



The new European public sphere, the crises and challenges of "post-truth"

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Department of Political and Social Sciences (DSPS) | University of Catania

One of the salient aspects in the recent dynamic transformation of public opinion is the process of integration between national and European communication spaces, which together increasingly converge on a scenario of complex global interdependencies. While this integrative trend was taking shape, itself a topic of debate and controversy, the European arena had to deal with new challenges, that mainly derived from a succession of global crises (economic, migratory, pandemic, war). These challenges, as well as generating geopolitical and economic instability, have highlighted a further and deeper impact of the transformations of the communication context, such as digitalisation, platformisation, polarization and the set of phenomena that cluster around the imprecise and debated concept of post-truth.

The crisis phases have highlighted the progressive shift towards the European sphere of many issues that previously featured in national contexts of debate and policy-making. This has made this process of Europeanization an object of persistent attention in flows of political communication, and given integration itself a structure of polarized politicization.

Due to the growing importance of the Union and the greater prominence of European-level issues in national political-media systems, it can be hypothesized that the phase of European elections as "second-order" elections in member countries has ended. One significant aspect is that they have become an object of interest for some foreign governments who, through the propagation of fake news and propaganda, attempt to influence the choices of citizens and governments to the point of undermining the integrity of the elections. At the level of individual states, we note the role of populist parties and their leaders, who are accused of spreading content of dubious veracity to influence electoral contests and referendums. These processes are considered a threat to the values of civil coexistence and public debate, and trust in democratic institutions.

The increased salience of the issues now found in European public space poses challenges to the agency of organized civil society. The structure of national public spheres has in fact changed, giving greater space to new actors with the ability to set agendas and influence public debate. In this context, a different methodological approach has made it possible to overcome the top-down/bottom-up dichotomy of participatory processes in the process of integrating the European communication space. It thus seems appropriate to pay attention to the communicative activities of social movements that operate at a trans-national level (e.g. environmentalists), and to those of interest groups that expand their activities towards the European dimension (trade unions, businesses and consumers). Worthy of interest are the movements of protest, sometimes labeled as populist, which mobilize simultaneously in various European countries, displaying networked trans-national connections.

These processes are discursively articulated within a media ecosystem that is significantly influenced and distorted by phenomena of intolerance and incivility present in digital environments; communicative exchanges become radicalized and the very frames of the issues are influenced, causing the polarization of the arenas of debate.

The world of journalism has followed the process of Europeanization of national spheres and their politicization, often from a critical perspective, underlining the inadequacy of the Union's institutional responses and calling for their reform. This is accompanied by a crisis of journalism, characterized by loss of legitimacy of traditional media, which faces the affirmation of a framework of extreme fragmentation in information practices. It is necessary to deepen our understanding of the transformation of the news generation process, the impact on the role of journalists and editorial staff as gatekeepers and guarantors, and what adaptation and reaction strategies are in place, in the face of the complexity of the debate on information in European space.

On the basis of this framework, the call for papers solicits contributions that investigate the transformation of the national and European public sphere with particular attention to the challenges posed by crises, disinformation and manipulation phenomena. The areas investigated are those of electoral campaigns, strategies implemented by political actors and civil society and by traditional media, the impact of platformization processes on the fields of political communication, journalism and all other forms of communication.

Theoretical and empirical analysis papers are welcome, with research designs that include qualitative, quantitative or mixed methods methodologies.

Some possible relevant topics, though this is not intended to be an exhaustive list:

- changes that have occurred and new communication scenarios in the increasingly close and complex relationship between political communication and the public sphere;
- the restructuring of ideologies and propaganda practices;
- the redefinition of the public agenda in European space;
- the transformations and controversial nature of the international-European public debate with reference to processes of ideological and affective polarization, the use of incivility, and forms of discrimination online and offline, also with attention to gender issues;
- policies regarding political communication, information and the integrity of elections, formulated by European and national institutions (transparency of platforms and privacy; regulation of electoral campaigns, etc.);
- the emergence of new repertoires of extra-institutional political communication linked to protests, social movements and civil society actors, especially of a transnational nature;
- transformations and crises of contemporary journalism, with particular attention to the growth of new professional models and the role of the digital platform;
- trends that have emerged in the communication styles of leadership and parties in a hybrid and platformized communication ecosystem;
- from a discourse analytical perspective, linguistic and/or multimodal aspects of post truth communication;
- the technological infrastructure of political participation with particular regard to young generations (digital parties, networks, influencers, memes, UGC);
- methodological proposals and theoretical contributions to address the transformations of the public sphere, disinformation and new forms of conflict and political competition;
- (computational) propaganda techniques and mis/dis-information strategies in conflict scenarios.



Paper proposals must include: name, affiliation and email address, a title and an extended abstract with bibliographic references (600/800 words excluding bibliography), 3 key words. The proposers must also explicitly indicate whether they request the paper to be taken into consideration, after the conference, for publication in the magazine "Comunicazione Politica". In the event of an equal evaluation by referees, the authors who have indicated this option will have priority in selection for the conference.

Useful information on how to write an abstract for AssoComPol conferences is available in the "Abstract Instructions" section (<https://www.compol.it/eventi/convegno/convegno-2024/> under construction)

Deadline for sending proposals: 11 March 2024

Acceptance notification: 25 March 2024

Complete papers must be sent by May 22, 2024 to the conference paper room (accessible after login)

Scientific committee: Cristopher Cepernich, Marco Mazzoni, Rolando Marini, Antonio Martella, Gianpietro Mazzoleni, Melissa Mongiardo, Mariaeugenia Parito, Rossana Sampugnaro, Hans-Jörg Trenz, Douglas Ponton.

Local organizers: Rossana Sampugnaro, Francesca Montemagno, Mariaeugenia Parito, Martina Faia, Patrizia Santoro.

Secretaris: Melissa Mongiardo, Antonio Martella, Cesar Crisosto.