Persuasion Machines
Narrative, Language, and Human-Computer Interaction

Language and stories (fictional or non-fictional) have always shaped how people perceive and interact with the world. For much of its history, persuasion has been understood as an act between people: a speaker with the intention to move an audience, a rhetoric that can be traced back to someone. That is no longer the whole picture. Language can now be generated, ranked, translated, completed, and distributed by systems whose goal is to optimise for engagement rather than argue for a concrete position. Which words reach us and how they are framed are now primarily decided through recommendation algorithms.

As people train and optimise algorithms to process, predict, and generate meaning, we accidentally turn these systems back upon us, recursively optimising human behaviour and transforming how we communicate. This creates a recursive behavioural and ideological optimisation loop, with no one in particular at the wheel: direct influence no longer comes from a human author, but a system continuously tuned to maximise its own signals.

In here lies the tension between spontaneous human meaning-making and automated semantic conditioning; an interaction that fundamentally revolves around power and influence. The process of optimisation flattens complex societal debates into predictable formulas, changing how cultural values are transmitted when language is continuously mediated or generated by machines.

This panel invites contributions that examine narrative, language, and human–machine interaction as interfaces of this optimisation loop. Rather than treating stories as passive carriers of meaning, we wish to examine how narrative meaning is transformed when language is continuously mediated (and increasingly generated) by computational systems. How do stories carry values, and what happens to that

transmission when the storyteller is a generative model? What becomes the “neutral” voice, and whose values are treated as default?

Critical accounts of algorithmic influence are by now abundant. What is scarcer is constructive work that asks not only how the loop conditions us, but how it might be built otherwise. This panel therefore especially encourages contributions that go beyond critique to propose new approaches to development: experiments, prototypes, tools, or design frameworks that show how language technologies could be built and deployed otherwise, and how we might live and create alongside machines on more deliberate terms.

We welcome theoretically informed and empirically grounded contributions from across the humanities and social sciences, including: digital humanities, linguistics, literary and narrative studies, media and communication studies, sociology, anthropology, cultural studies, science and technology studies, rhetoric, and human–computer interaction.

Possible topics include, but are not limited to:

- Human-machine co-regulation: how algorithmic feedback loops habituate user behaviour and alter cultural value systems.
- Narrative as an instrument: how stories transmit values, fear, and belief.
- Semantic shift and the dynamics of meaning: how model-generated and model-mediated language accelerates, homogenises, or freezes semantic change.
- Machine-made emotion: sentiment, outrage, and affect as features that are now both measured (in people) and generated (by machines).
- Generative rhetoric: what makes a model credible to a person, defining the "neutral" voice, and whose values are encoded as “default”.
- Digital speak: evolution of language and sociolinguistic norms through continuous contact with algorithms.
- Automated persuasion and curation: synthetic messaging and platform algorithms that decide which narratives spread and whose voice is heard.
- Designing for algorithmic trust and transparency: structural and rhetorical features that make a machine legitimately trustworthy (verifiable source grounding, explainable outputs) rather than superficially credible.
- Human agency: interaction design models that foster user autonomy, critical reflection, and digital literacy, moving away from passive behavioural conditioning.

- Linguistic pluralism and democratic design: frameworks for language technologies that actively protect, preserve, and amplify minority languages, local dialects, and semantic variety.
- Collaborative co-creation: methodologies for collaborative writing, artistic production, or research where algorithms augment, rather than replace, human creative and interpretive agency.
- Critical and methodological reflections: disclosure norms for AI use in research, limitations of current interpretive tools when reading machine language, and the politics of building and studying these systems.