

Book review

Nikunen, K. (2019). *Media solidarities. Emotions, power and justice in the digital age*. London: Sage. 208 pp.

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In an increasingly globalizing world, knowledge about catastrophes, suffering and injustice is mainly gained through traditional and, increasingly, social media. Besides this primary informative function, media also play an important social role. They often act as public fora for, and producers of, collective emotional support, therapy, solidarity, and charity, both for the people affected and the broader community. As people's ability to function as political subjects and to act in solidarity largely depends on their capacity to understand, feel, imagine, and critically think about these issues and their causes, media play an essential role in providing spaces for these practices.

Kaarina Nikunen investigates in her interdisciplinary book *Media solidarities. Emotions, power and justice in the digital age* the new, self-developed concept of 'media solidarities', and this from a text, production, and reception perspective. Media solidarities refer to the different ways in which media create, shape, disseminate, materialize, and engage in expressions, participations, and representations of solidarity. Underpinning these practices and the presented studies is 'the media solidarity paradox'. While in the age of neoliberalism, various economic, political, and technological developments have eroded traditional solidarity structures, there are simultaneously more mediated solidarity expressions and calls.

By discussing, examining, and linking, both theoretically and empirically, various fields, theories, concepts, and moral and practice-based perspectives, *Media solidarities* proves to be a wide-ranging and innovative contribution to the literature on media and solidarity. More concretely, the work's focus, central argument, and relevance can be summarized by four key approaches. First, Nikunen theoretically extends the 'ethical turn' in media studies by moving beyond the often used sociological and political theories about solidarity and related conceptions of 'we' and engages in post-colonial and feminist perspectives of dissonance and 'common differences'. Second, she empirically and analytically extends current research. Whereas most studies focus on news coverage and humanitarian communication from a text and, to a lesser extent, production dimension, this book critically examines media production, reception, and, to a lesser extent, rep-

resentation of solidarity, and this across various media genres, both traditional and new. Third, based on the relevant concepts of affective economy and affective practice, Nikunen investigates if and how emotions are enabled and shaped by solidarity and are themselves produced and shaped by the political economy of media. Finally, although the book is critical, it acknowledges the relevance of imagination: it recognizes the possibility of productions and participations that mobilize people and create new forms of solidarity.

Looking more closely, the work consists of a theoretical chapter, five empirical chapters, and a concluding chapter. The theoretical chapter discusses the central concept of solidarity and other key themes, including emotions, affective practices, and media production. The five empirical case studies mainly investigate subjects about media and migration, and – reflecting the huge diversity of media solidarities and their contexts – all examine one or more conceptual dimensions of media solidarities: producing, imagining, feeling, sharing, witnessing, and participating. The second chapter examines the production conditions in the current digital media environment of activist media, advocacy media, and entrepreneurial investigative journalism and if and how these enable and/or constrain the creation of media content which enhances and/or expresses solidarity. Based on long-term ethnographic research in Southern Italy and drawing on the concepts of geographic imagination and hospitality, the third chapter investigates how places and regions are (re-)imagined through and with media, and how these imaginations affect politics, places, and human destinies. Relying on the concept of affective economy, the fourth chapter scrutinizes the construction and political implications of emotions and affect in the context of ‘doing good’ reality television. Chapter five focuses on solidarity campaigns, petitions, and news about suffering on social media, and discusses the differences between sharing and witnessing as solidarity practices. Grounded in empirical case studies on craftivism and tech activism, chapter six investigates if and how participation and new social movements enhance solidarity on social media and how collectivity, commitments, and hierarchies are thereby created.

While the book is valuable and innovative in various ways, some issues should be noted. First, Nikunen’s (qualitative-only) research is mainly (but not exclusively) confined to specific cases in the contemporary Global North. While recognizing the limits of space, time, and funding and the importance of a research focus, a more methodologically (e.g., quantitative and mixed-method studies, ...), geographically (e.g., more research on the Global South, ...) and temporally (e.g., more historical research, ...) diverse research approach could further increase the nuance and strength of the claims. Second, Nikunen could also have been more open and reflexive about key methodological research decisions (e.g., research and analysis methods, datasets, research periods, ...) and their under-

lying motivations. In line therewith, some empirical case studies are mainly theoretically driven and could have engaged more with the actual analysis. Third, while being more morally reflective, more empirical evidence and practical suggestions could have been presented concerning if and how the proposed alternative solidarity paradigm can also be effective in generating solidarity and public, financial, and political support, ideally on a large-scale basis.

Nevertheless, *Media solidarities* proves to be a very insightful and interesting book, which is recommendable to students and researchers involved in media and communication sciences, moral philosophy, and sociology in general, and the fields of solidarity, humanitarian communication, journalism, popular communication, and their intersections in particular. While the spotlight on the roles that media play for solidarity is very relevant, it would also be interesting to look at if, how and to which extent solidarity is relevant for media. In line therewith, more diverse, in-depth, comparative research that interconnects these media-solidarity interplays is needed. As Nikunen (2019, p. 34) argues: “It is our task as researchers to provide possibilities to imagine alternatives, to find spaces of hope that are not based on unrealistic utopias but in understanding complexities of social worlds and their challenges.” This book is certainly an inspiring scientific foundation and springboard towards such realistic alternative moral horizons.