Book of Abstracts

Workshop

European Communication Research: What, Whence, and Whither?

29 – 30 September 2025

Institute for Communication and Media Research, Nikolaistrasse 27-29, 04109 Leipzig

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Organizers: Stefanie Averbeck-Lietz, University of Greifswald; Leen D'Haenens, KU Leuven; Christian Pentzold, Leipzig University; Xiaoxian Wang, Leipzig University

In its 50th year, *Communications: The European Journal of Communication Research* invites to reconsider what European communication research is – and what it can be. From its start in 1975, the journal's mission has been to serve as a forum for scholarship and academic debate in the field of communication science and research from a European perspective. But what is in fact a European perspective?

The jubilee conference invites us to rethink what constitutes European communication research. This opens up a range of questions like: What are particular European preoccupations and key contributions to the wider debates? On which theoretical and methodological fundaments does European communication research rest that set it apart from other inquiries? Is there a unique European contribution to global communication theories? How do assumedly European values of diversity, solidarity, or democracy shape communication research? How can European communication research explore the concept of a 'digital Europe'? Where does European communication research lead us, and what can or shall we expect from it that is different from work drawn out in other parts of the globe? How do we deal with linguistic barriers and the diversity of research traditions? And can we think of European communication research beyond exceptionalism and essentialism?

These and similar questions had been around since the journal was launched, and they are still relevant today. They become virulent again in a context where Eurocentrism in research has been widely and rightly criticized while Europe's identity, its boundaries, its legacies, and values face increasing contestation. This ties questions of media and communication to Europe's political, legal, social, and economic formation that is in no way isolated, uniform, or static. Indeed, the attribute 'European' carries geopolitical as much as intellectual connotations with far-reaching consequences for the journal's scope, composition, and purpose.

The conference offers a moment to rethink what a European perspective could mean for scholarship and what kind of Europe is in fact evoked here. These reflections urge us to rethink the journal's role in fostering scholarship that is both inclusive and critically engaged with Europe's complexities. What kinds of questions can usefully be asked? What forms of critique are pertinent? What sorts of research should be drawn out? Which pathways should *Communications* follow to reaffirm its relevance and leadership in fostering impactful scholarship? Possible answers can come from a variety of areas given that the journal seeks to encompass the entire field of communication science as its domain of interest and the contributions published cover a wide range of subfields in communications.

AGENDA

Monday, September 29, 2025

01:00–01:30 pm	Welcome: Leen D'Haenens, Stefanie Averbeck-Lietz, and Ute Scheuch
01:30–03:00 pm	Keynote 1: Keith Roe (KU Leuven, Belgium) *Communication Research as a Mature Discipline: Which Way Forward?* Keynote 2: Maria Kyriakidou (Södertörn University, Sweden) *Media stereotyping and the question of speaking out* Chair: Leen D'Haenens
03:00–03:30 pm	Tea & Coffee break
03:30-04:30 pm	**PANEL 1: RETHINKING EUROPEAN COMMUNICATION LANDSCAPE** Ilgar Seyidov (Atilim University, Turkey) *What's Happening on the Eastern Side of European Communication? Rethinking the European Journal of Communication Research from non-Western Perspectives.* Cornelia Bogen (Ludwigsburg University of Education, Germany) *Counter-publics in China's authoritarian media system as a theoretical challenge for European media and communication studies*

Ludmila Lazarev (University of Music, Theater and Fine Arts Department of Social-Humanistic Sciences, and Modern Languages Chisinau, Republic of Moldova)
Promoting European Cultural Identity: The Case of the Republic of Moldova

Chair: Stijn Joye

04:30–05:15 pm **PANEL 2: STRATEGIC NARRATIVES ON CONFLICT AND CRISIS**

Elisabeth Wagner-Olfermann (Ilmenau University for Technology, Germany)
Medias Construction of Political Leadership in Transboundary Crisis: A comparative analysis of the mediated European responsibility discourse during the migration crisis and the coronavirus pandemic

Kostiantyn Yanchenko, Edda Humprecht (University of Jena, Germany)
Strategic Narratives on Social Media: The Role of Media Systems, Political Actors, and Platforms in Framing the Russian-Ukrainian War in Seven EU Countries

Chair: Philippe Maarek

07:00 pm Dinner (self pay, Auerbachs Keller)

Tuesday, September 30, 2025

09:00–10:30 am Keynote 3: Göran Bolin (Södertörn University, Sweden)
Surveillance between the state and the market

Keynote 4: Bernie Hogan (University of Oxford, UK)
Networks are only as good as your questions: Challenges for Social Network Analysis as research practice

Chair: Stefanie Averbeck-Lietz

10:30–11:00 am Tea & Coffee Break

11:00–12:00 pm **PANEL 3 DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION, AI, CREATIVITY**

Maria Teresa Cruz (NOVA University of Lisbon, Portugal)
Digital Europe: the contribution of Communication Research for European Digital Transformation.

