

## Call for Papers: “Scandals in New Media Environments”

This call invites submissions for the 3<sup>rd</sup> International Conference in Scandalogy at the University of Bamberg from April 2<sup>nd</sup> to April 4<sup>th</sup> 2020.

The conference will focus on “Scandals in New Media Environments” (for information about previous conferences, [see here](#)). The overarching theme serves a two-fold goal: On the one hand, we want to intensify research on mediated scandals (cf. Entman 2012; Burkhardt 2018) and substantiate our understanding of such forms of scandals and their impact on societies. On the other hand, we hope to connect the study of scandals with a larger scientific community in the broad field of digital communication research, be it in organizational communication, journalism studies, political communication research or other fields.

Even to the casual observer of media and society the conference theme appears timely because currently we seem to be living through an age of perpetual scandalization. Arguably, digital technologies are a catalyst in this respect. On an everyday basis, we can observe how social media offers new means to vent emotional attacks, spark outrage, or voice public discontent. Not only politicians, celebrities, and other individuals in the media spotlight are subject to such firestorms. Increasingly, ordinary citizens experience intensifying levels of digital slander and character attacks online as well. In many cases, the cause are simply gaffes or a careless public remark.

The increasingly low threshold by which such incidents become the subject of scandalous media coverage has been a matter of critique. It may be a significant feature of an overall trend in the tabloidization of culture and the rise of infotainment. Some authors even speak of “unleashed scandals” (Pörksen & Detel 2012) in such “hybrid media systems” (Chadwick 2013).

Such scandals typically have a rather short communicative half-life period, but may have gained a new quality through the rise of social media and digital technologies. In this respect, participatory digital publics can create a ‘spill-over’-effect so that the consequences of a public gaffe may incite a more substantiated discourse in the political system and in conventional journalistic mass media. On the other hand, the scandalizing potential of new media requires modified strategies of reputation management by politicians, celebrities, institutions and corporations.

Against this backdrop, we should inquire if we are witnessing a transformation of mediated scandals through digital communication practices. If so, what will be the consequences for dealing with future scandals and cultural affairs?

Yet, new media also offers a different perspective on journalism and scandals as technological infrastructure and digital tools give journalists new means to investigate hard scandals like substantial financial or political wrongdoings. One example is the work of the International Consortium of Investigative Journalists (ICIJ) and the publication of the Panama Papers or the Paradise Papers respectively.

Such reporting can rely on data-driven analyses and may incite political change, if further actors like online news sites, whistleblower platforms or ordinary users comment such cases and share information. However, rather often these exposés do not substantiate a due process of scandalization and fail to bring reform. If so, we should ask why traditional reporting on scandals, despite new means of collaboration and research, may have lost its effectiveness.

To tackle these issues we believe that our conference theme should bring the practitioners' perspective into the academic field as well: Often, journalists are limited to describing scandal cases and criticizing scandalized actors, instead of reflecting a potential lack of (or too much) response by the public. Possibly, academic research and journalism could alleviate this deficit, if both fields would be more sensitive to technological and social characteristics of new media in the process of scandalization. We assume that professional communicators could provide an important perspective to this as well. For example marketing- and campaign-experts who evoke scandals with strategic goals in mind, or media spokespersons who have to deal with online scandalization and mitigate its consequences. Therefore, we also invite contributions that are not limited to the academic field but deal with practical aspects of scandals and digital media.

*Therefore, possible submissions for this conference may focus on:*

- scandals in Social Network Sites and their 'spill-over'-effects, i. e. amplifications/ catalysts between online and offline media
- users as opinion-leaders and scandalizers
- tabloidization and scandals in online media
- investigative journalism, whistleblowing and the datafication of scandals
- pitfalls of crisis communication in digital environments and online firestorms
- the power of algorithms (e. g. filter bubbles) in the reception of scandal cases

However, to understand scandals in new media environments, we also suggest broadening the scope of our scientific analysis. Arguably, scandals occur in every culture and at all times in human history, thereby constituting a part of our species' social evolution. We would like to encourage submissions that cover the historical perspective as well. This can help us to understand how new media of the past (ancient theatre, early modern pamphlets, bourgeois mass media, cinema, television, etc.) allowed groups to effectively mediate social events which involved the breaching of certain moral or legal codes and helped to determine how to elicit a public response.

*Additional topics may include:*

- theoretical implications of scandals and the emergence of new media technologies
- historical case studies analyzing the relationship between scandalization and new communication channels and forums

## **Information about paper submissions**

Abstracts should not exceed 300 words. Please include an additional short biographical note of no more than 150 words.

As the selection of abstracts will be peer-reviewed anonymously, we ask contributors to include a separate title page containing title, author/s, affiliation/s, and the address, phone, fax, and e-mail of the first author.

Peer reviewers will evaluate all submissions based on relevance and originality, clarity of research purpose, grounding of theoretical and methodological approach, focus, and organization.

We plan a publication of selected articles in a collected volume (most likely with the [Herbert von Halem Verlag](#))

Please email abstracts to [scandalogy.kowi@uni-bamberg.de](mailto:scandalogy.kowi@uni-bamberg.de) by September 30<sup>th</sup> 2019.

You will receive a notification by November 8<sup>th</sup> 2019.

## **Keynote**

Confirmed keynote speaker is Jan Fleischhauer. It is a pleasure and an honor to welcome Jan Fleischhauer, one of the leading German columnists (FOCUS, DER SPIEGEL) and a regular guest in national talk shows. Fleischhauer is an engaged and stridently argumentative publicist. He will give personal insights how journalists can endure heated public debates, character attacks and scandals in digital media environments.

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With best regards,

*Dr. André Haller (University of Bamberg / Kufstein University of Applied Sciences)*

*Dr. Hendrik Michael (University of Bamberg)*

*Lucas Seeber M. A. (University of Bamberg)*