

## Call for Papers

Annual Conference 2026 of the Swiss Association for Communication and Media Studies (SACM) at the Zurich University of Applied Sciences

**April 22-24, 2026**

## **Enabling transformation and participation: Empowerment for and through communication and media**

Societal transformations - whether social, ecological, political or technological - are continuous processes in which social systems change fundamentally, for example in terms of values, norms and relationships. These processes require not only structural changes, but also communicative prerequisites. Communication and media play a dual role here: on the one hand, they are key resources for shaping, accompanying and publicly negotiating change processes; on the other hand, they themselves have a transformative effect by opening up or restricting access to participation, information and opinion-forming. In this field of tension, empowerment becomes a key concept: empowerment becomes a key process not only as a process at the micro, meso and macro levels that allows actors to actively participate in social development, but also as a way of opening up a normative perspective on empowerment that demands fair participation and self-determination in a changing communication landscape.

Empowerment through and for communication and media not only means the acquisition of media and communication skills but also refers to the opportunity to influence social conditions through communication - be it through journalism, strategic communication, political communication or media education. At the same time, the term refers to a collective dimension of self-empowerment that finds expression in social movements, civil society organizations or participatory communication formats. The SACM Annual Conference 2026 will address this dual perspective and ask: How can communication and media empower people to participate more in society - and how can they themselves be empowered to fulfill this aspiration?

### **Thematic focus**

We invite contributions on the following topics:

#### **1. Theory formation and theoretical approaches**

Empowerment is an interdisciplinary term from the disciplines of communication science, psychology, educational research and economics, which can be considered at the micro, meso and macro levels. In order to systematically analyze the role of communication and media in social transformation processes, theoretical approaches are needed that not only describe but also explain and critically reflect on empowerment. This subject area invites contributions that take up existing theoretical concepts, develop them further or put new theoretical perspectives up for discussion. Both communication science and inter- and transdisciplinary approaches are required that shed

light on the structural conditions, potentials and limits of empowerment through and for communication and media.

### **Possible topics and questions:**

- What contribution can communication science make to a normative foundation for empowerment?
- How can the micro, meso and macro levels of empowerment be linked in terms of communication theory?
- Which theoretical approaches are suitable for understanding the significance of empowerment for major social transformation processes?
- What role does power and its displacement play in the theoretical foundation of empowerment in media contexts?
- How can a mutual exchange between civil society and communication and media studies on transformation-relevant research desiderata be facilitated and how can scientific findings be made accessible to a broader public?

## **2. Journalism research**

Journalists are key players in the dissemination of knowledge and guidance and therefore make a significant contribution (?) to the empowerment of society. At the same time, they themselves face the challenge of dealing with new technological and social developments. This requires both the continuous development of journalistic skills and a critical examination of the impact of digital platforms, artificial intelligence and changes in media use on journalistic practice. Media use and citizens' expectations are constantly changing. The variety of information sources, new digital formats and interactive participation opportunities mean that the role of the audience must be rethought. Also relevant is the question of how media offerings can be developed in such a way that they not only inform but also highlight opportunities for action and promote social dialog.

### **Possible topics and questions:**

- What role does journalism play in a public sphere increasingly shaped by AI?
- To what extent can citizens be empowered in their social participation through local reporting and constructive journalism?
- What strategies can journalism use to counteract news deprivation and news avoidance?
- How can journalism contribute to social resilience?
- How can journalists be supported in using AI more efficiently in their work?

## **3. Organizational communication**

Organizations can actively contribute to the empowerment of various stakeholder groups through their strategic communication - both internally and externally. In this sense, communication is much more than an instrument for conveying information: it

is a central lever for empowering employees, external stakeholders and society. Strategic communication can change attitudes and acceptance and actively involve stakeholders in development processes. At the same time, strategic communicators themselves face the challenge of adapting to new technological and social developments. This requires both the continuous development of skills and a critical examination of the impact of digital platforms and artificial intelligence on the professional field of strategic communication.

