

Call for Papers for the first joint conference of the Fachgruppe "Digitale Kommunikation und Medien" of Deutsche Gesellschaft für Publizistik und Kommunikationswissenschaft and the Interest Group "Human-Machine Communication" of the International Communication Association

Machines as (new) actors in digital communication: challenges and opportunities for science and society

Monday, September 15 to Wednesday, September 17, 2025, in Dresden, Germany

Conference Team: Dr. Katrin Etzrodt, Lisa Weidmüller, Prof. Dr. Sven Engesser

I. Conference Theme

The increasing integration of machines into digital communication represents a significant development in science and society. We have witnessed a continued evolution from search engines such as Google Search, which "only" collect and select our communication, to automated chatbots in social media, to simple conversational interaction in both written (e.g., Replica) and spoken form (e.g., voice assistants such as Alexa and Siri). While we are writing this call, a major push towards large language models such as ChatGPT is emerging, which greatly expands the ability of machines to converse with their users in written and spoken form. However, the evolution is not just about qualitative changes in the digital communication, but also about the expansion of application areas and the further acceleration of the development of the technology itself. It invites a multitude of questions that are pivotal for communication science and interdisciplinary research. How do these advancements in human-machine interaction reshape individual identities, social dynamics, or cultural norms? What are the impacts of increasingly sophisticated digital communication on users? How does the interplay between humans and communicatively sophisticated machines redefine the boundaries of knowledge creation and dissemination? In addition, it is crucial to explore the ethical considerations of such technologies, their influence on privacy and security, and the potential for widening or bridging socio-economic divides.

The conference aims to unravel these complex threads, fostering a holistic understanding of how digital communication with machines is reshaping our reality. We will give particular attention to the opportunities and challenges that arise from digital communication between humans and machines, both for *science* (e.g., in data collection and analysis, theoretical conceptualization, and empirical measurement of human-machine communication) and *society* (e.g., development of new forms of communication or thinking, loss of skills), which will be explored on three levels:

(1) Understanding of and familiarity with **the machines themselves** is becoming increasingly important given their rapid and intrusive development. We therefore consider it important to put a

spotlight on the introduction of new technological developments and the discussion that focuses on the developments of these machines. We invite you to, e.g., introduce novel and intriguing developments concerning communicative capabilities, and discuss the opportunities and challenges of these developments for communication but also for communication research.

(2) Communicating machines, like other media, are the product of institutions and organizations. In contrast to traditional media, these new machine actors are increasingly developed by institutions whose economic interests do not necessarily correspond to the visible area of application of these actors. An important question that emerges is how the resulting difference will affect the development of this technology and its impact. For this reason, we intend for the conference to put a spotlight on **the influence and responsibilities of organizations and institutions behind these technologies** - how their motives and goals might influence the development of communicating machines and their impact on society.

(3) Last but not least, we aim to highlight **society as a user and a critic** of these actors. The new actors affect us at several levels such as norms, values, concepts, societal and institutional structures, or social interaction. At the same time, negotiations about, e.g., roles, areas of application, or ethics on different levels determine the development and influence of these actors. Therefore, in addition to exploring their use by and effects on society, the conference will provide a platform for examining the negotiation processes within society and its impact on developments of communicating technologies.

The following examples are intended to inspire your submissions and *are not exclusive*:

The machines themselves

- What (new) actors are there and to what extent can they be categorized as actors, is their interaction communication, are they capable of meaning-making?
- How do these (new) actors influence research practices, methods, or analyses in communication studies?
- How is the development of these (new) actors influenced by culture and society?
- Why is understanding the extent of meaning-making concerning the (new) actors critical for communication science and society?
- How can communication science help improve these (new) actors?

The organizations and institutions behind them

- What roles do organizations and institutions play in developing artificial actors for digital communication?
- How do the goals of organizations and institutions and the roles of the (new) actors in digital communication relate to each other? What implications does this relationship have?

- What responsibilities do organizations and institutions have concerning the (new) actors and how do they tackle these challenges? Why might it be crucial for them to acknowledge and address their responsibilities, and what are the potential consequences of neglecting them?
- Why is it important to balance innovation with ethical considerations when developing (new)actors, and what are the potential societal impacts of this balance?

