Call for Papers

Annual Conference of the Methods Division of the German Communication Association (DGPuK)

30 September – 2 October 2026, Cologne
GESIS – Leibniz Institute for the Social Sciences,
Unter Sachsenhausen 6-8, 50667 Cologne

Computational Opportunities and Challenges in the Measurement of Media Use and Media Effects

The increasing availability of digital behavioral data and computational tools has transformed how communication researchers study media use, exposure, and effects. These developments offer unprecedented analytical depth – but also introduce new complexities in measurement, theory-building, and ethical practice. This year's conference of the Methods Division invites contributions that advance and critically engage with computational approaches to the measurement of media use and effects – through methodological innovation, conceptual refinement, or empirical application.

We seek submissions that explore how computational methods can not only *extend* but also *rethink* established approaches to studying media exposure, its drivers, and its consequences. What new insights emerge when traditional communication theories meet high-dimensional data, algorithmic modeling, and novel hybrid designs? How do computational approaches enhance – or complicate – our ability to measure media use and effects in fragmented, dynamic digital environments? And how can we design responsible, transparent, and reusable infrastructures for long-term research on media use and effects?

This conference theme builds on a growing body of work – both nationally and internationally – that critically reflects on the conceptual, methodological, and technological challenges of measuring media use and effects in digital environments. A key motivation for this conference theme is the well-documented limitations of self-reported media exposure (e.g., recall biases, social desirability effects). In response, scholars have increasingly turned to digital behavioral data and automated methods to model media choice, exposure, and effects with greater granularity and ecological validity. The conference emphasizes the importance of interdisciplinary thinking and valid computational approaches to advance both empirical insight and theoretical understanding in an increasingly complex media landscape.

This call invites contributions that address core opportunities and challenges at the intersection of computational methods and the empirical study of media use and effects. We welcome theoretical, methodological, and empirical work – especially studies that critically reflect on how computational approaches shape what and how we can know about media exposure and its consequences.

Submissions may engage with, but are not limited to, the following five areas:

1. Integrating and Interpreting Diverse Digital Behavioral Data in Media Use and Effects Research

Digital media environments generate a wide array of digital behavioral data – from platform APIs and web tracking to sensor data, app usage, and data donations. These sources offer unprecedented access to patterns of media use and exposure. Yet they also raise important challenges related to visibility, granularity, and interpretability. We invite contributions that explore:

– The methodological integration of digital behavioral data with qualitative insights, surveys, experiments, or psychophysiological measures

– The design of hybrid systems for tracking and analyzing user behavior

– Establishing how computational methods (e.g., clustering, text-as-data, anomaly detection) can support the integration of digital behavioral data into media use and media effect studies

– The comparative strengths and limitations of different data sources in capturing media use and linking it to potential effects

2. Theorizing Media Use and Effects in Fragmented, Algorithmically Shaped Environments

Contemporary media environments are shaped by personalization, algorithmic curation, and cross-platform fragmentation. Computational methods allow researchers to track exposure and engagement in granular detail, but they also raise fundamental theoretical questions: What constitutes "use" or an "effect"? How can complex, latent phenomena such as belief change, polarization, or emotional resonance be meaningfully modeled and measured across diverse contexts and time frames? We invite contributions that:

– Advance or revise theories of media choice, exposure, and effects in light of large-scale digital behavioral data

– Operationalize and model latent constructs (e.g., ideology, emotional tone, framing, text complexity) using computational approaches such as simulations and machine learning

– Link media content to user-level outcomes through automated exposure-effect pipelines, including dynamic and cross-platform analyses

– Critically assess the validity and limitations of computational proxies in capturing complex psychological or sociopolitical effects

3. Addressing Bias and Representation in Computational Research on Media Use and Effects

Studies based on voluntary participation and the installation of research software (e.g., apps, browser plugins) often suffer from selection effects, while platform data provide only partial access to media use and exposure. These limitations have direct consequences for the validity and generalizability of media effects research. We seek papers that address:

– Statistical or causal inference methods for mitigating self-selection and representational bias (e.g., weighting, imputation, sensitivity analysis)

– Methods for identifying and quantifying data distortion, including comparisons with benchmark data

– Approaches integrating qualitative methods (e.g., interviews, diaries, ethnographic observations) to contextualize digital behavioral data, provide deeper insights, and identify blind spots and biases in media use and effects research

- Design strategies to broaden participation and enhance validity and robustness in computational measurement

4. Building Sustainable Infrastructures for Computational Media Use and Effects Research

The promise of computational media research depends on sustainable and transparent infrastructures. Yet many tools are developed ad hoc, lack documentation, or are inaccessible for reuse – hindering cumulative science. We invite contributions that:

- Document and share reusable tools for collecting, annotating, or analyzing digital behavioral data on media use and media effects

- Discuss standardization practices for tool development and data annotation

- Reflect on the institutional and technical conditions needed for open, reproducible, and scalable computational research

- Assess the energy and resource sustainability of computational pipelines as well as the ethical and labor dimensions of data work (e.g., conditions in data labeling)

5. Ethical and Legal Foundations for Computational Research on Media Use and Effects

The analysis of digital behavioral data raises complex ethical and legal questions – particularly when it involves sensitive topics, long-term monitoring, or vulnerable populations. Computational media research must navigate these challenges responsibly and transparently. Relevant topics include:

- Consent, privacy, and data protection in passive and long-term digital behavioral data collection

- Normative frameworks for interpreting and communicating media use and effect findings

- Ethical uncertainties and legal grey areas in cross-platform, multi-method research designs

Submission Format

We welcome conceptual, empirical, and methodological contributions. Submissions related to the conference theme may address the suggested areas outlined above but are not limited to them.

