

Editorial

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Dear SComS readers,

The third and last issue of the year offers a diversity of communication topics. The General Section includes a study of parasocial relations with media characters and an analysis of COVID-19 rhetoric in Iran. The Thematic Section presents a rich discussion of issues and processes involved in the persistence of “old media.” Diverse topics are also presented in the Community Section including a summary of the SACM award winning dissertation and an introduction to DOCA. Finally, the contributions to the Book Review Section discuss books on Internet memes and the influencer industry. Before our more detailed overview, we are pleased to present an important next step for SComS.

SComS is evolving toward Open Data and Open Research. Since 2017, SComS has been published as a platinum open access journal. One notable feature is the journals’ multilingual nature. For authors, the online first publication of articles is particularly advantageous, enabling the timely publication of accepted contributions. With these features, SComS has positioned itself as a dynamic and innovative journal in the European journal landscape. However, the step toward Open Data and Open Research has not been fully embraced yet. With respect to Open Data, SComS currently allows researchers to publish additional information and materials (e.g., codebooks, tables, images, research data) alongside the research article. However, SComS lacks an integrated policy on Open Data that defines its Open Data strategy, mission, and measures. The journal is now addressing this gap in a project set to begin in November 2023. We are in

fact delighted to announce that Università della Svizzera italiana is funding the project, titled “Open Data Strategy for the USI Journal SComS (ODSCOMS),” as part of its institutional funding line for Open Science and Open Research Data in 2023. Developing such a policy is crucial to contextualizing the already established practice of publishing supplementary material and laying the legal foundation for future collaborations with existing data repositories. The project will particularly address data protection, copyright issues, and research ethical considerations. We will support the Open Data transition with training activities and guidelines, including workshops and video pills, to encourage researchers to adopt the practice of publishing research data in open formats alongside research results and to overcome fears and barriers. The project, led by Katharina Lobinger and Anna Picco-Schwendener, both from USI Università della Svizzera italiana, will run from November 2023 to October 2024. We are excited to underscore and renew the innovative character of our journal with this initiative.

The first article in the General Section, “Parasocial relationships with morally ambiguous media characters – the role of moral foundations” is authored by Michelle Möri from the University of Fribourg, Dominique S. Wirz of the University of Amsterdam, and Andreas Fahr from the University of Fribourg. The authors analyzed viewers’ parasocial relationships (PSRs) with morally ambiguous media characters (MACs). The study examined relationships with eight such characters from recent media productions and represented a variety of moral ambiguity in different



genres. The findings show that while viewers accept some degree of MACs' immoral behavior, their PSRs are stronger with MACs who are perceived as more moral, regardless of the viewers' own moral foundations. Among the five moral domains, authority and purity were not significant for parasocial relationships formed by the viewers, in contrast to care, loyalty, and fairness, which had a positive effect. The authors argue that viewers probably expect morally ambiguous characters to stand up to authority and act in impure ways. Overall, perceived morality had a stronger effect on viewer PSRs than perceived ambiguity.

Hossein Kermani from the University of Vienna, together with Mona Korshidi and Mohammad Ashtiani Araghi from the University of Tehran authored the article "A case study on the COVID-19 discourse in politicians' speeches: Investigations into the speeches of former Iranian President Hassan Rouhani." It takes a look back into the all too familiar recent history of the COVID-19 pandemic in a research context that has not been previously addressed in our journal: Iran, and the public speeches of its former President Hassan Rouhani. The discourse analysis of 30 speeches from February to April 2020 thus adds to existing research into the use of COVID-19 as a signifier in the discourses of mostly Western political elites, populists, and conspiracy theorists. Rouhani's emphasis on COVID-19 as a "state of exception" echoed a common strategy of the Iranian and other autocratic regimes to legitimize measures of control over society. At the same time, it departed from previous practice by opposing not only dissidents and critics, but also religious figures.

