

Spiral of Silence Goes Meso: Conceptualisation of the Relations Between Immediate Social Environment and the Perception of The Climate of Opinion

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One of the best-known points of criticism of the spiral of silence theory is that it neglects to consider the immediate social environment. The following theoretical contribution aims to close this gap and integrates the immediate social environment into the spiral of silence. It focuses on the first part of the theory, i.e. the influence of monitoring the immediate social environment on the perception of the climate of opinion. We propose a new conceptualisation of the relations between immediate social environment, media use and the perception of the climate of opinion. The contribution also considers relevant conditions under which spiral of silence processes take place in digital environments. This includes, above all, the blending of interpersonal and mass media communication. Our concept basically comprises three parts: (1) specification of the concept of immediate social environment, (2) modelling all sources to monitor the social environment as an egocentric network and (3) modelling all influences in this network. The approach of integrating the immediate social environment into egocentric networks and thus introducing the meso-level into the theory of the spiral of silence, represents a contribution to a contemporary reformulation of the theory.