#### **Possible topics and questions:**

- How do organizations communicate to promote acceptance of social change internally among employees and externally among stakeholders?
- How does organizational communication enable internal and external stakeholders to participate in transformation processes?
- How are communications employees empowered for AI-supported work?
- How can organizations use strategic communication to empower people in times of crisis and provide orientation?
- How can strategic communication help shape social change for the common good?

#### **4. Policy, regulation and governance**

Media policy, institutional structures and historical developments shape the possibilities of social empowerment through and for communication. They determine which framework conditions are created for journalistic diversity, freedom of expression and access to media content. The regulation of platforms, the transformation of public service media and the importance of media funding are decisive factors that influence communicative action and social participation. Particularly in times of advancing technological change, the question arises as to how media policy can ensure that digital innovations are in harmony with democratic and social values. At the same time, historical developments are central to understanding current media systems, as they provide information on how communication spaces, audience structures and media economies have changed in the long term.

#### **Possible topics and questions:**

- How does media policy influence the possibilities of empowerment?
- What challenges and opportunities does platform regulation pose for communications sovereignty?
- To what extent do public media contribute to social empowerment and what alternative or complementary models are needed in the digital media environment?
- What media funding strategies are necessary to ensure diversity and independence in the digital era?
- How can historical perspectives contribute to a better understanding of current media policy challenges?

## 5. Political communication

Political communication plays a central role in empowering the public to actively participate in democratic processes. At a time when algorithmic media environments, disinformation and misinformation influence political debates and digital media enable new forms of political participation, it is crucial to develop new strategies for fact-based, participatory and inclusive political communication

### Possible topics and questions:

- How can political media use be used as a means of empowerment and for active democratic participation?
- How can communication strategies support citizens in making informed decisions?
- How does political disinformation hinder the empowerment of the public to participate in politics?
- To what extent can digital platforms be used for political mobilization and participation?
- Which formats and methods of political communication have proven to be particularly effective or counterproductive for various actors such as citizens, political parties and authorities, and why?

## 6. Audience, reception and impact research

The way in which people use media and perceive and process content plays a decisive role in their empowerment in an increasingly digitalized world. Media can strengthen self-efficacy, promote social resilience and enable people to deal competently with an increasing flood of information. At the same time, it is important to understand the different needs of different target groups and respond to them in a targeted manner. Media experiences also play an important role in identity formation and social participation, which further underlines their importance for individual and collective empowerment.

### Possible topics and questions:

- How do the media enable their audience/target groups to deal with information in a self-determined and reflective way?
- How do media users avail of resources and skills to utilize the changing media landscape for their own purposes?
- What are the effects of media on emotions, knowledge and well-being at an individual level and how do they affect social resilience?
- How can dealing with information overload be promoted as an essential skill?
- Which specific target groups require special support for their media literacy and media performance and which strategies are particularly effective here?

## 7. University teaching, media education and media socialization

University teaching, media education and media socialization play a central role in empowering individuals and groups to use media critically and reflectively. In an increasingly digital world, the question arises as to how university teaching can contribute to equipping people of different generations with the necessary skills to navigate complex media landscapes safely and independently

### Possible topics and questions:

- How can critical thinking be promoted in communication degree programs?
- How can digital resilience be strengthened to make people more resistant to cyberbullying, disinformation and toxic content?
- How can media education be used as a tool against disinformation and misinformation?
- What key media skills are required across generations?
- Which media skills are new and which are fading into the background?

## 8. Open Panel

Contributions on current research without thematic reference to the above-mentioned topic.

