

2027 SACM CONFERENCE**22-23 April 2027****University of Bern****Communication in a Challenged World: From Division to Connection**

Across contemporary societies and geographies, communication has become simultaneously a force for fragmentation and a potential instrument of repair. Deepening polarization, the erosion of shared epistemic foundations, and the uneven distribution of digital infrastructure are reshaping the conditions under which public discourse occurs with consequences for democratic participation, institutional trust, and social cohesion both in Switzerland and worldwide.

Digital transformations, accelerated by rapid advancements in artificial intelligence (AI) and related technologies, have intensified these dynamics by widening existing inequalities and perpetuating a sense of uncertainty and precariousness. Within Western democracies, disinformation and conspiracy narratives have been spreading with unprecedented speed across platforms, undermining the informed deliberation that democratic systems require. Meanwhile, the authority of traditional media and journalism continues to erode as authoritarian models of governance are gaining traction globally.

Yet, divisions also create openings and opportunities both for traditional communication actors (e.g., journalistic media or educational institutions) and new ones (e.g., human and AI-powered influencers). In the case of Switzerland, which is one of the world's leading hubs of AI-driven technological innovation, the technological transformations—and societal changes amplified by them—offer a unique possibility to explore how communication-related shifts bring not only harm but also good by fostering new forms of public debate and political participations, bridging group divides, and identifying new standards and principles for different forms of communication.

This conference is organized around the belief that communication research can not only pinpoint these ongoing societal challenges but also bring forward opportunities to bridge divides. We are calling on scholars to tackle these questions, among others, with rigorous research and ideas.

KEY QUESTIONS

- How can communication practices foster meaningful dialogue across social and political divides?
- What strategies reinforce trust in democratic institutions and strengthen resilience against disinformation, propaganda, and hate speech, and how can new AI technologies contribute to these strategies?
- How do we build inclusive information ecosystems in which structurally marginalized voices are heard, and what is the role of different technological affordances in strengthening and undermining them?
- What do current sociopolitical ruptures and divides demand from communication research, theory, and practice?

To address these questions, the overarching theme of the conference is further divided into six interconnected subthemes:

1. Journalism Research

Legacy media is losing ground while platform-native news formats and peripheral actors are becoming increasingly present and powerful in the information landscape. Political pressures in newsrooms and ownership concentration further threaten journalistic independence. At the same time, independent and audience-funded media are emerging with unprecedented momentum. Finally, the rise and proliferation of AI-generated content, including but not limited to deepfakes, creates further challenges for journalistic practitioners. These challenges are particularly pronounced in the case of Switzerland with its distinct multilingual media ecosystem and the rapid scale of adoption of new technologies.

This subtheme invites research on how journalists navigate disinformation ecosystems, rebuild source credibility, and adapt to professional norms under political pressure and economic precarity.

KEY QUESTIONS

- How do journalists maintain independence under political and corporate pressure?
- What reporting practices effectively counter information pollution without amplifying it?
- How does journalism contribute to democratic resilience?
- What models sustain quality journalism in under-resourced contexts?

2. Media Education & Media Socialization

As algorithmically curated feeds and AI-generated content start dominating information environments, the cultivation of critical media literacies becomes urgent. Media socialization increasingly occurs outside formal institutions, shaped by peers, platforms, and influencers, which also opens critical avenues for research around old and new ways of social media use among the younger and older generation and its implications for wellbeing. Finally, access to quality media education varies dramatically across geographies, socioeconomic contexts, and demographic groups, leading to unequal opportunities for critical media engagement.

This subtheme explores how education systems, families, and communities can equip citizens, especially younger generations, to engage constructively with contested information environments, and how they can either reproduce or disrupt existing inequalities in media literacy and education.

KEY QUESTIONS

- What media literacy interventions help reduce susceptibility to information pollution?
- How do sociodemographics shape media socialization outcomes?
- Can digital media education foster cross-cutting exposure rather than reinforce echo chambers?
- What role do informal educators and influencers play in shaping media norms?

3. Media Policy, Structures & History

Regulatory frameworks designed for the broadcast era are straining under platform capitalism and transnational information flows. Historical analysis reveals how media structures have always reflected and reinforced social hierarchies as well as how they can be contested. Today, debates over platform regulation, public media funding, and digital sovereignty carry high democratic stakes.

This subtheme examines policy responses to fragmentation and the structural conditions enabling or constraining pluralism.

