

## **THE 71<sup>ST</sup> ANNUAL ICA (VIRTUAL) CONFERENCE “ENGAGING THE ESSENTIAL WORK OF CARE: COMMUNICATION, CONNECTEDNESS, AND SOCIAL JUSTICE”, MAY 27-31, 2021 (ONLINE)**

Media and communication scholars from around the globe participated in, virtual reality this time, the 71st Annual Conference of the International Communication Association (ICA). The Polish Communication Association organized a panel “Advancing Media Theory in the Times of Societal Crises.” The goal of the panel was to advance theoretical approaches related to media and societal crises. Taking the COVID-19 outbreak as a point of departure, the papers presented in the session evidenced current media shifts towards ‘mass-self communication’ and ‘cumulative deliberation’. Moreover, studies from Central and Eastern Europe went a long way to extend the notion of societal crises by the rise of polarization and a sharp decline of trust in the media.

Due to the virtual reality mode of the conference, all participants recorded and uploaded their presentations at the ICA conference platform. Although conversations were limited mostly to an exchange of comments on ‘chat’, it was still possible to learn about current studies and developments in communication research from presentations and papers available online.

In the session sponsored by the Polish Communication Association, there were four presentations. The first was offered by Mark Deuze from the University of Amsterdam (in the Netherlands). In his contribution, Deuze introduced and defined the field of study regarding media and communication theory in a reference to the most recent, 7th edition, of the famous publication “McQuail’s Media and Mass Communication Theory’ (2020). In this edition of the book, scholars outline seven fundamental theories explaining the role of media in society, as they emerged from a century of scholarship. In his presentation, Deuze showed how each of these theories can be considered to be ‘at work’ in current debates and concerns about the role of media and communication in the global coronavirus crisis. He also paid specific attention to the dual convergence of, on the one hand, a hybrid media system where traditional mass media institutions (such as mainstream journalism, advertising, film and television) exist and operate side-by-side to a new media environment mainly consisting of so-called ‘mass self-communication’ in social media. On the other hand, all this convergence takes place alongside that of the social spaces and locales of work, leisure, education, the public and private sphere, friendships, and the family in the ‘supra-locale’ of the

home where (under conditions of social distancing, quarantine and self-isolation) all life is organized and structured from a distance, in media.

In second presentation, Svetlana S. Bodrunova from St. Petersburg State University (Russia) offered an interpretive concept of cumulative deliberation that explains how public discussions are won by cumulation of support and opinion, rather than a rational deliberative process. According to Bodrunova, the concept offers an alternative view on the nature of public discussion and allows for avoiding excessive normativity in explaining today's deliberative processes. In her presentation Bodrunova illustrated cumulative deliberation by the examples from online discussions in four languages and operationalized the concept for networked discussion studies combining it with the ideas from general systems theory.

Next, Michał Głowacki from University of Warsaw (Poland) presented his research (conducted with Karen Donders from Vrije Universiteit Brussel, Belgium) on public service media in Poland in the times of social polarization and the rebirth of political parallelism. Głowacki and Donders argued that the lack of independence of PSM organizations in Poland, politicized news, and PSM contributing to societal and political polarization in general does not fit existing theoretical conceptualizations such as the polarized pluralist media system or competitive authoritarian tradition. They also discussed how Polish PSM these days can be conceptualized in a manner that contains more explanatory power as to why we are observing a consistent deterioration of the state of play of PSM in Poland. Their research showed that the fragile checks and balances system that emerged in the post-Communist period and, which came with political influence over PSM while at the same time still allowing for some internal pluralism and journalistic autonomy, no longer exists in Poland. According to Głowacki and Donders, this cannot only be attributed only to the policy of the PiS government though and relates to a resistant value pattern among ruling elites as well as citizens of which large parts accept, and in some cases even prefer, 'Government Service Media' over the ideal model of PSM.

Finally, Agnieszka Stępińska from Adam Mickiewicz University (Poland), presented her study on a level of trust in media in times of a socio-political crisis in Poland in 2020 (COVID-19 and postponed presidential elections). By providing results of the survey conducted in 2020, Stępińska discussed a question of media trust in highly polarized political system accompanied by and a low level of trust in political institutions and a high level of political parallelism of the media system.

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