Saskia Witteborn (Chinese University of Hong Kong, Hong Kong)
Generative AI and Ethnographic Communication Research: Gaps and Opportunities

Mariana Zubenschi (State Pedagogical University from Chisinau, Republic of Moldova)

	Empowering Individuals through Generative Learning of Self-Concept to Build Self-Confidence and Embrace European Identity Chair: Cristina Ponte
12:00–12:30 pm	Lunch
12:30–1:15 pm	**PANEL 4: DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION, AI, CREATIVITY (PART II)** Nayra Vacaflor (University of Bordeaux Montaigne, France) *The evolution of creative and innovative communication research in Europe: a critical perspective* Pilar Lacasa (University of Alcalá, Spain), Nerea Rubio-López (University of Seville, Spain/ University of La Rioja, Spain), Mitsuko Matsumoto (University of La Rioja, Spain) *Imagining Digital Europe on TikTok: From Institutional Narratives to Meme Culture* Chair: Panel 4: Xiaoxian Wang
01:15–01:45 pm	Reflections: Friedrich Krotz (University of Bremen) Chair: Christian Pentzold
02:00 pm	Farewell

ABSTRACTS

Communication Research as a Mature Discipline: Which Way Forward?

Keith Roe (KU Leuven, Belgium)

In the past 50 years Communication Research has developed from being a 'young' to a 'mature' discipline. This speech will review the current strengths and weaknesses of the field and assess some of the opportunities and threats which it may encounter in the next stage of development. Finally, suggestions for future research methodology and policy will be made.

Media stereotyping and the question of speaking out

Maria Kyriakidou (Södertörn University, Sweden)

The talk will discuss the evolving research on media stereotyping and address the idea of speaking out against them. It will start by an overview of the research field, highlighting how the changing technological and political landscape introduces new urgent concerns such as the current weaponisation of stereotypes in populist discourse. Taking Gumpert and Cathcart's paper on Media Stereotyping as a point of departure, the talk will then focus on the idea of speaking out as a way of challenging harmful stereotypes and holding media accountable. What does 'speaking out' mean in the context of social media platforms? What role do media research and universities in general have to play in speaking out against media stereotyping? What are the perils of speaking out in complex political and media environments? Posing these questions rather than attempting to answer them, the talk will be an invitation to reflect on how European media research can move towards tackling these issues.

What's Happening on the Eastern Side of European Communication? Rethinking the European Journal of Communication Research from non-Western Perspectives.

lgar Seyidov (Atilim University, Turkey)

As a well-regarded journal in the field, *Communications: The European Journal of Communication Research* positions itself as a prominent platform for scholarly discourse and academic debate in communication science, particularly from a European perspective. In this context, analyzing how topics and issues are framed within its publications during a specific period can provide valuable insights into the journal's gaps and deficits, guiding further research. The primary focus here is on publications that go beyond dominant Western examples and perspectives. Specifically, concentrating on studies reflecting the viewpoints of Eastern European countries (including Caucasian countries), which can be categorized as non-Western, will be beneficial in identifying gaps both within the journal itself and in the broader field of communication studies in Europe. In doing so, the 10-year period of the journal publication will be selected for the sampling. Following the comprehensive examination, the articles focused only on Eastern European countries will be included. Thematic analysis will be employed to analyze the findings. Four main research questions are identified as; (a) What are the main themes? (b) Which theoretical approaches were embodied in? (c) What types of methodologies were employed? (d) What types of suggestions can be concluded for further

studies? The findings will be thoroughly discussed to explore which topics are more commonly addressed and which theoretical approaches are predominantly utilized in studies. Additionally, the methodologies frequently employed in such studies, along with their underlying reasons and implications, will be comprehensively analyzed. This study aims to provide significant contributions to the journal's future scope and policies by examining how it has navigated epistemologically and methodologically from a non-Western perspective over the past decade, based on a representative sample.

"Counter-publics in China's authoritarian media system as a theoretical challenge for European media and communication studies"

Cornelia Bogen (Ludwigsburg University of Education, Germany)

It has been rightly criticized that public sphere research in European communication studies remains mainly tied to liberal, republican, and social democratic social models (Seeliger und Sevignani 2021, p. 10; Habermas 2022). This is why Eurocentric perspectives are said to have been dominating communication science research into social change, while countries from the Global South such as China have remained to be blind spots (Badr et al. 2020, p. 297-300). As a result, existing models of comparative media systems research and the concept of authoritarian deliberation (He & Warren 2017) fail to explain the complex nature of China's online public sphere. Furthermore, European communication science research into the structural change of the public sphere has not adequately taken into account the long-running discussion of whether the internet has enabled the development of civil society in China (Yang & He 2010, p. 5-7; Yang 2017; Li 2016; Gainous et al. 2024). In order to understand the ongoing disintegration of a general political public in European democracies and beyond, it is worthwhile to investigate how authoritarian political systems strengthen their resilience (Sinkkonen 2021) by taking China as one of the two leading cyber powers as a case study. Against the backdrop of leading Chinese communication scientists' observation that both the virtual public sphere and the state-controlled network structure are in a co-progressive relationship with each other (Yang & He 2017, p. 18-19), I argue that the constant negotiation processes observed between the Chinese government and the population can be profoundly studied if we take into account how the Chinese government deals with counter-publics. First, I will show that the theory of public opinion monitoring and control has primarily informed the Chinese Communist Party's approach to processes of public opinion formation. At the same time, both internet and social media have provoked a structural change of the Chinese public sphere, as emerging counter-publics, participatory publics, and anti-publics have challenged state management of internet control. Second, I will introduce a typology of different types of Chinese counter-publics. To create this typology, I use my own empirical studies in the field of health (crisis) communication as a basis, which I reinterpret in my presentation and summarize for further development of a concept of an authoritarian public sphere. The three types of counter-publics that I derive show that both counter-publics (type 1) observed during the Covid-19-pandemic (2020-2022) and the participatory public sphere (type 2) observed during the SARS-epidemic (2003) relate to the object of the state hegemon by directing their resistance towards state media regulation and state-regulated professional media reporting. However, the fact that only type 2 succeeds in having a political impact indicates that within a time span of twenty years, the Chinese government has further enhanced its techniques of media censorship. Moreover, the current trend of employing a two-directional form of propaganda communication is supported by the existence of type 3, in which a government-orchestrated online nationalism is directed against the othering attempts of an international actor regarded by Chinese discourse particpants as a „cultural imperialist“.

