

Political Communication Report 2023 - Issue 01 “New Methodological Diversity in PolComm”

<http://dx.doi.org/10.17169/refubium-39040>

Letter from the Editor

Re-launching the Political Communication Report: A Space for Collective Self-reflection

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The last issue of the Political Communication Report (PCR) was published in 2016. Since then, populist parties and elites have reshaped digital campaigning. Progressive and reactionary movements have formed around hashtags and meme-driven protest formats. The global pandemic transformed the way we collaborate and “meet” one another. Meanwhile, the prisms through which we come to view politics – news outlets and social media platforms – are undergoing rapid transformations, while emergent forms of AI are poised to have a profound transformative impact on our digitally networked societies. In short: *political* constellations have changed immensely, as have *communication* dynamics.

Arguably, political communication scholarship has always been focused on moving targets. But if you are like me, you can’t help but notice how these targets seem to be picking up speed, while simultaneously multiplying. So in light of all this noise, all these new possibilities for doom-scrolling, and the constant assault on our collective capacities for attention, do we really need another info outlet? The obvious answer is: no.

The more sophisticated one is: perhaps – but it probably needs to look like what we have in mind with the new Political Communication Report (which is really also the old Political Communication Report).

Allow me to briefly lay out what this entails: Beyond the immediate institutional work of the two divisions, we might think of political communication as a network, a field, or a community. As scholars of such things, we know that whatever label we use here, these forms of connectivity depend on communicative ties – on building and maintaining connections that provide pluralistic and inclusive communicative spaces. The more connected we all are, the more we all benefit. But for this to happen, we also need to be able to collectively self-reflect.

It is in this spirit that the PCR will foster cooperation between established and emerging voices interested in shaping our collective conversations. The success of this endeavor will depend on all of you, as readers, as contributors, as a network, a field, a community. Collectively, we want to provide a communicative space that is more dynamic than our journal publications, but less ephemeral than social media posts. The overarching themes of the upcoming issues are therefore guided by a commitment to pluralism and self-reflexivity.

Let's take a look at what we have so far: Issue 1 (of 2) for 2023 introduces some new and some familiar names via the format of our "Awardee Interview Questionnaires." Here, the authors that were awarded various division prizes in 2022 introduce themselves and tell us about their (ongoing) research process. Meanwhile, the thematic essays focus on the topic of "New Methodological Diversity in PolComm." In my role as editor, I honestly didn't do much other than provide this prompt to members of our community, to solicit their input. Despite hectic schedules, the enthusiasm for this project was astounding. Practically everyone I tapped immediately agreed to contribute to the PCR. I am extremely grateful to be able to announce that the relaunch issue consists of a collection of incredibly thoughtful, timely, and highly important contributions:

- First up, the editorial team of *Political Communication*, led by Regina Lawrence, provides a succinct overview of key developments in the field – and how this has impacted their work at the journal. Under the title "New Methods, 'Old' Methods," they point to emerging trends and challenges in political communication research, many of which are picked up by the other essays in this issue...
- Emilija Gagrčičin & Chelsea Butkowski note the (underappreciated) role and (untapped) potential of qualitative methods in contemporary Polcomm scholarship. They make a case for more mutual understanding between quant and qual, and remind us of the discipline's long history of mixed-methods approaches.
- Danielle Brown and Kathleen Searles provide critical reflections on agency and persistent inequalities within our field – and propose three actionable strategies for how to ensure "our subfield's important efforts to diversify the voices of political communication are not contributing to harm."
- Ulrike Klinger, Daniel Kreiss, and Bruce Mutsvairo provide a new model to conceptualize the relationship between "Platforms, Power, and Politics," taking various modes of institutional power and context specificities into account.
- Josephine Lukito's text on "Political Language and the Computational Turn," also stresses the importance of social contexts along with human agency, pointing out the usefulness of emerging language processing methods while remaining mindful that, "we do not become reliant on these tools for interpretation or decision-making."

- Finally, Claes de Vreese and Fabio Votta provide an overview of the looming changes and challenges we can expect AI to create within our subdiscipline – including ways in which political communication scholarship can help guide the coming transitions.

Reading these pieces, it is striking how much they complement one another, pointing to various parts of the metaphorical elephant that comprises our field. An unprompted theme that emerges is the acknowledgment that political communication (research) does not take place within a vacuum: Just as the context of political dynamics matters, so do the people who contribute to studying them. On that note, and beyond our wonderful contributors, I want to thank the two division chairs, Frank Esser and Sharon Jarvis as well as Patricia Moy for their input and guidance on this re-launch project. And finally, I want to applaud the fantastic work of my predecessor Eike Rinke, the PCR's last editor – all I've been doing this past year is to try to fill the shoes he left me. Along with Joshua Scacco, the previous social media manager and webmaster, he has been more than generous with his time and council.

Curd Knüpfer, May 2023