This issue of SComS once again includes a Thematic Section. This time it is dedicated to the theme "Old media persistence. Past continuities in the brand-new digital world." Thus, the Thematic Section explores the persistence of "old media" and, at the same time, highlights the blind spots of discourses that emphasize disruption, revolution, and upheavals and that tend to ignore aspects of resistance, persistence, and continuity. Further information on the theme and the six contributions in this Thematic Section can be found in the introduction provided by the

guest editors, Gabriele Balbi, Berber Hagedoorn, Nazan Haydari, Valérie Schafer, and Christian Schwarzenegger, whom we want to thank for choosing SComS as a suitable outlet for these highly relevant and topic reflections that underline the importance of examining innovations through a historical lens.

Two contributions to the Community Section address two very different but equally important topics. The first contribution is a summary of the dissertation by Niels G. Mede titled "Science-related populism: Conceptualization, empirical investigation, and implications for science communication." We have the honor of featuring this short synopsis into the work of Niels G. Mede, who has been awarded the 2023 Dissertation Award by the Swiss Association of Communication and Media Research (SACM). The SACM Dissertation Award recognizes the best Ph.D. thesis in communication and media research completed at a Swiss university or by a Swiss researcher. In his excellent dissertation, the author focuses on science-related populism, a phenomenon that has not been systematically examined despite its potentially dysfunctional effects. The award jury particularly praised the dissertation for providing not only a new theoretical model, a new scale for measuring the phenomenon, and an analysis of the specific Swiss context but also practical advice on how to communicate about science and how the scientific community should approach communication. Congratulations!

The second contribution in the Community Section addresses the aforementioned topic of Open Science. Franziska Oehmer-Pedrazzi, Sabrina H. Kessler, Edda Humprecht, Katharina Sommer, and Laia Castro present the Open Access Database of Variables for Content Analysis (DOCA). This database collects and presents operationalizations of content analyses in communication and media research. The goal is to ensure transparency in method application, and thus adherence to growing quality standards in content analytical research, in the spirit of Open Science and Open Methods. In their contribution titled "Fact Sheet 'DOCA - Database of Variables for Content Analysis': On the relevance, objective, content, and participation possibilities of the database of vari-

Table 1: Submissions to SComS and editorial decisions in 2022, compared to 2021 and 2020

	Submissions (full paper)	Acceptance	Rejection after review	Regular desk rejection	Desk rejection due to plagiarism	Still in process
Total 2022	83	26	11	41	4	1
General Section	52	6	3	38	4	1
Thematic Sections	31	20	8	3	0	0
Total 2021	50	19	7	24	0	0
General Section	38	9	5	24	0	0
Thematic Sections	12	10	2	0	0	0
Total 2020	42	18	7	15	2	0
General Section	33	11	6	15	1	0
Thematic Sections	9	7	1	0	1	0

Note: The numbers for Thematic Sections in 2022 include submissions for the Special Issue on the DACH 21 conference.

ables for standardized content analysis,” the authors provide insights into the structure and objectives of DOCA. They complement this highly informative presentation with personal remarks and insights, explaining the resource-intensive setup and the challenges of sustaining DOCA in the long term against the backdrop of the fast-paced academic environment.

The contributions to the Book Review Section evaluate monographs on two important aspects of digital media: the influencer industry and Internet memes. The first review addresses Emily Hund’s “The influencer industry: the quest for authenticity on social media” published by Princeton University Press. Nils S. Borchers praises the book for its “vivid and knowledgeable” historical approach detailing the chronological emergence of the influencer industry beginning in the 1990s as well as analyses of specific cases. Throughout, the book examines the production of authenticity as industrial construct. While it focuses on the influencer industry in the U.S., the reviewer notes similarities to Western Europe that make the book relevant to non-U.S. readers. He also notes that the “Influencer industry” will be particularly useful to readers interested in the history of the industry as well as its internal dynamics.

Michael Johann reviews “Memes – Formen und Folgen eines Internetphänomens” by Joanna Nowotny and Julian Reidy. The book examines Internet memes by discussing their referentiality, humor, political uses, and how they enter the mainstream. The reviewer praises the book for its compre-

hensive analysis and the richness of cases. The focus on the “darker” aspects provides a useful counterpoint to the romanticization of memes in most literature, in his view. But it also limits the book, as the readers might expect a more balanced approach. Overall, the book receives a very positive evaluation as detailed and thought-provoking.