Open Panel

In addition to contributions aligned with this year's conference theme – Computational Opportunities and Challenges in the Measurement of Media Use and Effects – the conference will host one or more Open Panels for work that lies beyond the central theme. Submissions to the Open Panel should demonstrate clear methodological relevance. Please indicate "Open Panel" in the title of your submission. The same formal criteria for submission and review apply as for presentations within the main conference theme.

Interactive Formats

Submissions are also invited for interactive formats beyond traditional conference presentations. One-hour slots are available for proposals that include a description of the topic, the participants involved, and the planned format or structure. Both discursive formats (e.g., thesis café) and practical formats (e.g., workshop) will be considered. The goal of these interactive formats is to broaden or

deepen the conference theme on a different level. Acceptance decisions will be made by the organizers in consultation with the division's speakers, taking into account the overall program.

Submission

Submissions for all formats should be prepared as an extended abstract (800–1,200 words, including references, figures/tables, and title page) and submitted via ConfTool. Submissions and presentations may be in **English or German**, although the general conference language will be English.

The submission will open on 1 April 2026 and the deadline is **15 May 2026**.

Contributions must not have been previously published in this form in a journal publication or presented at a German-language academic conference. However, submissions are welcome if they highlight a methodological aspect of a study that has already been published or presented, provided that this aspect was not the main focus of the earlier publication or presentation.

Each submission must be assigned to one of the following categories:

1. **Presentation of new data collection and analysis methods:** The contribution serves primarily to inform the field about new data collection and analysis procedures (relevant to communication research) or newly developed tools that may be useful to empirical researchers ("there is/there should be" contributions). Such procedures are not systematically evaluated for quality, nor is the contribution aimed at solving a specific problem. Its main value lies in inspiration and training.

2. **Addressing a specific problem using novel data collection or analysis methods:** A "there is"-type contribution that introduces a communication-related problem and presents a discussable proposal for how a new method of data collection or analysis can help address it. The submission should outline the method's relevance for broader fields and issues within communication research, rather than merely offering a small, isolated case without further abstraction.

3. **Original methodological research:** The contribution presents and systematically examines a data collection or analysis procedure with regard to its methodological characteristics, strengths, and limitations. Comparative methodological studies are particularly welcome. The relevance for communication research and fields of application must be explicitly addressed.

4. **State-of-the-art presentations:** The contribution provides an overview of central areas of methodological research in communication studies. From a meta-analytical perspective, it highlights approaches, research desiderata, and areas of need.

Review and Selection

At this division conference, a constructive feedback process will replace the traditional review procedure. Submissions will still be anonymized and evaluated according to the usual criteria; however, reviewers will be asked to provide primarily constructive suggestions for improving the contributions. The reviews are intended first and foremost as feedback for the authors and as orientation for the conference organizers. The organizers also reserve the right to take the overall design of the conference program into account when selecting contributions. Provided that all formal requirements are met and within the limits of time and space, the goal is to accept as many submissions as possible.

The criteria for the constructive review of submissions are:

1. Relevance to the division: Does the submission make an independent, substantial methodological contribution to communication and media research?

2. Clarity of presentation: Is the submission well structured and clearly formulated? Does it include all information necessary for review (e.g., on sample, reliability, validity)? For empirical studies: are concrete results presented?

3. Content coherence: For empirical contributions: Are the study design and implementation theoretically and methodologically appropriate and in line with the current state of the art? For non-empirical contributions: Is the relevant literature adequately considered? Are explicit links to communication and media research made?

4. Relation to the conference theme (not applicable for Open Panel submissions): Does the submission explicitly address the conference theme, and if so, is the connection convincingly established (e.g., to a specific point in the call for papers)?

A special issue in *Computational Communication Research* on the broader topic of computational approaches to media use and effects research is planned. A separate and open call for this special issue will be announced at a later stage. Conference submitters are invited to consider submitting to the special issue.

forsa/Lazarsfeld Scholarships

Information on the forsa/Lazarsfeld Scholarships will be provided in a separate call.

Early Career Workshop

Information on the early career workshop preceding the conference will be provided in a separate call.

Conference details

Location:

GESIS – Leibniz-Institute for the Social Sciences
Unter Sachsenhausen 6-8
50667 Köln

Conference schedule:

– Wednesday: Workshops, Get together
– Thursday: Conference program ca. 9am-6pm with conference dinner afterwards
– Friday: Conference program, including forsa/Lazarsfeld panel

For the hosting institute:	*For the division:*
Frank Mangold	Julia Niemann-Lenz, Hannover
Christina Viehmann	Pablo Jost, Mainz
Chung-hong Chan	
Ahrabhi Kathirgamalingam	
Lukas Otto	
Mareike Wieland	