Caution, idealism and cynicism - young adult news satire engagement

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In research and media, young Swedes are hailed as engaged and disengaged; politically idealistic and pessimistic (cf. Amnå & Ekman 2015). One of the main resources for young citizens are various forms of political media. Different types and genres are considered more or less relevant, valuable, or in some cases, harmful, to developing a well-rounded, healthy citizenship (cf. Bennett 2008; Dahlgren 2009). News satire – a hybrid of news and satire – is sometimes blamed for what is perceived as problematic political cynicism among young adults (cf. Hart and Hartelius 2007; Coletta 2009). This paper puts forth an opposing argument, as that kind of research often ignores contextual factors, and the active engagement of audiences (cf. Jones 2010; 2013a; 2013b), exposing a top-down perspective on meaning making still prevalent in many fields of research. In doing so, there is a risk of missing valuable aspects of news satire engagement, understood as educational, emotional and playful (Doona 2016).

Applying theories related to the affective modes of address of satire (cf. Corner et al. 2013; Jones 2013) emotions (Burkitt 2014) and their relationship to citizenship (cf. Papacharissi 2015; Coleman 2013; Eliasoph 1998) – which all stress the importance of subjective processes of rational and emotional reasoning in relation to media and citizenship – the paper asks: How do news satire audiences construct and negotiate contradictory notions of citizenship?

The paper draws on qualitative research on audiences (interviews and focus groups with 31 young adults) who engage with news satire regularly. It argues that engagement with and through news satire is highly affective (cf. Day 2011; Corner et al. 2013) and connects to emotions such as fear, scepticism and self-doubt. As previous work has shown that these young adults are characterised by a ‘cautious reflexivity’ (Doona 2016), this paper aims to further understand the contradictory nature of such reflexivity. It does so by problematizing scholarly accounts of young citizens, that often tends to conflate criticism, or low political efficacy (Campbell et al. 1954), with ‘cynicism’. Young adult news satire audiences, whose citizenship is developing, are ‘caught’ in a state of cautious reflexivity, wherein they keep negotiating between a strong belief in liberal democracy, and a pessimistic sense of lacking political efficacy.

Biography

Joanna Doona is a post-doc researcher founded by the Wahlgrenska foundation, and lecturer in media and communication studies at the Department of Communication and Media (KOM) at Lund University. Her doctoral dissertation Political Comedy Engagement – Genre work, political identity and cultural citizenship was published in 2016, and awarded Best Doctoral Thesis in media and communication studies 2015-2016 (awarded by the Swedish Association for Media and Communication Research, FSMK). In her current work, she is exploring the connection between satire engagement and political cynicism.

References