Society as a user and a critic

- How do new actors, such as large language models like ChatGPT, impact communication and communication spaces?
- What influence do advances in robotics have on digital forms of communication?
- How does digital human-machine communication influence and reshape social interactions and relationships?
- What ethical considerations arise from the presence of machines in digital communication? (e.g., authenticity, data security, and data protection, inclusivity)
- Why, or for what reasons are we observing the aforementioned phenomena?

II. Submission Formats

a) Presentation of current research (without a thematic specification)

The conference aims to create a forum for current research in the field of digital communication and human-machine communication in all its breadth to facilitate a lively exchange between the scientific groups. For this, presentations and subsequent discussions are planned. There are no thematic requirements for the submission except that they should be relevant to at least one of the two organizing groups (Digital Communication or Human-Machine Communication). Both theoretical and empirical contributions from the areas mentioned are welcome. Presentations can be given in German or English. German presentations, however, must be always subtitled in English. Presentation duration will be between 10 and 20 minutes and additional room for discussions.

b) Presentation of current research on the conference theme: Machines as (new) actors in digital communication

The core of the conference will be panels featuring presentations followed by room for discussion on overarching topics. Submissions should relate to the topic of the conference and preferably address at least one of the above-mentioned levels. Presentations can be given in German or English. German presentations, however, must be always subtitled in English. The presentation duration will be between 10 and 20 minutes and additional room for discussions. In case of a large number of accepted submissions, we may offer high-density panels featuring a shorter speaking time (3-7 min) depending on the topic.

c) Interactive Formats

We also welcome submissions for interactive formats beyond the conventional conference presentation. Proposals can be submitted for one-hour time slots, including a description of the topic, the people involved, and the rough format/procedure. Both discursive (e.g., thesis café) and practical formats (e.g., workshop) will be considered. The aim of the interactive formats should be to expand or deepen the conference topic. This format should be held in English.

III. Formalities and timeline

Extended abstracts (800 to 1,200 words, excluding bibliography, graphs, and tables) can be submitted anonymously in electronic form as a PDF via the ConfTool platform until March 15, 2025: <https://www.conftool.net/digikomm-hmc-2025>.

Please indicate whether you contribute to the a) open, b) topic-specific panel, or c) interactive format. Contributions to the open panel (a) can be submitted in English or German, to the topic-specific panel (b) or the interactive format (c) should be submitted in English.

All submissions for presentations (a & b) will be peer-reviewed according to the following DGPuK criteria: thematic fit to the call (if submitted for the topic-specific panel), theoretical foundation, relevance of the research question, appropriateness of the method/approach, novelty value/originality, clarity and conciseness of the presentation. Submissions for the interactive format (c) will be reviewed by the organizers, in consultation with the division and interest group chairs, and considering the entire program. The review process results will be announced at the end of May 2025.

IV. Special formats

The conference management reserves the right to approach individual colleagues with a request to contribute to the conference topic (e.g., keynotes, or workshops).

V. Conference schedule

The conference will begin on Monday, September 15, 2025, in the evening with a get-together and end on Wednesday, September 17, 2025, around noon. More detailed information on the venue, accommodation, etc. will be announced in an invitation to the conference.

Early-career panel/workshop

Formats for early-career researchers from both divisions will be held in the context of the conference. Information on submission modalities for these formats and the time slot will be provided separately in the corresponding call of the early-career groups.

Social and cultural program

In addition to the obligatory welcome reception, the conference dinner (and party), and the farewell reception, we are planning a cultural program that casts the spotlight on some 'new actors' that have become embedded in Dresden's DNA.

Special offer for participants with children

The divisions are committed to organizing the conference in a family-friendly way. Participants who require childcare are requested to contact the organizers directly in advance.

Team

Fachgruppenleitungen Chairs of the division interest group		Ausrichtendes Institut Hosting Institute
FG DigiKomm Ulrike Klinger Merja Mahrt Early-career rep. Katharina Frehmann Lisa Weidmüller	IG HMC Jihyun Kim (Chair) Katrin Etzrodt (Vice Chair) Early-career rep. t.b.a.	Institut für Kommunikationswissenschaft Technische Universität Dresden Organizing Team Katrin Etzrodt Lisa Weidmüller Sven Engesser

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