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Call for Papers

Images of and for inclusion: Interdisciplinary perspectives

Guest Editors

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Deadline for submission of full papers: 15 May 2026

Images are an increasingly important means of communication: many messages now consist not only, and often not first, of verbal text, but also of images, such as videos, photographs, and infographics. Think of digital channels: websites, posts on social networks, banner ads: all texts and messages that use images in addition to words. But how does communication through images work? How can an image convey a concept, a message?

Understanding how communication through images works can be particularly urgent when the message to be conveyed concerns sensitive social issues, situations, and spheres such as those involved in the topic of inclusion and inclusivity. Companies and institutions are confronted with the need to communicate effectively on this topic and are looking for the most suitable ways to respond to it[1].

The task is not easy and hides several pitfalls, related to the specificity of both the means (the images) and of the concept to be conveyed (inclusion/inclusivity). As the research in visual rhetoric has discussed, images have specific communicative capacity that makes them powerful means of communication and persuasion (see for instance Kjeldsen 2014, 2021). This power of images is related to their specific rhetorical qualities : « their ability to create presence, their potential for realism and immediacy, and their ability for semantic condensation» (Kjeldsen 2012, p. 252). On their turn, these specific rhetorical qualities stem from material components of images that interact and organize themselves in the representation and the message as a whole (Kress & van Leeuwen 2021, Kjeldsen 2017). The interaction and the combination of the different components can give rise to very different

[1] See for example the programme "Équité - Promouvoir l'égalité, la diversité et l'inclusion à tous les niveaux des hautes écoles (2025-2028) launched by Swissuniversities, the umbrella organisation of Swiss universities (Programme Equité (2025-2028) - swissuniversities).

representations of a same object or situation or concept, such as inclusion or inclusivity, and the different representations may have a different validity (i.e. degree of truth; Kress & van Leeuwen 2021) depending on the values and beliefs of a certain culture, or a certain social group or context in which the image is used, resorting to a very different communicative result or effect. Besides, inclusion and inclusivity are complex concepts that represent complex social processes and it is not obvious how their different facets can be encapsulated in images. For instance, to visually represent inclusion in a way that is recognisable to the public, we risk resorting to simplistic and trivialising representations of certain human conditions, derived from mental processes of "hasty generalisation" (Rigotti 2005, Walton 1999) and which do not respect the specificity and diversity of the individuals involved, influencing perceptions, attitudes, and behaviour at a social level. The advent of AI reinforces this risk: generative artificial intelligence tools, both free and paid, can generate images very easily by entering a simple prompt in the appropriate field. However, precisely because of their fundamental mechanism of association and generation based on previous data, they carry about the strong risk of obtaining and using common representations marked by biases and prejudices (Mukherjee et al., 2023) and thus generating stereotyped images, contributing to the dissemination and reinforcement of commonplaces that may hinder inclusion instead of promoting it.

In line with this, social neuroscience, integrating social psychology and neuroscientific methodologies, offers a framework for understanding how the brain processes visual and mental representations, contributing to the understanding of the processes involved in reducing stereotypes and promoting inclusion (Cacioppo & Cacioppo, 2013; Morese et al., 2016; Auriemma et al., 2020). Recent neuroscientific evidence has explored the influence of cognitive and emotional processes (facial recognition, empathy, bias) and group dynamics (gender, ethnicity, ability) in the representation of inclusive images.

In an era where communication is increasingly visual, images serve as powerful artifacts that shape collective imaginaries, reinforce or challenge stereotypes, and influence social inclusion/exclusion processes.

This special issue invites interdisciplinary contributions exploring the images as a multifaceted construct in communication, with a focus on their role in fostering inclusive societies.

We welcome articles addressing, but not limited to, the following questions:

- What visual, aesthetic and symbolic characteristics define in communication an image as inclusive or not inclusive?
- How are these representations interpreted in different cultural and media contexts (art, advertising, social media)? And how does historical iconography reflect enduring stereotypes or inclusive models?
- What communication processes determine the persuasive effectiveness of inclusive/exclusive images?
- How do they affect implicit biases, empathy and group dynamics? And what role do visual counter-narratives (e.g. activist art) play in changing these perceptions?
- How do technology (e.g., generative AI) and traditional/digital media amplify or counteract visual inequalities?
- How can they be used to promote fair representations of marginalised identities, and which strategies (design, policy, education) are most effective?

Key dates

- 15 December 2025: Abstract submission deadline
- 15 January 2026: Decision on acceptance/rejection of abstracts
- 15 May 2026: Full paper submission deadline
- May – July 2026: First round of peer review
- 15 October 2026: Resubmission deadline
- October – December 2026: Second round of peer review
- 15 February 2027: Final paper submission deadline
- March 2027: Editorial work / final shape-up

Submissions Guidelines

SComS welcomes submissions in English, German, French, or Italian. Abstracts should be a maximum of 500 words in length and should explain the main research question(s), scientific literature, methodology, and case studies the authors plan to use.

Manuscripts should be a maximum of 6000 words in length (including the abstract and all references, tables, figures, footnotes, and appendices). In addition, authors may submit supplementary material that will be published as an online supplement. Authors are invited to submit original papers that are not under consideration for publication elsewhere.

Articles shall be submitted using the APA reference style, 6th edition. The manuscript itself must be free of any information or references that might reveal the identity of the authors and their institution, allowing for double-blind peer review. Manuscripts should be submitted via the SComS platform: https://www.hope.uzh.ch/scoms/about/submissions. We ask authors to carefully prepare their submissions according to all the rules outlined in the SComS Submission Guidelines.

While the expected publication date of the Thematic Section is the end of 2026, early submissions that successfully pass the review process will also be immediately published online first. Contributions that receive positive reviews but are not accepted for the Thematic Section may be considered for publication in a subsequent SComS issue within the General Section. Papers are published under the Creative Commons license CC BY-SA 4.0. Authors retain the copyright and full publishing rights without restrictions.

About SCOMS

Studies in Communication Sciences (SComS) is a peer-reviewed, platinum open-access journal dedicated to advancing academic research and debate in communication and media research. Focused on building bridges between different research cultures, SComS welcomes high-quality original articles from various communication-related disciplines. The journal publishes research that crosses disciplinary boundaries and encourages contributions in English, German, French, and Italian. The journal, founded in 2001, is jointly edited by the Swiss Association of Communication and Media Research (SACM) and the Faculty of Communication, Culture and Society of the Università della Svizzera italiana (USI Lugano).

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