on scandal, functionalistic and communicative-discursive. She concludes that the communicative-discursive perspective appears to be more suitable for the analysis of political scandals in current pluralistic societies. Her contribution is primarily of theoretical nature, but, in order to illustrate her statements, she provides certain empirical examples; in particular, two German political scandals: the Plagiarism scandal around minister of defense, Karl-Theodor zu Guttenberg, in 2011 and the Mortgage-Media scandal centered around President Christian Wulff in 2011-2012.

How media systems affect the dynamics of media scandalization in two Western European nations is discussed in two content analytical studies. First, MARCO MAZZONI, ROBERTO MINCIGRUCCI, and ANNA STANZIANO take a closer look at the mechanisms of scandalization in Italy. Their empirical analysis of investigative reporting on an alleged corruption scandal reveals a tendency for spectacularization and instrumentalization of scandals in journalism. These narrative patterns are used as means of Italian journal-

ists to cover political scandals and must be understood with respect to differences of the Italian media system compared to other Western nations. In another empirical study, MARIA KARIDI, DANIELA MAHL, and MICHAEL MEYEN provide evidence that media coverage of scandals in the German press has considerably changed over the past three decades. Relating to Snow and Altheide's concept of media logic, the authors interpret their findings of increased personalization and narrativization as a changing of dominant agent-structure dynamics in the journalistic field. This is exemplified by analyzing the coverage of tax-evasion and environmental scandals in two prominent cases from the 1990s and 2010s.

The reasons for increased media coverage of political scandals are discussed by CHRISTIAN VON SIKORSKI. He also offers a broad empirical overview over effects of media coverage and presents possible macro level impacts of political scandals. For instance, scandals of the political elite may reinforce the strategy of populist politicians who claim to fight against a corrupt system.

An empirical case study about effects of political scandals on public preferences is presented by DOMINIC NYHUIS and SUSUMU SHIKANO. The authors used longitudinal data on public preferences during the donation scandal of the German party CDU and modified a model of Shikano and Käppner which is used to decompose ideological and non-ideological components of sympathy ratings of politicians. The findings indicate that the valence component of political preferences can be influenced by coverage on political scandals.

Another perspective is taken by TIMOTHY COOMBS, SHERRY HOLLADAY, and ELINA R. TACHKOVA. The authors focus not only on the United States but also on the research field of strategic communication and the relationship between scandals and crises. The authors point out that organizational scandal research is mostly dominated by case studies and lacks theoretical foundations. Thus, their paper closes the gap between scandal and crisis research. The authors define an intersection of both states as a ›scansis‹. This concept takes into account that a crisis can merge to a scansis when media coverage reveals violations of expectations by stakeholders.

That even our most basic common sense understanding of scandals is culturally mediated and historically bound to the development of Western political and media systems is illustrated in LAEED ZAGHLAMI's commentary on scandals with respect to religion, media, and politics in Algeria. From a totally different standpoint, Zaghlami explains the, at times, conflicting

dynamics of scandalization in an islamic country and a former authoritarian and current semi-presidential system.

Overall, the selection of studies provides profound theoretical perspectives backed by empirical evidence. However, adding further to the relevance of scandals in the 21st century, a practical contribution to this collected volume is important to us. We think, generally, it is problematic to deal with scandals as far-reaching media and society phenomena from an exclusively theoretical standpoint that, too often, offers abstract explanations for concrete problems. Thus, we are happy that FREDERIK OBERMAIER, one of the leading journalists behind the publication of the Panama Papers, provides insights into the challenges of investigative journalism and the reach of global scandals. With this interview we hope to trace an arc between the research field of Scandalogy and journalistic practice at the International Consortium of Investigative Journalists (ICIJ).

We would like to thank our keynote speakers Robert M. Entman (George Washington University), Martina Wagner-Egelhaaf (University of Münster), and Steffen Burkhardt (University of Applied Sciences Hamburg). They enriched the conference with their presentations and their expertise in scandal research. Furthermore, their work proves that scandals are topics in various disciplines: Martina Wagner-Egelhaaf is professor of German studies, Steffen Burkhardt is a scholar of communication studies and Robert M. Entman works as a political scientist. Special thanks go to the Ludwig Delp Foundation in Munich which funded the conference as well as the production of this book. We also thank our reviewer team who selected the best papers out of a large number of excellent paper submissions. Furthermore we would like to thank the publishing house Herbert von Halem for guiding us through the process of making this book. Last but not least we thank our student assistants Theresa Briselat and Lisa Feller who helped us in the organization and during the conference, and Andreas Böhler who translated the interview with Frederik Obermaier and Steffen Burkhardt's contribution.

This book aims particularly at scandalologists of all scientific subjects. However, it is also interesting for a broader public. Especially practitioners in the media, public relations, politics, economy, and other areas can find useful information on the process of scandalization.

We hope you enjoy reading and especially that you gain new insights.

Bamberg January 23rd, 2018

André Haller, Martin Kraus and Hendrik Michael

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