The circumstance that from a deliberative understanding of the public sphere, the third type is an anti public, while from an autoritarian understanding it is system preserving, underlines the normative attributions in Chinese and European concepts of the public sphere. In a third and last step, I will present certain problem areas to which a concept of an authoritarian public sphere in China should refer, including normativity, the tension between universality and particularity, and transnationalism.

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Promoting European Cultural Identity: The Case of the Republic of Moldova

Ludmila Lazarev (University of Music, Theater and Fine Arts Department of Social-Humanistic Sciences, and Modern Languages Chisinau, Republic of Moldova)

In recent years, the role of culture in shaping a shared European identity has gained increased relevance, particularly in the context of European Union (EU) enlargement and integration

processes. This paper addresses the case of the Republic of Moldova—a country situated at the periphery of the European Union, with a complex geopolitical, cultural, and historical background—and investigates how the idea of European cultural identity is constructed, communicated, and received within Moldovan society.
The research is framed within the broader question of how communication facilitates the formation and promotion of a common European identity through culture, as part of the Jean Monnet project TEIDCIPEI - *The European Identity Development Through Culture In The Process of European Integration.* Moldova provides a particularly insightful case study due to its ongoing efforts to align with EU norms and values, its participation in cultural and educational programs such as Erasmus+ and Creative Europe, and its internal tensions between pro-European and pro-Eurasian orientations.
The paper draws on interdisciplinary methods, including discourse analysis of public policies, media narratives, and institutional communication, as well as qualitative case studies of cultural events and projects that emphasize European themes. It explores the ways in which Moldovan cultural institutions, NGOs, and civil society actors mobilize culture as a strategic resource for identity formation. Particular attention is given to how cultural heritage, memory, language, and symbolic representations are used to foster a sense of belonging to the European community, while also navigating the legacy of Soviet influence and the persistence of local/national identities.
The analysis reveals both opportunities and contradictions. On the one hand, the promotion of European cultural identity in Moldova has led to a renewed interest in democratic values, intercultural dialogue, and creative expression aligned with EU standards. Cultural diplomacy initiatives and transnational collaborations have provided platforms for Moldovan artists and institutions to connect with their European counterparts. On the other hand, the process is marked by ambivalences: the coexistence of competing historical narratives, the influence of external (especially Russian) media, and the uneven access to cultural participation across regions and social groups.
The paper argues that culture, as a form of symbolic communication, plays a crucial role in articulating visions of Europeanness that go beyond political rhetoric or economic agreements. It also emphasizes the need for inclusive, participatory communication strategies that resonate with local contexts and engage citizens in meaningful ways.
In conclusion, the case of the Republic of Moldova illustrates the potential of culture to serve as a bridge between national identity and European belonging, while also highlighting the challenges of promoting a coherent and widely accepted European cultural identity in a borderland society. The findings contribute to the broader debate on the communicative dimensions of European integration and the future of cultural cohesion in an increasingly diverse and complex European space.

Medias Construction of Political Leadership in Transboundary Crisis: A comparative analysis of the mediated European responsibility discourse during the migration crisis and the coronavirus pandemic

Elisabeth Wagner-Olfermann (Ilmenau University for Technology, Germany)

In 2011, the OECD identified the increasing frequency of transboundary crises as one of the greatest challenges of the 21st century (OECD, 2011). These crises transcend geographical, systemic, and temporal boundaries – examples include the financial crisis, the migration crisis, and the coronavirus pandemic. For over a decade, political scientists have studied this new crisis type with the consensus that the necessary international cooperation needs political leadership (Ansell et al., 2010; Boin, 2018; Quarantelli et al., 2018). However, this is impeded

by an authority vacuum, a lack of formal leadership, and geographical and cultural diversity among potential followers (Blondin & Boin, 2020; Parker & Karlsson, 2014; Tallberg, 2010). Even within the EU – often considered a potential transboundary crisis manager (Boin et al., 2014) – scholars note a problematic coexistence of intergovernmental and supranational leadership (Nugent, 2017; Van Esch, 2017).

This study adds a communication science perspective, arguing that public visibility becomes a key leadership resource under such conditions (Fairhurst & Grant, 2010; Glaab, 2010; Strömbäck & Nord, 2006). It explores the question how media construct leadership in transboundary crisis, focusing on the EU as a case particularly suited to study the 'governance dilemma' of such crises (Rhinard, 2009). The study thus also offers insight into the contestation triggered by crises, which fuel "processes of legitimization, de-legitimization, and re-legitimization" (Hart, 1993, p. 40).