### Submission formats

Format	Scope	Description
<b>Individual submission</b>	Extended abstract (2,000-4,000 characters incl. spaces)	15-minute presentation on a specific topic of the conference or for the open panel. Please also submit a short abstract (500-1,000 characters) for the conference program.
<b>Panel submission</b>	Panel description (1,000 characters)+ 4-5 individual contributions (2,000-4,000 characters each)	90-minute panel with several thematically linked contributions. Please attach a separate cover sheet with author information.
<b>Workshop "Science meets Practice"</b>	Workshop description (1,000 characters)+ Individual contributions (500-1,000 characters each)	45-90-minute interactive workshop in which science and practice come together. Please indicate moderator and participating speakers.
Submit the contribution via the Easychair platform, the link will be available on the <a href="#">SGKM Conference 2026   ZHAW Applied Linguistics</a> website from the beginning of September.		

### Individual submission

For an individual submission, please write an extended abstract (length: 2,000-4,000 characters including spaces) for a 15-minute presentation. Indicate the subject area to which the contribution will make particular reference. Please also submit a short summary of your contribution (length: 500-1,000 characters) for the conference program.

**Panel, specialist group session**

The procedure for submitting a panel or specialist group session is identical: Please write a panel proposal with 4 to 5 individual contributions for a 90-minute panel. The individual contributions should relate to a common panel topic. The description of the panel should not exceed 1,000 characters, and descriptions of 2,000-4,000 characters are required for each individual contribution. Please complete a separate cover sheet for each panel with all author information to ensure anonymity in the review process.

**Assessment criteria for the review process**

Submissions for individual contributions, panels and specialist group sessions will be evaluated anonymously by at least two reviewers (peer review). All contact details must therefore be stated separately on a cover sheet. You should also avoid references in the short paper that allow conclusions to be drawn about the authorship.

The following assessment criteria apply: 1) relevance of the topic, 2) proximity to the conference topic, 3) theoretical foundation, 4) appropriateness of the method/approach, 5) clarity of the argumentation and 6) originality.

For panels: 7) Relevance (?) of the individual contributions to a common theme.

**"Science meets Practice" workshops**

This format is intended to create a space in which the direct exchange between communication and media scientists and media practitioners (e.g. journalists, PR professionals, speakers, bloggers, media managers) can be realized.

If you would like to submit a workshop, please write a proposal comprising individual contributions from 3 to 5 people for a panel (45-90 minutes). The workshop topic should be outlined in an abstract (1,000 - 2,000 characters), including the questions to be addressed by all participants during the workshop. A brief summary of 500-1,000 characters and details of the participants from academia and media practice are required for each individual contribution. The workshops submitted will be selected according to a slightly adapted procedure. The submitted proposals will be evaluated using a modified list of criteria:

1) Relevance of the topic, 2) Proximity to the conference topic, 3) Clear thematic connection between the contributions from practice and communication and media studies.

**SGKM PhD-Workshop**

A PhD workshop will be held in the run-up to the SACM annual conference. This workshop is aimed at doctoral students who are writing their dissertation in the field of communication and media studies and are members of the SACM. It will take place as a pre-conference event on Wednesday, April 22, 2026, from 1-5 pm.

Doctoral candidates who register and are selected in a process independent of the annual conference can present their dissertation ideas or parts of their dissertation and receive feedback from peers and experienced researchers. Further information can be found in the call for submissions. The workshop is organized by the research associates Michelle Möri and Jérôme Chariatte. Information on the PhD workshop and registration can be found on the conference website.



## Important dates

Activity	Date
Submission on Easychair platform from	Beginning of September 2025
<b>Deadline for submissions</b>	<b>Monday, November 24, 2025</b>
Announcement of the review results	Beginning of February 2026
Publication of the conference program	Beginning of February 2026
Start of registration	Beginning of February 2026
Registration deadline for speakers	Monday, March 23,
Registration deadline for list of participants / box office	Thursday, April 9 / flexible
Get-together/PhD Workshop (separate CfP)	On the evening of April 22, 2026
Conference	April 22 - 24, 2026

## Contact us

**Organizing Committee:**

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If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact us by e-mail at "sgkm2026.linguistik@zhaw.ch".

We look forward to your contributions and exciting discussions at the SACM Annual Conference 2026 in Winterthur!