As started last year, we want to seize the opportunity in this last issue of the year to give an overview of the number of submissions to SComS in the previous year, 2022. We are happy to see an ongoing increase in submitted manuscripts as shown in Table 1. Compared to 2021 there is an increase from 50 to 83 in 2022. This is partly due to a special issue (see below) which received far more submissions than the regular Thematic Sections. Nevertheless, the General Section itself expanded from 38 to 52 submissions. The overall acceptance rate of manuscripts submitted to SComS in 2022 was 31%, which rose to 68% without manuscripts that were rejected on editorial grounds for a lack of fit with the scope of SComS, a low general quality (desk rejects) or due to cases of (self-)plagiarism.

In 2022 SComS hosted one special issue dedicated to the DACH 21 conference (ed. by Thomas Zerback, Mark Eisenegger, Thomas N. Friemel, & Mike S. Schäfer) and one Thematic Section titled “Changing Communication of Higher Education Institutions” (ed. by Silke Fürst, Daniel Vogler, Isabel Sörensen, & Mike S. Schäfer). Those received 31 full paper submissions in total. With 20 accepted and

published papers they reach an acceptance rate of 65 %.

Total downloads of articles reached a new all-time high. After an exponential growth from 2019 (5500) to 2021 (22000), in 2022 a total of 24200 articles were downloaded. Additionally, SComS is read in the printed edition created by Seismo Press.

A scholarly journal running a double-blind peer-review procedure could not work without the engagement of dedicated reviewers. The further increase of submissions led to an even higher demand for reviewers in comparison to recent years. We sincerely thank all reviewers who reviewed manuscripts in 2022 providing invaluable feedback to authors: Gregory Adamo, Philippe Amez-Droz, Dorothee Arlt, Hanan Badr, João Pedro Baptista, Martin W. Bauer, Petra Bernhardt, Bernd Blöbaum, Lisa Bolz, Nils S. Borchers, Cornelia Brantner, Jonas Brendebach, Andrea Cerase, Christoph Classen, Sarah Davies, Jennifer Davis, Philip Di Salvo, Tobias Eberwein, Mark Eisenegger, Birte Fähnrich, Nayla Fawzi, Lena Frischlich, Stefan Geiß, Florian Greiner, Valerie Hase, Uwe Hasebrink, Christiane Hauser, Brigitte Huber, Olaf Jandura, Torsten Kahlert, Anne Kaun, Gui-

do Keel, Katharina Kleinen-von Königslöw, Ulrike Klinger, Nadine Klopfenstein Frei, Carmen Koch, Benjamin Krämer, Rebekka Kreling, Uwe Krüger, Corinna Lauer, Nathalie Le Bouëdec, Melanie Leidecker-Sandmann, Benedetto Lepori, Juliane Lischka, Katharina Lobinger, Anna Marchi, Sarah Marschlich, Tristan Mattelart, Hendrik Michael, Ilaria Moschni, Kathrin Friederike Müller, Brigitte Naderer, Peter Nagy, Minh Hao Nguyen, Liliana Oliveira, Daniel Pfurtscheller, Colin Porlezza (2), Patric Raemy, Nelson Ribeiro, Joan Ramon Rodriguez-Amat, Katharina Schlosser, Philipp Schrögel, Anne Schulz, Lisa Schwaiger, Christian Schwarzenegger, Julia Serong, Dario Siegen, Marko Siitonen, Denise Sommer, Christian Strippel, Sascha Trültzsch-Wijnen, Heidi Tworek, Florence Van Hove, Niklas Venema, Anna J.M. Wagner (2), Annie Waldherr, Tobias Weidner, Peter Weingart, Bartosz Wilczek, Jing Zeng, Lisa Zieringer, Arne Freya Zillich, and Fabian Zimmermann.

We hope you will enjoy reading this issue.

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and Mike Meißner