

Between the Fourth Estate and the Fifth Power: *Conservation and Innovation in PSM Journalism*

Call for Paper Proposals

RIPE@2022 conference

18 – 21 September 2022 in Vienna, Austria

The 11th biennial RIPE conference is sponsored by ORF, Austria's public service media (PSM) provider, and hosted by the University of Vienna. The conference theme invites paper proposals that are relevant for advancing understandings of journalistic theory and practice in the context of a complicated set of challenges related to digital disruption, globalization, commercialization, information disorder, and the importance of fair, free and independent information and news provision that has been a persistent responsibility of public service media organizations over the decades.

Elaboration of the Conference Theme

Digital technologies have created enormous disruptions for media systems and companies, and ushered in consequential shifts in economic as well as political power. More media of more types are motivated by commercial imperatives even as the editorial function has become endangered. New media platforms are increasingly influential and used sources for 'news' and information and resist being defined as media companies. The big tech big data corporations have substantial influence on public communication today. National PSM providers remain important in principle but are often at severe disadvantage in many respects, including economic funding, political support, commercial pressure and competition, channel proliferation, and fundamentally as a consequence of the enormity of changes in the scope and scale of competition.

Countries and populations around the world are challenged by trends summarized as fake news, mis- and disinformation campaigns, filter bubbles and the algorithmic production of personalized content – especially news. The collapse of editorial responsibility has resulted in a systemic condition characterized by nontransparency and unaccountability. All of this gravely endangers the health and vitality of the public sphere for democratic societies, and undermines PSM in both institutional and operational aspects. As people increasingly cruise the internet universe of commercial social media, trust and performance for quality journalism is seriously at risk.

The historic paradigm has prioritized the creation and maintenance of independent media based on professional, accountable journalistic skills and practices as an essential for democratic practice. For this reason, the press has been conceptualized as the Fourth Estate of power (alongside Executive, Legislative and Judicial) in democratic societies. This understanding of the institutional framework that has protected PSM's role in the Fourth Estate is under attack from political and business interests in an increasing number of countries. PSM is under stress in traditional broadcasting and even more so in the online environment that is largely governed by commercial interests that manage a corporatized Internet with profound potential consequences given the powerful influences

of social media. At the same time, societies are struggling to cope with massive social disruption manifest in polarization and fragmentation, nationalistic protectionism, xenophobic politics, sophisticated new forms of clandestine propaganda and cyber-strategies that seek to undermine democracy and foment unrest.

A series of crucial questions invite serious consideration: How can PSM keep pace with these dynamics and mitigate the damaging consequences of digital transformation? How can PSM effectively compete with the dominance of digital media giants and serve as a counterbalance? How can PSM resist the alarming constellation of pressures opposing them and develop appropriate answers to maintain their role and function as independent, trusted sources of truthful, fair and balanced information dedicated to serving the whole of society? How can PSM be distinctive in providing and defending Quality Journalism in the digital age, avoid being caught up in the problem of filter bubbles, escape the risk of unwittingly engaging with fake news, safeguard independence and advance media pluralism and content diversity?

The RIPE@2022 conference will address one of the most challenging contemporary topics facing PSM in the digital age. We invite paper proposals that are relevant to these concerns about the role of public service journalism as an essential and foundational part of the Fourth Estate to effectively challenge the negative impact of the fifth power.

Topics of Specified Interest

Empirical and comparative research is especially needed that addresses the following topics that will ultimately frame the workgroup structure for the RIPE@2022 conference in Vienna:

1. Policy developments affecting news and journalism for PSM organizations

- Comparative and/or indepth analysis of trends and changes in media policy affecting PSM's role and function as a news and current affairs provider
- Challenges in the growth of populist politics and the politization of information for partisan interests
- Complications and potential solutions for policy affecting domestic information and news provision given the proliferation of transnational actors and pressures
- Other topics and aspects related to media policy and legal developments affecting PSM news and current affairs journalism, especially challenges to safeguards for independence

2. Developments in journalistic and editorial practice in the digital media environment

- Addressing sophisticated forms of propaganda from domestic and international sources that are intentional and strategically designed to stir unrest and undermine democracy
- Internal strategies and policies developed by PSM organizations to cope with a range of challenges involving fake news, filter bubbles, mis- and disinformation, etc.
- New approaches to news and current affairs provision and programming, including formats and genres intended to serve either general or particular populations
- PSM's role and ambitions in news provision at the international level
- Challenges and developments in journalistic codes of ethics for PSM today, and the need for independence in practice and provision
- Other topics and aspects affecting PSM news and current affairs journalism

