

Comparison as Method and Heuristic in Communication Research

Vienna, Austria, 23–25 September, 2026

Call for Papers

The conference “Comparison as Method and Heuristic in Communication Research” takes place against the backdrop of rapid technological, media, and societal change. It focuses on innovations, trends, challenges, and solutions in comparative research within the field of media and communication studies.

Back in November 2006, the former Commission for Comparative Media and Communication Research of the Austrian Academy of Sciences, in collaboration with the Department of Communication at Johannes Gutenberg University Mainz, organized a workshop on this topic (Melischek et al., 2008). That workshop examined the state of comparative media and communication research in German-speaking countries, addressing core questions: What is comparative communication research? What are its objects of study? And what is the scientific value of comparison? At the heart of the discussion was comparison as a method and methodological principle.

The workshop was held at a time when comparative approaches in media and communication studies were not yet systematically established. However, they had been gaining increasing relevance since the 1990s (Livingstone, 2003; Pfetsch & Esser, 2004) and have since matured into a more consolidated area of inquiry (Esser & Hanitzsch, 2012; Esser, 2016; Chan & Lee, 2017; Holtz-Bacha, 2021; Volk, 2021).

Today, the [Institute for Comparative Media and Communication Studies](#) (CMC) brings together key perspectives on public discourse, media change, and transformations in mediated public communication through its Research Groups on [Media Accountability & Media Change](#), [Media, Politics & Democracy](#), and [Science Communication & Science Journalism](#). These Research Groups focus on questions of ethics and responsibility, democracy and participation, as well as truth and factuality—unified by a common methodological foundation: the comparative approach (see also: Melischek & Seethaler, 2017).

This conference revisits the comparative paradigm with fresh urgency. It addresses the pressing need to reflect on methodological innovation, technological transformation, and shifting global contexts from an international perspective. By bringing together scholars working across global regions, the event aims to critically assess the role of comparison as both method and heuristic in contemporary communication research—and to chart pathways for its future development.

Call for Papers (Themes)

1. Innovations, New Developments, and Approaches in Comparative Communication Research

We welcome submissions that explore methodological developments, discuss the use of new digital and technological tools, examine the challenges and potentials of comparative approaches, or present innovative proposals for advancing comparative methodology.

Questions might include:

- How can emerging technologies such as Artificial Intelligence, machine learning, or natural language processing enhance comparative research designs in communication studies?

- In what ways do automated content analysis and large-scale digital datasets (e.g., news archives, digital platforms) reshape the scope and scale of comparative research?
- How can comparative methods be adapted to address new forms of digital and hybrid media, such as influencer communication, platform governance, or algorithmic curation?
- How can mixed-method approaches strengthen comparative communication research?
- How can we ensure that long-term panel designs evolve methodologically in response to technological developments without compromising their scientific rigor and comparability?
- What are best practices for ensuring transparency, replicability, and ethical integrity in technologically mediated comparative studies?

2. Methodological Reflection and Critique

Comparative methods offer many advantages: they are context-sensitive, contribute to theory-building, help identify causal relationships, and have high heuristic value. Nevertheless, this conference also invites critical perspectives. What are the blind spots, limitations, and epistemological or methodological challenges associated with comparative methods? How can we overcome these issues?

Questions might include:

- What are the methodological implications of using computational tools for comparability—do they introduce new biases or overcome traditional limitations?
- How can we make comparative research more participatory, inclusive, or decolonial—both in design and in interpretation?
- How can comparative research contribute to the de-Westernization of communication studies?
- How should comparative research reflect upon the concept of national states?
- How relevant is historic comparison to understand current developments? What are the obstacles and potentials we have to consider?
- How do comparative approaches manage the demand for replicability, the tension between internal and external validity, or generalizability?

3. After Comparison: Making Use of Comparative Results

Comparative methods help identify patterns, uncover similarities and differences, and advance theory. They contribute to a deeper understanding of complex social phenomena. This section asks how comparative findings can be used productively—both within academia and in broader societal contexts.

Questions might include:

- How can comparative results be theoretically integrated or related back to existing frameworks?
- What generalization strategies (e.g., typologies, model building) are especially fruitful in comparative research?
- How can comparative insights be made productive across interdisciplinary contexts?
- In what ways can comparative findings inform methodological innovation or open new research perspectives?
- What is the value of comparative results for policy-makers and other stakeholders—and how can we rethink discursive science-to-policy or science-to-public processes?

Submission Guidelines

We welcome regular and student-led submissions. The conference language is English. All submissions must contain a separate cover page and an extended abstract. The cover page should provide the title of the submission, author information, 3–5 keywords and, if applicable, a note identifying the submission as a student-led paper. Extended abstracts must be fully anonymized for peer review. They should be 800–1.000 words long (excluding references, tables, and figures).

Please send your submissions containing separate PDF files for cover page and anonymized extended abstract to cmc@oeaw.ac.at.

The deadline for submissions is **February 27, 2026**. Submissions will undergo peer review, and acceptance notifications will be sent out no later than March 30, 2026.

Date

The conference will open with a keynote and panel discussion on the evening of September 23, 2026. Authors of accepted extended abstracts will present their papers in person in Vienna on September 24 and 25, 2026. The conference will conclude around noon on September 25, 2026.

Organizers

Institute for Comparative Media and Communication Studies (CMC)
Austrian Academy of Sciences | University of Klagenfurt
Bäckerstraße 13
1010 Vienna, AUSTRIA
<https://www.oeaw.ac.at/cmc>

Contact

cmc@oeaw.ac.at

Conference Venue

The conference will be held at the Austrian Academy of Sciences (ÖAW), located in the heart of Vienna at Dr. Ignaz Seipel-Platz 2, 1010 Vienna, AUSTRIA.

Conference Registration

Registration will be open from March 30, 2026. Conference attendance is free.

Publication

The organizing team aims to publish selected contributions and results of the conference in an academic context.

References

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- Melischek, G., & Seethaler, J. (2017). Die Institutionalisierung der Kommunikationswissenschaft an der Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften: Geschichte und Aufgabenbereiche des Instituts für vergleichende Medien- und Kommunikationsforschung [The institutionalization of communication science at the Austrian Academy of Sciences: History and areas of responsibility of the Institute for Comparative Media and Communication Studies]. *Geistes-, sozial- und kulturwissenschaftlicher Anzeiger*, 152(1), 65-98. <https://doi.org/10.1553/anzeiger152-1s65>
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