

For special session 7: "The Politics of ICTs"

Google media coverage in the context of EU data protection reform

Astrid Mager, Austrian Academy of Sciences

The search engine Google is created in research labs in Silicon Valley. However, Google is also shaped in wider society. Media discourses, in particular, have been described as a central arena where technologies are negotiated and the demand for and acceptability of new technologies is created. The search engine Google is not a groundbreaking new technology anymore. What is new, however, is the accelerated pace of pushing new Google features on the market including contact lenses measuring blood sugar levels or smart meters monitoring power consumption. While Google products used to be widely celebrated in mass media, the tone has changed more recently against the backdrop of illicit practices of scraping WiFi data, increased privacy violations, and, most importantly, the NSA affair.

In this presentation, I capture this shift by analyzing how Google is framed in the Austrian press using critical discourse analysis (CDA). Focusing on selected mass media and online resources I trace how Google is debated in the context of the ongoing formation of the European data protection law. The data protection reform serves as a focal point where Google search and related services are negotiated at the intersection of privacy values, business interests, NSA scandals and cultural specificities. It enables us to see what discourses dominate in the Austrian media and what aspects remain marginalized (e.g. lobbying of Google and Co vs large-scale citizen surveillance), what actors and rhetoric strategies push certain agendas and hide others, and ultimately, how hegemonic value-systems (e.g. informational capitalism) are stabilized and challenged in media rhetoric.