There is a lack of studies on portrayals of political leadership in crises across borders (Aaldering & Vliegenthart, 2016). Based on the importance of public responsibility negotiations in political crisis management, the study suggests that perceptible leadership in transboundary crises results from a mediated transboundary responsibility discourse, which makes not only actors but also their evaluation and alliances publicly visible. To capture this, the Discursive Actor Attribution Model was expanded to also include legitimations efforts via justifications, by integrating for example insights from the Leadership Capital Index (Bennister et al., 2015; Gerhards et al., 2009; Hobolt & Tilley, 2014; Roose et al., 2015).

A manual quantitative content analysis captured newspaper coverage during the migration crisis and the coronavirus pandemic in Germany, Austria, Ireland, and the UK (1,513 articles/2,453 attributions). In each country, two quality newspapers with a different political orientation were selected (for example The Guardian/The Daily Telegraph, Der Standard/Die Presse). The comparative design with a country and crisis comparison explores how national Euroscepticism and communitization of policy fields shape responsibility negotiations in the multilevel setting. Results show that while Euroscepticism had no effect, communitization influenced actor visibility: Although both crises were transboundary, European actors were more visible during the migration crisis ($p = <.001$, $v = 0,37$). However, attribution types and directions offers limited insights into the construction of leadership. Blame attributions dominate (36%), while calls for action focus less on recognizing leadership and more on strategically abdicating responsibility, aligning with the theory of crisis exploitation (Boin et al., 2009). Most attributions remain within geographical and systemic boundaries; there is rather a mediated observation than a true transboundary responsibility discourse. Finally, responsibility addressees outside the nation state are rarely personalized (22%) and over half of the attributions lack justification and thus a legitimizing component. These results suggest that – in the European case – the responsibility discourse reflects an increase in Europeanization, depending on the policy focus of the crisis, rather than a public debate about leadership and problem-solving competencies.

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Strategic Narratives on Social Media: The Role of Media Systems, Political Actors, and Platforms in Framing the Russian-Ukrainian War in Seven EU Countries

Kostiantyn Yanchenko, Edda Humprecht (University of Jena, Germany)

In times of armed conflict, the media plays a crucial role in shaping public perceptions, political debates, and international responses. The ongoing Russian full-scale invasion of Ukraine has intensified discussions on how information warfare and strategic narratives influence public opinion and policymaking in Europe (Locoman & Lau, 2024). Information environments, influenced by national media structures and political alignments, affect how conflicts are framed and which narratives gain traction (Knüpfer & Entman, 2018). Therefore, examining war-related narratives across different contexts is essential for understanding the broader dynamics of political communication in times of conflict. The digital landscape is critical in contemporary conflicts, as information warfare complements traditional military operations (Prier, 2020). Russia's use of disinformation campaigns, agenda-setting tactics, and digital propaganda networks has been extensively documented (Bradshaw et al., 2024). However, pro-Russian war-related narratives are not confined to Russian state actors; similar messaging is echoed by a range of actors in Europe— right-wing populist politicians (Wondreys, 2025), so-called "alternative media" outlets (Beseler & Toepfl, 2024), and segments of mainstream media in countries experiencing democratic backsliding (Czyż, 2024). Other European actors actively engage in counter-framing efforts, emphasizing themes such as Russian aggression, civilian suffering, and democratic resilience in their war-related communication (Marigliano et al., 2024). These competing narratives form the core of our study, as we examine how different national contexts, media ecosystems, and political actors influence the media representation of the Russian-Ukrainian war in Europe. Specifically, we analyze war-related narratives that either advance or challenge Russian strategic interests in France, Germany, Hungary, Italy, Lithuania, Poland, and Sweden. By systematically analyzing the prevalence and co-occurrence of these narratives in 93,217 Facebook and Instagram posts from major media outlets and political actors, we assess whether specific information environments facilitate the spread of pro-Russian content and examine the role of populist actors in shaping war-related discourse. Our research is guided by the following research questions: RQ1: What are the patterns of association among different war-related narratives? RQ2: How does the prevalence of pro-Russian narratives vary across platforms, countries, and actor types? RQ3: To what extent are right-wing populist actors involved in shaping war-related discourse in the studied countries? To address these questions, we use automated content analysis with LLooM (Lam et al., 2024), a large language model–based framework for concept induction and classification, combined with hierarchical clustering to group war-related narratives. We further apply logistic regression models to examine the role of platforms, national contexts, and political affiliations in the spread of pro-Russian narratives. The study results allow us to group the countries into three categories based on the spread of pro-Russian narratives. Pro-Russian narratives were rare in France, Sweden, Poland, and Lithuania; present mainly among political actors in Germany and Italy; and widespread across both media and political segments in Hungary. The findings highlight how media and political factors influence information environments, calling for tailored, country-specific responses to disinformation.