KEY QUESTIONS

- What historical patterns of media development and collective memories shape current divisions, and how do these continue to affect contemporary communication?
- What regulatory models best balance free expression, platform accountability, and pluralism?
- What is the future of public service media in an era of streaming and platform dominance?
- How do North-South asymmetries shape global communication governance?

4. Political Communication

Political communication is being transformed by populist rhetoric, strategic disinformation, and the migration of political discourse to social platforms. From microtargeting to astroturfing, new techniques weaponize division while eroding the shared epistemic ground democratic deliberation requires. In the case of Switzerland, these risks are amplified by the increasing risks of foreign interference (e.g., in the form of disinformation and propaganda campaigns), particularly as the country remains a common host of key events associated with international politics.

This subtheme explores how political actors, movements, and institutions communicate in an age of polarization, across different platforms and audiences.

KEY QUESTIONS

- How do populist and authoritarian actors exploit fragmented media ecosystems?
- What role does political communication play in constructing or dissolving trust?
- How can deliberative formats be designed to bridge partisan divides?
- What effects do algorithmic amplification or microtargeting have on political discourse?

5. Audience, Reception & Impact Research

Audiences are neither passive recipients nor fully autonomous interpreters: they are shaped by social context, identity, and platform affordances and increasingly by AI systems that curate, summarize, or even produce content. We welcome work examining how generative AI alters reception, from examining trust in those systems to emotional attachment (e.g., do AI-personalized messages feel more or less authentic?) to the very nature of "exposure" when AI mediates what is seen and how. Research on selective exposure, echo chambers, and cross-cutting engagement challenges simplistic narratives about media effects and offers insight into the conditions under which communication bridges divides.

This subtheme calls for empirical and theoretical work on how diverse audiences engage with, reject, or transform mediated messages.

KEY QUESTIONS

- Under what conditions does exposure to opposing views reduce rather than intensify polarization, and how does AI-recommended or AI-generated content compare to human produced ones?
- How do marginalized audiences resist, reinterpret, or reclaim dominant media narratives?
- What is the actual reach and impact of disinformation on political attitudes and behavior?

- How do trust, identity, and emotion mediate audience reception across different social groups?
- Much media consumption now happens in "invisible" spaces—podcasts, private messaging, AI assistants. How should we conduct research in these hybrid environments? And how does this research gap affect regulatory decisions regarding especially newly and rapidly developing technologies such as AI, especially in a small, multilingual country like Switzerland?

6. Organizational Communication

Organizations occupy a distinctive position within today's fragmented communication landscape: as employers, as public-facing institutions, and as actors with growing responsibility for the information ecosystems they participate in. Strategic communication is increasingly called upon not only to inform but to rebuild trust — internally among employees navigating uncertainty and change, and externally among stakeholders and publics confronted with disinformation, polarization, and declining confidence in institutions. This challenge takes on particular significance in Switzerland, where direct democracy, linguistic and cultural diversity, and a tradition of social partnership place distinct demands on how organizations communicate with and involve their stakeholders. At the same time, organizations themselves must adapt to disruptive technological shifts, including the growing integration of artificial intelligence into communication practice, while critically examining the risks these tools pose to credibility, transparency, and trust.

This subtheme explores how organizational communication can serve as a bridge-building force amid social and political divides — fostering dialogue, resilience, and inclusion both within organizations and in their relationships with broader society.

KEY QUESTIONS

- How can organizational communication rebuild trust among employees and stakeholders in times of social and political division?
- What role do organizations play in countering false information and strengthening informed public discourse?
- How are communication professionals adapting their practices and skills to navigate AI-driven transformations?
- How can strategic communication help organizations support inclusion and give voice to structurally marginalized stakeholders?
- What responsibilities do organizations bear in shaping social cohesion through their communicative practices, particularly in a small, multilingual, and politically decentralized country like Switzerland?

Guidelines for Submitting a Proposal

Individual Submission	Panel	Workshop “Science meets Practice”
Extended abstract of maximum 3,000 characters (including spaces, bibliography not counted). Please also submit a short abstract for the conference program (500–1,000 characters). Please ensure that the author(s) are not named in either the summary or the main body of the submission. Please find a detailed description below.	Panel description: 1,000 characters 4–5 individual papers (3,000 characters each) centered around a shared theme A cover sheet listing the panelists must be included. The summary and extended abstract as well as the panel description should not contain the authors’ names. Please find a detailed description below.	Summary of the workshop topic (1000 characters) and a summary of the individual contributions (500-1000 characters each). Include a title page featuring details about the speakers from both research and professional practice in the communications and media field. Please also indicate a moderator. No anonymization is required.
10–12-minute presentation (if accepted)	90-minute panel (if accepted)	45 to 90 minutes (if accepted)

Please submit your contribution via the ConfTool platform. The link will be made available on the conference website.

