



Media and Communication in Flux: Contextualizing the Influence and Implications of and for Social, Political and Economic Transformations

It is well established that media and communication (co)shape power relations, public discourse, political processes and the production of knowledge. However, the various conditions within which contemporary communication takes place are undergoing profound transformations. These changes extend far beyond the emergence of new technologies and media platforms, such as large language models (LLMs), AI chatbots and social media. They are also reshaping the infrastructures through which social relationships are established and sustained, as well as reinforcing the (unequal) distribution of power among individuals and institutions. Power in and within communication is increasingly exercised through data infrastructures, automated decision-making, and personalized communication channels.

These transformations present significant challenges for communication professionals – including journalists, public relations, marketing and organizational communicators – as well as for organizations, policy makers and democratic societies. Among these challenges are the fragmentation of audiences, informational overload, the spread of mis- and disinformation, the changing of media models, platformization, commodification of digital labour and attention, and the growing influence of algorithmic systems. These developments continually transform the conditions under which communication is produced, distributed and interpreted, while also contribute to the reshaping of the formation of the public sphere, social relations, the circulation of knowledge and meaning, and opportunities for political and cultural action.

In this panel, we do not wish to explore merely what these transformations of media and communication are, but primarily what they bring alongside them. We are interested in the exploration of how these transformations reorganize social relations and power, how they (re)shape democratic life and how individuals, communication professionals, policy makers, institutions and governments are

adapting to them. We especially welcome contributions that critically analyze the transformative power of media and communication and their embeddedness in broader social relations. The focus of the panel is not solely on transformations as such, but on the underlying question of how and for whom these transformations operate: which forms of subjectivity, social relations, hierarchies, exclusions, etc., they produce, reinforce, challenge or undermine.

To mirror the diversity and richness of current trends and issues, we invite both empirical and theoretical contributions that foster dialogue between media and communication studies and related disciplines, including but not limited to sociology, political science, anthropology, organizational studies, economics and political economy, technology studies, digital humanities, philosophy, and gender and LGBTQIA+ studies. We especially encourage interdisciplinary perspectives that examine media and communication in relation to broader social, cultural, technological and economic processes. Contributions from PhD researchers and early-career scholars are particularly encouraged.

Possible topics include, but are not limited to:

- media and social, as well as political communication through the lens of critical theory, (critical) political economy, post- and decolonisation studies, feminist studies and other critical approaches;
- platformization, GenAI and related transformations of communication practices;
- transformations of journalism, public sphere, and political communication;
- governance, regulation, self-regulation, and management of media, journalism, digital platforms, marketing, public relations and political communication;
- adaptation of communication professions and organizations to digital, societal and technological transformations;
- changing relations between the national, supranational and global levels of communication, media and information policy;
- communicative practices of resistance (alternative media, activism, counter-public theories, social movements ...);
- various dimensions of power inequalities in media and communication, such as gender, racial, and class relations;
- new methodological approaches to media and communication research.

By bringing together diverse perspectives, this panel aims to provide a space for critical reflection on the role of media and communication in the shaping of contemporary societies, as well as how they themselves are influenced by wider structural changes. Through this, we seek to encourage discussions that move

beyond technological determinism in addressing the broader political, cultural, social, and epistemological implications of processes highlighted above. Additionally, we invite contributors to approach the study of media and communication as sites where power, meaning, and social futures are continuously negotiated, contested, and reimagined.