3. Challenges and opportunities posed by commercial interests as the fifth power

- Ways and degrees to which the rise of commercial power and pressures can be reasonably understood as posing a 5th power or estate in contemporary democracies
- Strategies, developments and impact of commercial news on PSM's position and capacity. May be targeted to one or more levels of engagement (local, national, global, etc.)
- Changing competitive dynamics and related challenges as well as opportunities this creates for PSM news organizations and operations
- Linkages between state interests and commercial interests affecting the capacity of PSM journalism to remain free, truthful, critical and independent
- Other topics and aspects related to the rise of commercial pressures on PSM journalism

4. Challenges and developments in news and current affairs across relevant platforms

- Cross-platform journalistic and editorial strategies and practices in news provision today
- Emerging technological opportunities and threats for PSM news production and provision
- Organizational and operational restructuring initiatives in the area of news and current affairs, especially as these are a response to commercial and other competitive pressures
- Requirements, complications and competencies related to online news provision by PSM companies
- Partnerships with other public and private sector organizations or companies in the development of strategies and operations to enhance PSM news and current affairs services
- Other topics and aspects related to organizational and operational developments in PSM journalism

5. Criteria for PSM as the Fourth Estate in the digital ecology

- The role and regulatory framework of PSM in terms of requirements or expectations for distinctiveness in its mission and remits in the digital ecology
- Criteria for safeguarding accountability and independence from political and business interests in the governance and practice of journalism today
- Approaches for guaranteeing universality and accessibility for society with a focus on innovation
- Strategies and practices for building and maintaining public trust and institutional credibility in PSM news and current affairs provision
- Other topics and aspects related to strengthening PSM's essential role and functions as a vital part of the 4th Estate for democracies in the era of digital media

6. Declining trust in public institutions, alternative publics and strategic alliances

- Explaining the decline of public trust in institutions and the implications for PSM both as an institution and especially in news and public affairs provision
- Challenges and opportunities for PSM journalism in supporting the exercise of citizenship in the digital media environment
- The nature, concerns and dynamics of alternative publics with a focus on relationships with established institutions
- How mistrust is being handled by PSM news and journalism in organizational and content provision in increasingly polarized environments
- The identification, construction and management of strategic alliances to combat mistrust and strengthen the journalistic value of PSM news and current affairs provision

Submission Requirement

Paper proposals can be submitted via the conference website (<https://ripe2022.univie.ac.at>). You need to register in the internal system of the University of Vienna before you can submit a proposal. A registration link can be found at the bottom of the registration page, to which you will be redirected after clicking on the submission link mentioned above.

During the registration process you will have to enter information about you and your institution. If there are several authors, you can add them and their institutions during the later submission process.

Please enter the following information into the online submission form:

- the paper's working title,
- an extended abstract (max 1,000 words) addressing the six elements for evaluation (provided below)
- the two working group topics the paper is most closely related to.

Additionally, the abstract (including the paper's working title) needs to be uploaded as a Microsoft Word file. Please make sure that your Word file is anonymized and does not contain any indication of the author(s) either in the text or in meta data.

All submissions will be peer-reviewed (double-blind) by a scientific committee. The evaluation criteria are:

1. Relevance to the conference theme and fit with one of the working group topics.
2. Newness or originality of the research (empirical) or essay (philosophical)
3. Theorization and general importance
4. Research methods and design (for empirical papers)
5. Key findings and implications for theory
6. Relevance for PSM management and practice

Empirical research is highly valued, but we also welcome insightful philosophical, critical and theory-driven papers. Comparative research is important.

RIPE conferences focus on substance, dialogue and results. We therefore limit acceptance to about 60 papers and each is assigned to one of the workgroups.

Submissions are due 4 April 2022 (Extended Deadline).

Decisions about acceptance will be announced on 2 May 2022 at the latest including further details regarding the submission of the completed papers. Completed papers are due on 15 August 2022.

The conference happens over 2.5 days with a welcoming reception the night before the first day and the inaugural RIPE General Assembly on the afternoon of the third day. The conference language is English.

Conference fees will be announced at a later date. The fee will cover conference meals, events and materials, but not hotel accommodation or travel. Based on the level of interest, a non-obligatory social programme might be planned for the day after the conference at an additional cost for those interested to participate. The RIPE conference does not supplement personal travel costs.