Deadline for submissions: [November 27, 2026]

Announcement of the review results: [Beginning of February 2027]

Deadline for registration (speakers): [March, 2027]

Deadline for registration (general participants): [April 2, 2027]

Deadline for late registration (general participants): [April 10, 2027]

Individual Submission

For individual submissions, please provide a detailed summary (3,000 characters max, including spaces, bibliography not counted) of a presentation lasting 10–12 minutes. Specify the thematic area and, if applicable, the sub-topic to which the contribution belongs. A short summary (500–1,000 characters) for the conference program should also be submitted. Authors must ensure that their name does not appear in either the summary or the main body of the submission.

Panel

Please submit a panel proposal consisting of four to five individual contributions for a 90-minute session. All contributions should address a shared panel theme. The panel description is limited to 1,000 characters, while a description of 3,000 characters is required for each individual contribution. A cover sheet listing the panel chair and all participants must be

included; please ensure that individual participants are not named in any of the texts (summary, presentation, or submission materials).

Criteria for Evaluating Individual Contributions and Panels

1. Individual and panel proposals undergo anonymous peer review.
2. All individual submissions must be anonymized and submitted via Conftool.
3. For panels, anonymized individual contributions must be accompanied by a cover sheet listing the participants.
4. Evaluation criteria: 1) topic relevance, 2) alignment with conference themes, 3) theoretical foundation, 4) methodological rigor, 5) clarity of argumentation, 6) originality; for panels: 7) coherence of contributions around a shared theme.
5. Panels submitted by practitioners from applied media research or the media sector are assessed only on criteria 1, 2, 5, and 7. These proposals are not anonymously peer-reviewed but are evaluated by the organizing committee.

"Science Meets Practice" Workshops

This workshop series is designed to foster an open forum for dialogue between communication and media scholars and media professionals, including journalists, PR specialists, speakers, bloggers, and media managers, to engage in direct knowledge exchange.

If you wish to propose a workshop, please submit a proposal consisting of individual input from three to five panelists, for a session lasting 45 to 90 minutes. The workshop theme should be clearly presented in an abstract of 1,000 characters, outlining the key questions that all contributors will address during the session. A short summary of 500–1,000 characters, along with information about the participants from both academic and practical media backgrounds, is required for each individual contribution.

The submitted workshop proposals will be reviewed through a slightly revised selection process, based on an adjusted set of evaluation criteria:

1. Relevance of the topic
2. Alignment with the overall conference theme, and
3. Demonstrable thematic coherence between contributions from practice and those from communication and media studies.

SACM PhD Workshop

A pre-conference PhD workshop will take place on **April 22**, from **12:00 to 17:00**, on the opening day of the conference. It is intended for SACM doctoral students in communication and media studies who are members of the SACM.

Selected participants may present their dissertation projects or excerpts and receive feedback from peers and researchers with more experience. The workshop is organized by the SACM mid-level representatives. Information about the PhD workshop and registration can be found in the respective call. The submissions do not undergo the peer-review process, and there is a particular timeline for PhD workshop participants (see [Call](#)).

Timings & Deadlines

Deadline for papers	November 27, 2026
Announcement of the review results	February 2027
Start of registration	February 2027
Registration deadline for speakers	March 2027
Publication of the conference program	March 2027
Registration deadline for general participants	April 2, 2027
Late registration deadline for general participants	April 10, 2027
Conference dates	April 22-23, 2027

Registration Platform

All speakers selected through the review process must register for the conference via Conftool by the designated speaker registration deadline. Attendees not presenting must register either via Conftool by the participant registration deadline.

Registration Fee

Rate	Fee (CHF)
SGKM member (no dinner)	160.00
SGKM member (dinner)	250.00
PhD students (no dinner)	90.00
PhD student (dinner)	140.00
Non-member (no dinner)	210.00
Non-member (dinner)	310.00
Late registration (no dinner)	230.00
Late registration (dinner)	330.00

Contact and Information

E-Mail: sgkm2027.ikmb@unibe.ch

Website & link to conference registration: https://www.ikmb.unibe.ch/sgkm_2027/about

Social media: [LinkedIn](#)

Hashtag of the conference: #SGKM27

Organizing Committee

- Prof. Dr. Silke Adam
- Dr. Mykola Makhortykh
- Ani Baghumyan
- Roman Winkelhahn
- Victoria Vziatysheva
- Vihang Jumle