



Themes and Special Focus

Founded in 2015, the **Communication & Media Studies Research Network** offers an interdisciplinary forum for the discussion of the role of the media and communications in society. We seek to build an epistemic community where we can make linkages across disciplinary, geographic, and cultural boundaries.

Media, to return to the etymology of the word, are the entities positioned one kind of middle or other. They are middle-objects, conditions or technologies that facilitate human communication, between one and one, one and many, or many or many. Media are agents of cultural "between-ness." They bridge spatial separations, so that people not in each other's immediate physical presence can connect. They bridge time, so ideas, information and cultural representations from another time (a minute ago or a century ago) can be re-heard and re-seen. Media, in other words, material means for the production and distribution of meanings across space and time.

In this definition, media are as old as human writing and drawing. However, the forms of media have changed fundamentally across the long arc of human history. The depth of these changes is such that, from era to era, we are barely the same persons. It is media that have allowed us to change so much—whether that be at different times and in different places for better or worse.

One such transformation, half a millennium ago, was the mechanical reproducibility of human communications—and with it a whole communicational infrastructure of typographic culture (books, libraries, newspapers, schools ...). The twentieth century saw a cascading series of transformations around photographic and audio reproduction and its derivatives (photolithographic printing, radio, sound recording, cinema, television). In the twenty-first century, we find ourselves in the midst of a new series of transformations, centered around the digitization of text, image, sound and data and the global interconnection of these digitized meanings per medium of the internet.

What makes us different, how do our lives change, as a consequence of these new objects and processes of human "between-ness"? This is the key question addressed by the Communication and Media Studies Research Network—at its conference, in its journal, in its book series and in its online interactions. Much of the dialogue in this network is focused within disciplines: sociology, business, education and the disciplines of "media studies" and "communications" themselves. However, in the nature of phenomena so pervasive as media, many of the conversations are interdisciplinary. We also welcome a range of forms of intellectual focus, from empirical expositions to theoretical and conceptual analyses.