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Blindspots, And Perspectives of the European Migrations Media Research

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Recent studies in Communication and Media Studies, Migration, Nationalism and Conflict Studies have revealed that mainstream and social media in the West play dominant role in perception of the migrants in their host countries. Abundant research has highlighted the European mainstream media trend to represent refugees – in particular those migrating to Europe from the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) – as dehumanized, homogenous, passive masses and a menace to Europe's safety, culture, economy, identity and values (*e. g.*, Palmgren, A., Åkerlund, M., & Viklund, L. (2023), De Coninck, D. (2023), Zawadzka-Paluektau, N. (2023), Rheindorf and Wodak, 2018 ; Vezovnik, 2018; Vollmer and Karakayali, 2018). Many of these studies have pointed to antagonization of MENA and Ukrainians' refugees in the European mainstream public space (mainstream and social media). They emphasize humanization and solidarization of the European media coverage on the Ukrainian refugees' crisis in the EU member countries contrary to de-humanization and "othering" of the Muslim refugees (Elmas, T., Yılmaz, F., & Gürbüz, N. (2024). Their research results and conclusions resonate with and replicate the bulk of other empirical corpora studies on media perception of refugees from different regions and divergent religious/cultural backgrounds.

However, the research is lacking on representation of the Ukrainian refugees in the francophone public space, specifically in the mainstream and social media of France, Switzerland and Belgium (Pettineo (2024). Our research project seeks to fill in this gap by

gearing at making a comparative empirical analysis of representation of the Ukrainian refugees in the French public space spanning 2022–2024s. It aims to explore main narratives of the Ukrainian women refugees' representation in the French mainstream media (national (quality newspapers) and regional press, TV and cinema). By employing corpus text analysis, quantitative content analysis and qualitative methods ("narrative configuration in qualitative analysis" (D. Polkinghorne, 1995) as well CDA (R. Wodak, 2015), we reveal how the French media represent/misrepresent different images of the Ukrainian women in France. Our research reveals a specific correlation between victimhood of the Ukrainian women refugees in France and its tabloidization in the course mediatization. Additionally, the research findings show that the trend towards the media tabloidization is linked to decontextualization, visualization, dehumanization of immigrants, "de-chronologization" as well as what we coin "archaization/de-modernization" of the public discourse on refugees. The paper questions the mainstream scholarship "solidarization perspective" on the Ukrainian refugees' representation in the Western media (contrary to de-humanization and othering of the refugees from MENA countries). Thus, this research reveals a paradox of humanization perspective with the Ukrainian refugees in France as "worthy victims" (Chomsky, Hermann, 2002) and their dehumanization in the francophone public sphere, more particularly in the French regional press, in the social networks, on the TV, and cinema. The findings of this empirical research reveal how the mainstream media sustain the stereotypes about "others" in the French public opinion, by representing/misrepresenting the images of the Ukrainian women. Finally, here we critically synthesize main stereotypes concerning a perception of the Ukrainian women migrants in the French mainstream media. We argue that this stereotype-making is due to decontextualization and more broadly – tabloidization of the French media discourse in respect to migration coverage (Hubé, 2014). The follow-up studies are exploring representation of the Ukrainian refugees in public space of other francophone countries both in Europe (Switzerland, Belgium), and overseas, in particular, in Canada.

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Surveillance between the state and the market

Göran Bolin (Södertörn University, Sweden)

Over the past decades, state and corporate surveillance has converged, but in which ways does this affect people's perception of surveillance? This lecture will give a short historical overview over changes since the 1990s, and a glimpse into some imaginaries of state surveillance and corporate dataveillance, based on empiric data from a three-country comparative project.

Networks are only as good as your questions: Challenges for Social Network Analysis as research practice

Bernie Hogan (University of Oxford, GB)

Social Network Analysis has emerged as a popular approach to understanding social structure, so much so that we run the risk of conflating the networks we construct with the social structure it measures. In this presentation I review modern approaches to the collection of social network data with a focus on communication networks. I highlight how the field has become more sophisticated in data collection. I note that this sophistication does not necessarily mean more objective data or more reliable insights. Instead, such sophistication can sometimes serve breadth over depth (with large scale computational networks) or it can mean greater attention to the world as understood by a respondent (with increasingly sophisticated interview tools). I show how our tools can be 'performative' but also must contend with various biases such as strategic withholding, anchoring, and social desirability bias. I sketch out 'co-creation' as an ethical approach to network data collection that embeds

ethical and epistemological concerns while acknowledging challenges for whole networks derived from multiple small personal networks.

New Perspectives for Franco-German Scientific Collaborations: Articulating Industrial R&D Collaborations from Geopolitical Tensions to Emerging Opportunities

Niklas Henke (Université Grenoble Alpes, France)

France and Germany are key actors of the European Union (EU), being founding members, and representing EU's biggest economic markets. They are also the powerhouse for European communication research (Eichmann, Webber & McCarthy, 2001; Defrance, 2023). Nevertheless, they show different approaches to communication research. The French *"Sciences de l'Information et de la Communication (SIC) »* represents a different epistemological heritage and framework then the German *"Kommunikationswissenschaft"* as shown by Averbeck-Lietz (2008) & Averbeck-Lietz et al., (2023). Despite their respective particularities, both countries practice close collaborations and influenced each other intellectually in the past, and they keep on doing so today. These circumstances make the two countries a relevant research object for understanding current challenges and perspectives for European communication research. Recent geopolitical and economic events (e.g. the Ukraine war and recent trade wars) shed new light on the Franco-German tandem and favour new structures of industrial and academic research collaborations. My contribution shall help understand the new situation and therefore be guided by the following research questions:

1. What are current particularities and challenges for Franco-German scientific collaborations?
2. Which implications have the recent North American events (e.g. scientists lay-offs of the Trump administration) on Franco-German collaborations?
3. Which perspectives and future scenarios can be identified?

