



Unconference Critique Digitale Report- Oct. 21-22, 2021

## **Political discourse online on YouTube**

*Panel B2- Zurich*

*21.10.21, 15.00 - 15.45*

*Panel suggested by: Laetitia Gern, University of Lausanne*

*Reporter: Anna Janka*

### **Discussion leader and core topic presentation:**

The core topic of this panel was the political discourse online on Youtube with a focus on French debates about laicity, the law about the separation of the church and the state. Laetitia Gern proposed the discussion topic. She is a PhD student at the University of Lausanne. In her doctoral thesis, she analyzed how politicians discussed laicity in different Youtube videos and how YouTube users reacted to the political positions in the comment section.

### **Main arguments in the discussion:**

After a brief introduction of the topic, the six participants started by debating how research online differs from other research. One difficulty raised was getting access to the demographic information about the people who comment under the youtube-videos. Their personal information is often unknown since they can choose a username, take on a fabricated online persona, and their available information is not verified. The availability of personal data is different when people participate in interviews or fill out questionnaires because the information is given to the researchers directly. An advantage of doing research online is that the discussion in the comment section or chatroom is more anonymous than in person. Therefore, people might share their opinions more honestly and argue more openly. There is also no observer's paradox online because the people might not know they are a part of a research study. This unawareness then poses some ethical questions. Additionally, the participants emphasized the importance of a multimodal analysis when researching a phenomenon online. Only then can the researcher fully grasp a message given in a comment, post, or video.

### **Proposed solutions:**

Lastly, the panelists debated how essential it is that scholars pay attention to topics and groups that were excluded from the discussions online. They agreed it could be insightful to compare which actors and political positions are given extensive attention and whose voices are silenced. Additionally, a researcher should focus on other topics connected to the central discourse of a video. Often topics like laicity were used as a cover-up to speak about more polarizing societal topics like migration.