

Call for Papers for a Special Issue – Winter 2027

Comparison as Method and Heuristic in Communication Research

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Comparison is fundamental to how communication research generates knowledge. It can operate at different levels of analysis, relate communication phenomena across a broad range of contexts, and examine continuity and change over time. Yet its significance extends beyond research design. As a heuristic, comparison provides a means of questioning established assumptions, revealing patterns and contextual contingencies, and generating new insights.

Since the 1990s, comparative research has become increasingly prominent in communication studies (Livingstone, 2003; Pfetsch & Esser, 2004; Melischek, Seethaler & Wilke, 2008) and has developed into a consolidated and differentiated field of research (Esser & Hanitzsch, 2012; Esser, 2016; Chan & Lee, 2017; Holtz-Bacha, 2021; Melischek & Seethaler, 2017; Volk, 2021). At the same time, this consolidation has coincided with substantial changes in the conditions under which comparative research is conceived and conducted. The phenomena and contexts under study are becoming increasingly complex, dynamic, and interconnected, while new forms of data and analytical approaches are expanding the scale and scope of comparative inquiry. These developments create new opportunities for comparison but also accentuate longstanding methodological and epistemological challenges concerning the construction of cases, the establishment of comparability, the consideration of context, and the interpretation and generalization of comparative findings. They also raise questions about inequalities in resources and research capacities within international comparative collaborations.

This Special Issue invites scholars to reconsider comparison as both method and heuristic in communication research. It seeks to critically assess the possibilities, challenges, and implications of comparison for contemporary communication research, with particular attention to the methodological and epistemological questions that comparative inquiry raises. It also examines how changing research practices and approaches are reshaping comparative research and how comparative findings can contribute to methodological and theoretical development as well as to insights of societal relevance.

We welcome conceptual, theoretical, methodological, and empirical contributions from the full breadth of comparative media and communication research. Submissions should engage explicitly with the rationale, conceptualization, and consequences of comparison, approaching comparison as a method, methodological principle, or heuristic rather than merely as a feature of the research design.

Key Areas

Innovations and Emerging Approaches in Comparative Communication Research

The first key area of the Special Issue focuses on methodological innovation and new approaches to designing and conducting comparative research. We invite contributions that discuss emerging tools and forms of data, develop innovative comparative designs, or reconsider established methods in light of technological, societal, and communicative transformations.

Conditions and Limits of Comparison: Methodological, Epistemological, and Critical Perspectives

Comparison can increase sensitivity to context, challenge assumptions derived from individual cases, support theory development, and help identify relationships between social structures and communication processes. Yet comparisons are never neutral. They depend on decisions about concepts, cases, categories, units of analysis, standards of equivalence, and relevant differences. The second thematic area therefore invites critical reflection on the epistemological assumptions, methodological limitations, and power relations embedded in comparative research.

From Comparison to Knowledge: Explanation, Theory, and Transfer

Comparative research goes beyond identifying similarities and differences. Its scientific contribution depends on how comparative findings are interpreted, explained, and connected to broader conceptual and theoretical questions. Comparative findings may also generate unexpected insights, challenge established explanations, and point to the scope and limitations of existing concepts and theories. The third thematic area therefore considers how comparative research can advance explanation and theory development, contribute to methodological development, and generate insights of relevance within and beyond academia.

Formats for Contributions

The Special Issue welcomes different types of manuscripts, including original empirical research articles, conceptual and theoretical contributions, methodological articles, literature reviews, and research notes presenting innovative comparative designs, infrastructures, datasets, or tools.

All submissions should make an explicit contribution to the discussion of comparison as a method, methodological principle, or heuristic. Manuscripts that merely report results from several countries or cases without reflecting on the logic, construction, or implications of the comparison are unlikely to fit the scope of the Special Issue.

All contributions to the Special Issue are subject to quality assurance. Contributions may be submitted in one of the following formats:

- **Peer-reviewed Article:** Theoretical, methodological, or research articles; max. 60,000 characters, including spaces and references; subject to double-blind peer review.
- **Media Practice and Research Reports:** Shorter research notes; max. 30,000 characters, including spaces and references; subject to double-blind peer review.
- **Essay:** Reflections on current issues stimulating scholarly discussion; max. 30,000 characters, including spaces and references. Before submitting an essay, authors are asked to send a brief pitch to the guest editors (cmc@oeaw.ac.at) for pre-approval. Essay submissions will be reviewed by the guest editors.

Manuscript Submission

Full manuscripts must comply with the [submission](#) guidelines and the [style guide](#) of *Global Media Journal – German Edition* and be submitted via the [journal's website](#) by 31 January 2027.

When submitting, authors should select the submission category “Special Issue: Comparison as Method and Heuristic in Communication Research.”

The Special Issue is scheduled for publication in December 2027.

Indicative Timeline

- Full manuscript submission deadline: 31.1.2027
- First-round review decisions: 31.5.2027
- Revised manuscripts due: 30.6.2027
- Final decisions: 30.9.2027
- Publication: December 2027

Further information: <https://www.globalmediajournal.de> and <https://www.oeaw.ac.at/cmc>

If you have any questions about content-related aspects, please contact the guest editors (cmc@oeaw.ac.at); for editorial queries, please contact the GMJ-DE editor Katharina Nötzold (gmi@polsoz.fu-berlin.de).

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