The methodology to answer these questions will consist in mobilizing online sources from research projects, industrial actors, and governments of the two countries. The research scope shall not be limited to the academic realm. Instead, industrial research projects should be considered, as they represent a high share of a country's overall R&D activities. The different structures of research funding in France and Germany impacts the communication research realized in both countries. A prominent R&D funding framework in France is the so-called *CIFRE* convention[1], which is meant to stimulate industrial R&D expenditures in France, while being disposed to diverse criticism (e.g. lack of transparency). The intervention shall reflect on the epistemological implications of such research fundings. Industrial R&D collaborations between both countries serve less often as research object than academic ones – a blind spot that shall be addressed with my intervention.

Geopolitical events, especially several ones initiated by the Trump administration, impact current research collaborations between France and Germany. Collaborations between both countries need to reconsidered according to the recent events in the scientific landscape of the United States. The lay-off of many scientists via the Trump administrations has its impacts on Franco-German, and therefore European research activities. These events create uncertainties and questions for the future of Franco-German collaborations (Rubinskiy & Sindeey, 2024). While Germany was historically closer to north American epistemologies, this is less the case for France (Bonnet, Bonnet & Averbecck-Lietz, 2014). Nevertheless, the question remains, about the precise effects of the described American events on Franco-

[1] For further information about the French CIFRE convention see https://www.enseignementsup-recherche.gouv.fr/fr/les-cifre-46510

German collaborations. Which scenarios and perspectives can be identified? The contribution shall develop such perspectives and scenarios.

Combining the historic, intellectual heritage of both countries, with considering current industrial R&D activities, in the light of current geopolitical tensions, allows identifying more precise ideas about possible futures for Franco-German collaborations, and European communication research in general.

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Digital Europe: the contribution of Communication Research for European Digital Transformation

Maria Teresa Cruz (NOVA University of Lisbon, Portugal)

This proposal addresses communication and media research as a crucial factor for understanding and shaping the digital transition in Europe and defining its civilizational future. Although this may seem self-evident, it is not yet reflected in the European efforts to frame and regulate digital transformation and AI, dominated by an instrumental vision of technique and the corresponding focus on misuse and bad actors, as the decisive shield for European values. However, such a vision is insufficient to respond to the magnitude of the transformation in question. The focus of this proposal is the "whence and whither" of European communication research with respect to digital transition and AI and the advocacy for its crucial role in the framing of the cybernetic age in Europe.

In the last decade, high profile scientists, technologists and entrepreneurs have signaled existential risks of AI for humanity. Such calls can be compared to those on climate change and the planet's sustainability, issued by equally relevant signatories. Far from doomsday or speculative fictions they both concern the place and role of human beings in the long techno-ecological development of human life on earth. But, whereas for the "green transition", the interdisciplinary alliance and ecological paradigm seem finally in place, for the "digital transition", the epistemological framing and interdisciplinary alliances have not yet coalesced in a way to truly influence our political decisions. A key task of communication research in the close coming years is to frame such an epistemological approach and present its techno-ecology (Hörl & Burton 2017) for the age of cybernetics and agentic AI.

The elements for discussion will be presented in three moments. The first will focus on the European regulatory framework regarding the digital transition (EU 2022, 2023, 2024), and the influence of communication sciences (or lack thereof) on some of its key documents. The second will comment on key aspects of the legacy of European communication research: the acknowledgement of the relation between culture and technology (Kittler 1997, 2009), the meeting of critical theory with media apparatuses, but also the valuing of cultural techniques (Siegert 2015) and the understanding that every communication and information technologies shape our social and cultural environments as well as our perception and knowledge (Krämer 2015). Media ecology and post-humanist perspectives, whether explicit or implicit, have long been present in communication and media theory and have had an enormous impact on cultural studies. However, the new symbolic machine of mathematical computation (Turing 1950) traverses both nature and culture and is based on communication as a general science of governance or control, inseparable from statistical prediction and electrical engineering. More importantly, whatever inspiration it may draw from human intelligence and its neurological system, this communication science is equally applicable to animals and machines (Wiener 1948). And so, inasmuch as any voluntary agency can be reinforced through feedback loops, i.e. controlled by machines, so any automated system can develop its own goals, at least theoretically (Simondon 2016, Hui 2024). Thus, the third moment of this proposal reflects on the more estranged field of cybernetics, to which the European communication research must come to terms with to present the full political significance and responsibility of its task (Quéau 2000, Berry 2018, Stiegler 2011), and the conditions for the new European crossroads of communication, sovereignty and values.

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Generative AI and Ethnographic Communication Research: Gaps and Opportunities

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Ethnography and machine learning (ML) are emerging as complementary methodologies for theorizing human communication. Traditional ethnography involves the detailed, immersive study of everyday life, emphasizing long-term researcher presence in specific contexts to produce "thick descriptions" of symbolic acts from the perspective of actors (Geertz, 1973, p. 7). This approach identifies meaningful patterns through contextualized interpretation (Hymes, 1971; Marcus, 1995). In contrast, ML identifies patterns computationally, relying on big data and statistical techniques (Li & Abramson, 2025).

