

International Conference

Digital Campaigning in Dissonant Public Spheres

Villa Collina, Cadenabbia, Italy
May 8-11, 2022

Call for Papers

Digital communication and digital media are massively challenging our understanding, thinking and knowledge about elections, referenda, protest mobilizations and other forms of political campaigning and engagement. Not only have political parties mediatized in high-choice media environments, but transformed into transmedia parties with communication at the core of their activities. Public spheres have become dissonant, disrupted by the inability to communicate across differences, increasing cacophony and polarization, and facilitate the manipulations of voter's opinion formation at a massive and transnational scale.

Parties, candidates and political movements develop new strategies of campaigning, including (but not limited to) microtargeting, embedding employees from tech companies into their campaigns, experimenting with new platforms beyond social media. At the same time, the campaign environment and its rules are in constant flow: some platforms end political advertisement or change the rules for certain aspects of campaigning.

New actors have joined the game of campaigning: algorithms that curate news feeds and manage content, social bots that automatically distribute messages and likes, chat bots on campaign websites, or data scientists and platform employees who joined PR consultants from the traditional era of mass-centered and target-group-centered campaigning. Additionally, recent studies on disinformation, foreign interference in campaigns, hyper-partisan media ecologies, hyperactive users and their impact on the opinion climate etc. have pointed to a massive level of voter manipulation, dark participation and coordinated inauthentic behavior.

Audiences, imagined audiences, and the ways in which voters use social media are also changing. Social media have become main sources of political information for a relevant part of the electorate, but at the same time voters tend to not trust social media for news and increasingly refrain from political debate on social media – fearing conflict and attack.

The aim of this international conference is to discuss the current state of research, reflect on the 2019 EP elections, the 2020 US presidential campaigns and several national elections in the recent past (2017-2021). Where do we stand, where does political communication research need to go, how can we overcome the challenges of data access restrictions, what can we learn from qualitative approaches? How can we trace and monitor digital manipulations across countries and over time? What are the public responses to these new phenomena?

We encourage authors to submit papers based on the proposed topics regardless of the geographical area. We are looking for either theoretical contributions or papers based on sound methodological work. We welcome quantitative approaches from both traditional approaches (surveys, experiments, content analysis etc.) and more innovative methodologies (social media networks analysis, social scientific computational methods and/or trace data based research). Authors should submit a short abstract (around 500 words without bibliography), providing information on the theoretical approach, methods used and possible preliminary results.

Important dates:

Submission deadline: December 15, 2021 (abstract of 500 words max.)

Acceptance information: (around) January 15, 2022

Please send abstracts to: dissonantpublicspheres@gmail.com

Location:

The conference will take place at
Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung / Villa La Collina –
Cadenabbia Via Rome 11 I-22011 Cadenabbia (Co.)
Italy

Invited authors will be provided with accommodation and food.

Organizers:

Ulrike Klinger (European New School of Digital Studies, Weizenbaum Institute for the Networked Society, Germany)

Uta Russmann (FH Wien der WKW University of Applied Sciences for Management & Communication, Austria)

Andrea Römmele (Hertie School, Germany)

Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung, Germany