NR14 / Digital Political Communication in the Global South: Power, Media, and Democracy

Topic : Research

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GENERAL OBJECTIVES, RESEARCH QUESTIONS AND SCIENTIFIC RELEVANCE

Political communication has been an established field since the 1970s, grounded primarily in political psychology and media studies examining how citizens process political information, form electoral preferences, and participate in democratic life. Early models were largely built around a broadcast-centred media ecology, where agenda-setting, framing, and persuasion were mediated through relatively stable institutional actors such as newspapers, radio, and television.

Over the past two decades, this model has been fundamentally disrupted. The rapid transition from cable television to the internet, social media platforms, and now AI-assisted information production has transformed the scale, speed, and structure of political communication. Needless to say, any disruption in media technology leads to new ways of conception, production, communication and reception of information leading to new metaphors, cognitive habits, worldviews, frameworks for social relations, breeding a new culture of knowledge and ways of knowing. Contemporary research increasingly focuses on identity-based mobilisation, selective exposure, motivated reasoning, institutional trust, misinformation, and affective polarisation. Academics in the Global South have been exploring and interpreting this intersection long before it gained prominence in the United States and Europe. Interacting with these established works could significantly enhance our current efforts, particularly in comprehending the intricacies of race and ethnicity-based mobilisation.

The panel advances political communication research by foregrounding Global South scholarship as a source of conceptual and methodological insight rather than merely empirical variation. By doing so, it situates contemporary debates on digital platforms, identity-based mobilisation, and democratic accountability within historically grounded and comparative contexts, offering analytical leverage for understanding political communication both within and beyond the Global South.

This panel responds to a growing recognition that digital political communication cannot be adequately understood through Western-centric assumptions alone. Scholars working on the Global South have long examined mediated politics in contexts marked by weaker institutions, high social heterogeneity, informal media ecologies, and intense identity mobilisation. Revisiting these literatures is crucial not only for political communication research in the context of institutions of the developing world, but also for understanding emerging dynamics in the United States and Europe, where similar patterns are now visible.

The panel aligns closely with the conference theme by foregrounding new media, political power, and democratic consequences, while explicitly advancing a comparative and de-Westernized perspective. The panel invites contributions addressing one or more of the following questions:

How do informational, relational, and expressive forms of news consumption on social media differentially shape political participation and mobilisation?

In what ways do political parties and leaders strategically use digital media to emphasise, reframe, or erase political narratives (e.g., memory, identity, development)?

What kind of regulatory policy frameworks are needed in order to protect the epistemic integrity of the public sphere and discourse, which is essential for a democratic spirit and structure?

How do institutional weaknesses in many Global South contexts complicate accountability for misinformation, disinformation, and platform governance?

What theoretical or methodological innovations are needed to study political communication in rapidly

changing sociotechnological environments?

CALL FOR PAPERS

Digital media technologies have transformed political communication across the world, reshaping how political information is produced, circulated, and consumed. Social media platforms, algorithmic curation, and AI-assisted content generation have altered relationships between political actors, media institutions, and citizens, with significant implications for democratic participation, accountability, and public discourse. While much of the existing scholarship on digital political communication remains anchored in Western contexts, scholars in the Global South have long examined mediated politics under conditions of social heterogeneity, institutional fragility, and intense identity-based mobilisation.

This panel invites papers that foreground the Global South as a site of theoretical and empirical insight rather than peripheral comparison. It seeks to engage work that examines how digital platforms interact with political power, identity, and democratic practices in diverse contexts, and how these dynamics complicate established assumptions about media effects, agenda-setting, and accountability. The panel also welcomes comparative research that connects developments in the Global South with emerging patterns in the United States and Europe.

We invite contributions that address, but are not limited to, the following themes:

Digital news consumption (informational, relational, expressive) and political participation

Strategic use of social media by political parties and leaders to shape narratives of memory, identity, and development

Misinformation, disinformation, and challenges of platform governance

Institutional trust, regulation, and epistemic integrity of the public sphere

Methodological innovations for studying digital political communication, including computational and mixed methods

The panel welcomes empirical, theoretical, and methodological papers. Submissions drawing on cases from Asia, Africa, Latin America, and other postcolonial contexts are especially encouraged, as are comparative and computational analyses of political texts and digital media.