While ML focuses on prediction, generative AI emphasizes creation. Large Language Models (LLMs), a subset of generative AI, are trained on extensive datasets scraped from the internet and have evolved from text-based systems to multimodal tools capable of generating text, images, and other genres (Sandhu, 2024). These advancements open new avenues for ethnographers of media and communication to explore multimodal datasets and their implications (Maltezos et al., 2025).

This paper addresses three critical questions from a European communication and media research perspective: (1) defining the ethnographic field in research with and on generative AI and LLMs; (2) examining sociocultural and political values embedded in LLMs; and (3) analyzing the ethical implications of these values and biases for ethnographic research.

Scholars have long noted that artificial intelligence systems and the narratives about them perform cultural and technical beliefs (Daly et al., 2019; Forsythe, 2001), a concern substantiated by recent studies highlighting the dominance of U.S.-centric language ideologies in LLM training datasets (Luitse & Denkena, 2021; Yakura et al., 2024). These biases shape LLM outputs, as they embed culturally specific ways of communicating, reasoning, and knowledge creation (Jones et al., 2025). Consequently, LLMs not only reproduce but also reinforce particular cultural communication aesthetics and ideologies while exhibiting their own form of machine agency (Katzenbach & Pentzold, 2024 on automation).

The increasing agency of generative AI introduces theoretical and ethical challenges distinct from those encountered in traditional and digital ethnographies. Unlike traditional and digital ethnographies that require human researchers to immerse themselves in physical and digital spaces (Boellstorff, 2008; Hine, 2000; Hjorth et al., 2017; Witteborn, 2023), generative AI assumes an active role in producing socioculturally infused outputs. This shift necessitates new ethical frameworks for studying highly contextualized phenomena in algorithmic research spaces and with synthetic interlocutors (Dengel et al., 2023).

In response to these challenges, this paper proposes guidelines for conducting ethically sound research with LLMs in Europe. Drawing on the EU's White Paper on AI (European Commission, 2020) and subsequent guidelines for responsible AI use (Klimczak & Petersen, 2023; Kusche, 2024), it emphasizes transparency, accountability, researcher reflexivity, and data privacy as foundational principles. Specific recommendations include ethnographic participatory action research (e.g., Lawson et al., 2015) for data gathering and verification, safeguarding research participants' rights, promoting epistemic justice for marginalized groups lacking digital literacy or legal protections, and regulating interactions with synthetic agents. By addressing these gaps and opportunities, this paper aims to advance interdisciplinary approaches to generative AI research while fostering ethical practices aligned with European regulatory frameworks.

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Empowering Individuals through Generative Learning of Self-Concept to Build Self-Confidence and Embrace European Identity

Mariana Zubenschi (State Pedagogical University from Chisinau, Republic of Moldova)

This paper explores the role of generative learning in developing a coherent self-concept that contributes to self-confidence and facilitates the internalization of a European identity among university students at the Academy of Music, Theater and Fine Arts, from the Republic of Moldova. Rooted in the interdisciplinary curriculum "Psychology of Communication: Identity in a European Context", the study presents an educational framework designed to cultivate reflective thinking, interpersonal communication skills, and value-oriented personal growth. The conceptual framework integrates classic and contemporary psychological theories of the self, including those by G.W. Allport, C. Rogers, E. Erikson, and E. Fromm, with sociocultural dimensions of identity construction in the European context. Through this lens, the self-concept is understood not as a fixed entity but as a dynamic construct shaped by reflexivity, social interactions, and cognitive-emotional integration. Generative learning is positioned as a pedagogical process that encourages learners to actively engage in self-exploration, perspective taking, and meaning-making within a culturally diverse environment. The curriculum model is informed by the Research, Development, and Diffusion (RD&D) approach and aligns with the key competences outlined by the European Council for lifelong learning. Structured into four thematic modules - such as Self and Social Identity, Communication Forms and Barriers, European Identity Construction, and Conflict and Value-Based Dialogue, the course encourages students to develop both professional and transversal competences. These include critical thinking, active listening, assertive expression, and strategies for conflict resolution.
A distinctive feature of the course is its emphasis on self-reflective and creative tasks that support the development of identity awareness and self-confidence. These activities involve the use of digital tools such as Canva, Jamboard, and Piktochart to create personal portfolios, infographics, and case-based analyses. Through these methods, learners internalize abstract concepts such as Homo Europaeus, social resilience, and intercultural communication within applied contexts.
Generative learning, in this context, is not limited to cognitive acquisition, but extends to identity transformation through the activation of the learner's agency and emotional resonance. The methodology fosters an inclusive educational climate, respecting individual learning rhythms and promoting cultural diversity and democratic values.

Preliminary findings from implementation within first-cycle university programs in arts and humanities suggest that students who engage with this curriculum demonstrate improved self confidence, heightened cultural sensitivity, and a deeper understanding of European identity as a pluralistic and evolving construct. The study concludes that empowering learners through generative approaches to self-concept development can significantly contribute to the formation of active, resilient, and value-driven European citizens.

