



Editorial

# Editorial for the Special Issue “Selected Papers from the 9th Annual Conference ‘Comparative Media Studies in Today’s World’ (CMSTW’2021)”

Svetlana S. Bodrunova

School of Journalism and Mass Communications, St. Petersburg University, 199004 St. Petersburg, Russia; s.bodrunova@spbu.ru

This Special Issue of *Future Internet* features the best papers from the 9th annual conference “Comparative Media Studies in Today’s World (CMSTW’2021)”, which was held between 20 and 21 April 2021, in St. Petersburg, Russia (virtually). From 2013 to 2021, the conference has gathered leading scholars in the area of comparative media and communication research. In recent years, the focus of CMSTW has increasingly shifted towards the study of online communication, especially that on social networking platforms and similar portals of public and not-so-public communication.

In 2021, the conference theme was “Communicative architectures.” As the CMSTW program chair, I deliberately chose this interpretation for two reasons. First, the aim was to accentuate the juxtaposition of “communication vs. communicative” for the way in which these terms are used in the various sub-fields of communication science. Second, the emphasis was to radically expand these terms beyond their present narrow technical use in the communication systems literature [1,2] and to allow for interpretations of the architectures of communication that were as comprehensive as possible. In organizing the call for papers, my colleagues and I aimed at linking “architectures” to “hierarchies”, “structures”, “layers”, or even “assemblages” [3], as well as overlapping “spheres” and “arenas” [4], to see how these architectural and spatial metaphors help in understanding the factors that shape public and interpersonal communication in today’s (and, possibly, future) Internet.

In other words, the scope of the conference was to explore the interplay between communication architectures and other features of online life. For instance, recently, scholars have proclaimed the rise of the platform society [5]. In it, affordances decide what message the medium is [6]; algorithmic intermediaries, commercial corporations, and influencer bloggers [7–9] compete in bypassing news agencies, and platforms impeach politicians [10]. The reshaping of power orders, the renewal of the public/private debate, context-bound differences, and the transformation of discussion practices all pose the question of what we are facing in the emergent communication architecture(s) of our life: Is there a horizontal co-existence of communication platforms, a multi-level complex of arenas, or a brave new world of (re-)emergent hierarchies? Additionally, to what extent can communication phenomena be explained via the “architectural” view?

User talk is a major part of online communication at present and may be seen as both the contents of the platforms (as “communication vessels”) and as an element of the communication architecture itself. The authors of this Special Issue explored how features of the communication structure and context relate to the content and discursive features of Internet discussions.

Trying to answer the questions posed above, the papers link the phenomena of media, psychological, or social-grouping nature to platform affordances, hierarchies of communicators, geographical proximity of communication loci, or dynamics of seemingly structureless opinion cumulation [11]. Thus, [12] demonstrates, among others, that large-scale international discussions on social networks, such as Twitter, have a certain logic in how their



**Citation:** Bodrunova, S.S. Editorial for the Special Issue “Selected Papers from the 9th Annual Conference ‘Comparative Media Studies in Today’s World’ (CMSTW’2021)”.

*Future Internet* **2022**, *14*, 334. <https://doi.org/10.3390/fi14110334>

Received: 15 November 2022

Accepted: 15 November 2022

Published: 16 November 2022

**Publisher’s Note:** MDPI stays neutral with regard to jurisdictional claims in published maps and institutional affiliations.



**Copyright:** © 2022 by the author. Licensee MDPI, Basel, Switzerland. This article is an open access article distributed under the terms and conditions of the Creative Commons Attribution (CC BY) license (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>).

news-like content changes into discussion on problematic issues with varying speeds, depending on the distance from the geographical epicenter of the discussed event. With predominantly methodological goals, the authors fine-tune and test several neural-network-based models for abstractive summarization, but they also show how summarization applied to real-world online debates allows for discovering their news/issues structure from a comparative perspective.

Everyday communication similar to that described in [12] tends to create communities—an element of communication architecture with dynamic composition, blurred borders, thresholds to enter, and internal “center–periphery” structure [13]. Detecting communities within socially mediated discussions helps to rethink the structure of social grouping as well as its reasons. Discursive communities may be non-self-evident. The authors of [14] checked seven automated methodologies for the detection of hidden communities in Twitter discussions of varying volumes and languages. The analysis showed that, despite better or worse precision metrics values, none of the methodologies allows for detecting large enough communities (roughly two to ten, as was suggested in political polarization studies [15], instead of the dozens detected by automated clustering). Thus, other methods of clustering, such as those based on the Markov moment [16], may be better suited for community detection on social media. Communities, however, may also be induced by user practices, on the one hand, and algorithms, on the other. The authors of [17] demonstrate that both the sequence of user messages and recommending algorithms may create differing communities from an initial set of non-related users. Thus, communities on communication platforms may be seen as emergent structures of a flexible and non-fixed nature, which, nonetheless, may be predicted.

Emerging communities that rise naturally based on authentic opinion cumulation need to be distinguished from communicative structures induced on purpose by strategic communication actors and actions/activities, such as, e.g., instruments of computational propaganda [18]. While the latter, in the form of bots and trolls, are studied actively, studies of the more subtle and fine-tuned efforts of opinion induction are less frequent. The authors of [19] developed a methodology for the detection of strategic communicators, whom the authors call “network combatants” and reconfigure the structure of authentic discourse and user relations within a given discussion.

