Call for Papers

Changes in communication in, from, and about higher education institutions

Guest Editors

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Deadline for submission of full papers: December 12, 2021

Higher education institutions (HEIs) are pivotal organizations in modern societies (Schäfer & Fähnrich, 2020). In past decades, the higher education sector has expanded considerably in many countries, with rapid increases in research output, growing student enrollment, and newly founded colleges and universities. New public management reforms and a growing need for societal legitimation have led many HEIs to prioritize communication, i.e., to establish communication offices, pursue branding, marketing, and reputation management, and to professionalize their communication efforts on traditional channels, websites, and social media (Davies & Horst, 2016; Elken, Stensaker, & Dedze, 2018; Marcinkowski, Kohring, Fürst, & Friedrichsmeier, 2014; Raupp & Osterheider, 2019; Schwetje, Hauser, Böschen, & Leßmöllmann, 2020; Vogler & Schäfer, 2020). This has resulted in competition for public visibility, involving researchers, HEI leadership, and professional communicators at central levels, research centers, and departments (Crettaz von Roten & Entradas, 2018; Entradas et al., 2020; Friedrichsmeier & Fürst, 2012; Koivumäki & Wilkinson, 2020; McKinnon, Black, Bobillier, Hood, & Parker, 2019; Rödder, 2020; Watermeyer & Lewis, 2018). This competition could fuel the mediatization of scientific organizations (Peters, Heinrichs, Jung, Kallfass, & Petersen, 2008; Scheu, Volpers, Summ, & Blöbaum, 2014) and poses new risks and challenges, from unintended and potentially dysfunctional effects to scandals and crises (Fähnrich, Danyi, & Nothhaft, 2015; Schwarz & Büker, 2019). However, scant research has been conducted on how communication in, from, and about HEIs has developed over time and changed as a result of transformations in higher education and the media landscape. The Covid-19 pandemic has also had an impact on higher education communication that has yet to be explored. Moreover, several studies have focused on practices and structures of communication offices, whereas little attention has been paid to members of the administrative board (rectorate) and their

changing perceptions and strategies regarding the public communication and representation of their particular organizations.

While communication offices at HEIs have expanded, journalism has suffered from reductions in staff and resources, resulting in an increasing imbalance between science journalism and university public relations (Göpfert, 2007; Guenther, 2019; Vogler & Schäfer, 2020). Researchers argue that this development poses a risk that fact-based, independent, and critical reporting on science could decline while the dissemination of strategic, affirmative, and sometimes even misleading information could increase (Bauer & Howard, 2009; Göpfert, 2007; Weingart, 2017; Wormer, 2017), thereby jeopardizing trust in science and HEIs in the mid-to-long term (Weingart & Joubert, 2019). However, we know little about these interrelations, about the quality and ethics of HEIs' communication as well as about news coverage and public perceptions of HEIs and their changes over the past years and decades.

Existing studies indicate a growing diversity of communication formats and media channels addressing various stakeholders, including the proliferation of events and media releases as well as the increasing use of online channels (Lo, Huang, & Peters, 2019; Metag & Schäfer, 2017; Raupp & Osterheider, 2019; Vogler, 2020). While communication on social media allows for direct and visible interactions with stakeholders, more research on its actual importance and influence is needed. First results show that many universities use social media but fall short of utilizing them fully and only tend to engage in minimal dialogue with stakeholders (Entradas et al., 2020; McAllister, 2012; Metag & Schäfer, 2017; VanDyke & Lee, 2020). However, the role of social media communication – and online channels in general – may have undergone transformations in recent years and in relation to the effects of the Covid-19 pandemic.

We invite the submission of empirical analyses and theoretical / conceptual contributions from scholars of organizational communication, communication management, strategic communication, science communication and journalism, higher education studies, organizational sociology, sociology of science, and other related fields and disciplines. We welcome submissions related (but not limited) to the following areas and topics:

- Changes in the resources, practices, strategies, and influences of communication offices at HEIs

- The professionalization of HEI communication and communicators, e.g., with respect to professional training, evaluations of communication processes and practices or in terms of ethical standards and reflections

- Changing representations of HEIs in media / public / online discourses

- The uses, perceptions, and effects of HEI communication and coverage among various target groups / stakeholders

- The transformation of relationships between different actors involved in HEI communication, e.g., communication professionals, rectorates of HEIs, policy makers, scientists, journalists, students, citizens

- Changes in HEI communication resulting from digitization

- The shifting importance of crisis communication and Covid-19-related changes in HEIs' communication

- Communication in, from, and about HEIs in light of the mediatization of science

- The evolving role of public visibility for the legitimation of HEIs

Submission guidelines

SComS welcomes submissions in English, German, French, or Italian. However, English is the preferred language of this Thematic Section. Manuscripts should be a maximum of 9000 words in length (including the abstract and all references, tables, figures, footnotes, 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 to allow 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 submissions according to all rules given in the SComS Submission Guidelines.

The expected publication date of the Thematic Section is November 2022. However, 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-NC-ND 4.0. Authors retain the copyright and full publishing rights without restrictions.

Key dates

- Submission of full papers closes on **December 12, 2021**.
- The first review will be provided no later than **March 15, 2022**.
- The revised manuscript should be submitted by **May 15, 2022**.
- The second review and notification of acceptance will be provided no later than **July 31, 2022**.
- Final papers should be submitted by **September 15, 2022**.
- Publication of the Thematic Section is scheduled for **November 2022**.

We look forward to receiving your submissions. If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact guest editor Silke Fürst (s.fuerst@ikmz.uzh.ch).

About SComS

Studies in Communication Sciences (SComS) is a peer-reviewed, platinum open access journal for communication and media research. It publishes original research from a variety of traditions, disciplines, contexts, and methodologies, thereby addressing and illuminating communication in its various facets. Neither authors nor readers are required to pay any fee. SComS 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). SComS is published by Seismo Verlag and HOPE (Hauptbibliothek Open Publishing Environment). For more information, see https://www.hope.uzh.ch/scoms/index.

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