The evolution of creative and innovative communication research in Europe: a critical perspective

Nayra Vacaflor (University of Bordeaux Montaigne, France)

Since the 1970s, communication research in Europe has experienced a profound transformation. Moving away from traditional positivist models, it has opened up to more creative and innovative approaches (Miège, 2015). Numerous research projects illustrate this trend towards more immersive and participatory practices. At the crossroads of action research and systemic communication, methods such as escape-rooms (Vacaflor & Lima, 2022), shadowing (Van der Weele & Bredewold, 2021), interactive video (Matsiola, 2024), legos (Gaunttlet, 2013) or collages (Hamilton & Pinnegar, 2019) make it possible to explore human interactions and collect data in real time.
This evolution is characterized by a diversification of methodologies and objects of study, as well as critical reflection on the very foundations of communication research (Douyère, 2016). Communication research in Europe is characterized by its roots in the values of diversity, solidarity and democracy. These principles have enabled the development of communication models rooted in local realities yet connected to global debates. Hall (1997) and Bourdieu (1994) have highlighted the importance of reassessing power structures through the media, a concern that is in the heart of contemporary research.
To avoid essentialism, researchers in Europe are called upon to explore further the cross-border and intercultural dimensions of communication phenomena. This means taking into account language barriers and valuing diverse research traditions (Rains et al.2020). The evolution of creative and innovative communication research in Europe is marked by a constant questioning of dominant paradigms. Researchers are invited to explore new possibilities, push back methodological boundaries (Arnold, 2019) and adapt to the challenges of a constantly changing world. My co-editing of articles on innovative research methods in organizational communication in France confirms this point. This dynamic is part of a continuously changing societal context, marked by digitalization, transnational mobilities and social crises. As McQuail (2010) says, since communication is intrinsically linked to the evolution of social and cultural systems, researchers must continually adapt their theoretical and methodological approaches.
Methodological innovation at the heart of research
The integration of digital tools and multimodal practices has also played a key role in this evolution. The work of Helen Kara (2020) on creative methods in the humanities and social sciences, and the analyses of Kirsten and Tosten (2020) on methodological innovation in strategy and management, attest to this. Although these examples do not specifically study communication subjects, they offer interesting perspectives on methodological forms of representation and their potential for revealing complex social dynamics.
In this paper, I aim to define methodological innovations by European communication researchers within the past five years. Based on a study of qualitative research published between the years 2020-2025 on Academia.edu and Researchgate.net, I will identify articles presenting substantial originality at each stage of the research process. This analysis will

focus on two key aspects: data generation and methodological analysis. To interpret them I will combine a thematic approach to identify innovative methodological trends in communication research and a critical discourse analysis of a selected corpus to examine epistemological issues.

This study explores new research methods in European communication field, expanding how data is collected and analyzed. By sharing creative approaches, it encourages collaboration and growth in the field. Eventually, it helps make communication research more flexible and inclusive.

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Imagining Digital Europe on TikTok: From Institutional Narratives to Meme Culture

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This presentation explores how the hashtag #digitaleuro on TikTok can be a place where meanings about Europe's digital present and future are created. While the digital euro was initially linked to the European Central Bank's institutional efforts to promote a digital currency, it has become part of a broader set of practices. It extends to the discourses and aesthetic forms immersed in TikTok's algorithmic ecosystem. The presence of this concept on social networks, which are predominantly used by young people (Probert, 2025, February 19), can provide a revealing perspective on how younger generations relate to European identity and values, mediated by algorithms and AI. In any case, it is not only young people who use it; institutions and politicians are also present. By April 2025, more than 1,100 posts had been published with the hashtag #digitaleuro, ranging from informative and promotional content to ironic memes, critical comments, and speculative fiction.

The study draws on research on platforms (van Dijck, 2020), digital storytelling (Zhao et al., 2024), and the presence of algorithms (Brooker & Mair, 2023) on TikTok. These works serve as a starting point for exploring how short-form videos, sound overlays, AI filters, and remix logic shape the production and circulation of meanings about Europe. It also draws on the possibilities offered by TikTok as a form of civic expression (Moffett & Rice, 2024), considering how seemingly informal or humorous TikToks can articulate broader critiques of economic governance, digital sovereignty, and the role of European institutions in everyday life.

A mixed methodology combines quantitative analysis of metrics and metadata with qualitative, multimodal, and narrative research (Hernando Velasco et al., 2024). We draw on previous work on cultural production on TikTok that has used the same methodology for data collection and analysis. Various steps are followed, mediated by different types of software (Lacasa et al., 2025 (in press): 1) scraping of 1,111 posts using Apify; 2) visualization of the most relevant data using Tableau; 3) qualitative analysis of the most commented videos using Transana; 4) analysis of the comments applying the AI categorization processes enabled by Nvivo.

Preliminary results suggest that while some videos reproduce official narratives about the digital euro as a symbol of innovation and sovereignty, others rely on memes to convey Eurosceptic representations. In addition, comments become spaces for dialogue where institutional discourse is reinterpreted from local, generational, or ideological perspectives. TikTok's multimodal discourses allow participants to integrate financial and political criticism into entertainment-oriented formats, pointing to a hybrid public sphere that is both playful and political (Literat & Kligler-Vilenchik, 2023; Woods, 2024).

From the perspective of European communication research, this presentation contributes to the debate on how digital discourses and the AI present in them can help shape the concept of the digital euro and, to a certain extent, of Europe (Beaudonnet et al., 2023). In light of the 50th anniversary of *Communications*, this study, which focuses on a seemingly peripheral TikTok hashtag, invites us to rethink the "European" in communication research: not only as a reference point beyond the geographical or institutional, but also in a framework associated with entertainment among young people. The political imaginaries associated with playfulness can be discussed within the framework of the transformative aesthetics of AI.

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