Communication structures may also be hybrid [20]—that is, comprise both online and offline milieus, which creates peculiar communication dynamics. The authors of [21] describe communicative situations of phubbing, a form of face-to-face alienation and snubbing provoked by smartphone use in public, especially in interpersonal communication in public spaces. The authors are, to our best knowledge, the first in the field of mobile communication studies to address the issue of phubbing activation and the factors that trigger it, including gender, age, and positive/negative affect.

The papers of the conference all confirm that the concept of communicative architectures may be used as an umbrella term to designate and comprise the relations between structural–hierarchical and other features of online communication. We hope for the wider use of this term in future studies of Internet media.

**Funding:** This research was funded in full by the project “Center for International Media Research” of St. Petersburg State University, year 2, grant #92564627.

**Conflicts of Interest:** The author declares no conflict of interest.

## References

1. Wang, W.; Xu, Y.; Khanna, M. A survey on the communication architectures in smart grid. *Comput. Netw.* **2011**, *55*, 3604–3629. [[CrossRef](#)]
2. Raychaudhuri, D.; Wilson, N.D. ATM-based transport architecture for multiservices wireless personal communication networks. *IEEE J. Sel. Areas Commun.* **1994**, *12*, 1401–1414. [[CrossRef](#)]
3. Felix, G.; Guattari, D. *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*; Massumi, B., Translator; University of Minnesota: Minneapolis, MN, USA, 1987.

4. Becker, B.; Wehner, J. Electronic networks and civil society: Reflections on structural changes in the public sphere. In *Culture, Technology, Communication: Towards an Intercultural Global Village*; Sudweeks, F., Herring, S., Eds.; Suny Press: Albany, NY, USA, 2001; pp. 67–85.
5. Van Dijck, J.; Poell, T.; De Waal, M. *The Platform Society: Public Values in a Connective World*; Oxford University Press: Oxford, UK, 2018.
6. McLuhan, M.; Fiore, Q. The medium is the message. *New York* **1967**, *123*, 126–128.
7. Bozdag, E. Bias in algorithmic filtering and personalization. *Ethics Inf. Technol.* **2013**, *15*, 209–227. [[CrossRef](#)]
8. Bull, A. *Brand Journalism*; Routledge: London, UK, 2013.
9. Bodrunova, S.S.; Litvinenko, A.A.; Blekanov, I.S. Comparing influencers: Activity vs. connectivity measures in defining key actors in Twitter ad hoc discussions on migrants in Germany and Russia. In *International Conference on Social Informatics*; Springer: Cham, Switzerland, 2017; pp. 360–376.
10. Ouyang, Y.; Waterman, R.W. Trump, Twitter, and the American Democracy. In *Trump, Twitter, and the American Democracy: Political Communication in the Digital Age*; Palgrave Macmillan: Cham, Switzerland, 2020; pp. 131–161.
11. Bodrunova, S.S. Practices of Cumulative Deliberation: A Meta-review of the Recent Research Findings. In *International Conference on Electronic Governance and Open Society: Challenges in Eurasia*; Springer: Cham, Switzerland, 2022; pp. 89–104.
12. Blekanov, I.S.; Tarasov, N.; Bodrunova, S.S. Transformer-Based Abstractive Summarization for Reddit and Twitter: Single Posts vs. Comment Pools in Three Languages. *Future Internet* **2022**, *14*, 69. [[CrossRef](#)]
13. Bodrunova, S.S.; Litvinenko, A.A.; Blekanov, I.S. Please follow us: Media roles in Twitter discussions in the United States, Germany, France, and Russia. *J. Pract.* **2018**, *12*, 177–203. [[CrossRef](#)]
14. Blekanov, I.; Bodrunova, S.S.; Akhmetov, A. Detection of Hidden Communities in Twitter Discussions of Varying Volumes. *Future Internet* **2021**, *13*, 295. [[CrossRef](#)]
15. Bodrunova, S.S.; Blekanov, I.; Smoliarova, A.; Litvinenko, A. Beyond left and right: Real-world political polarization in Twitter discussions on inter-ethnic conflicts. *Media Commun.* **2019**, *7*, 119–132. [[CrossRef](#)]
16. Bodrunova, S.S.; Orekhov, A.V.; Blekanov, I.S.; Lyudkevich, N.S.; Tarasov, N.A. Topic detection based on sentence embeddings and agglomerative clustering with Markov moment. *Future Internet* **2020**, *12*, 144. [[CrossRef](#)]
17. Bagnoli, F.; de Bonfioli Cavalcabo', G.; Casu, B.; Guazzini, A. Community Formation as a Byproduct of a Recommendation System: A Simulation Model for Bubble Formation in Social Media. *Future Internet* **2021**, *13*, 296. [[CrossRef](#)]
18. Woolley, S.C.; Howard, P.N. (Eds.) *Computational Propaganda: Political Parties, Politicians, and Political Manipulation on Social Media*; Oxford University Press: Oxford, UK, 2018.
19. Gavra, D.; Namyatova, K.; Vitkova, L. Detection of Induced Activity in Social Networks: Model and Methodology. *Future Internet* **2021**, *13*, 297. [[CrossRef](#)]
20. Chadwick, A. *The Hybrid Media System: Politics and Power*; Oxford University Press: Oxford, UK, 2017.
21. Guazzini, A.; Raimondi, T.; Biagini, B.; Bagnoli, F.; Duradoni, M. Phubber's emotional activations: The association between PANAS and phubbing behavior. *Future Internet* **2021**, *13*, 311. [[CrossRef](#)]