

The 69th Annual ICA Conference "Communication Beyond Boundaries"

Washington DC (USA), May 24–28, 2019



Photo by: Marek Wiczerzak

Media and communication scholars from all around the globe gathered in Washington in the United States of America for the 69th Annual meeting of the International Communication Association (ICA). The Polish Communication Association organized a panel "Power Struggles: State, Media and The Public." The goal of that panel was to bring together a range of scholars from several European countries whose studies focus on the notion of "power struggle" — an umbrella term for communications networks and partnership relations between the agents involved. The salient questions

addressed during the session were: How do the media outlets serve the public good and their citizens? What are the existing mechanisms to limit political pressures and to foster journalistic objectivity and independence? To what extent media power is nowadays affected by the public's needs and expectations? How do the media use their power in relation to state and the publics?

The PCA session was chaired by Iwona Hofman — the President of the Polish Communication Association. In her opening speech, Iwona Hofman introduced the Polish Communication Association to the audience, while Agnieszka Stępińska promoted the most recent issue of the *Central European Journal of Communication* (Spring 2019) and invited the audience members to submit their paper proposals to the Journal.

The first paper was presented by Paweł Surowiec from Bournemouth University. The paper focused on public media policy changes in Poland, asking what and how media policy solutions facilitate the rise of illiberal trends in a hybrid media system. The paper unfolded the logic underpinning the new politics of media regulation and argued that these paint a nuanced picture of democratic backsliding in Poland. Drawing from media policies, policy-makers' statements and media industry insights, Paweł Surowiec and two co-authors of the paper (Magdalena Kania-Lundholm from Uppsala University and Małgorzata Winiarska-Brodowska from Jagiellonian University) problematized exogenous and endogenous trends underpinning the rise of illiberal trends at the cross-roads of the Polish hybrid media system, politics and democracy. These trends, as Authors of the paper claimed, unfolded along the lines of tensions between political parties and civic society actors, ownership structures, cultural politics, partisanship and polarisation. Indicative of illiberal turn in politics, they are steps towards executive aggrandizement and deepening politicisation of public service media as a sector of the Polish hybrid media system.

Then, Manuel Puppis from University of Fribourg/Switzerland and Etienne Bürdel from University of Fribourg/Switzerland discussed topics that dominated debates regarding the necessity and role of PSM were raised by which actors. Building on a stage-based approach to the policy-making process, Authors performed a qualitative content analysis of policy documents. Results of their study showed that actors across the political spectrum have become more critical of the Swiss public broadcaster. However, young libertarian politicians and the association of small and medium-sized businesses aside, a strong majority considers public funding crucial to sustain a strong media landscape.

Next, Gabriella Szabó from the Centre for Social Sciences at the Hungarian Academy of Sciences shared findings of her exploratory research on the dynamics between social media and news media in discussing politics. The study was driven by the question: what kind of news media content works in a sharing environment? To answer the question, Gabriella Szabó measured the specificities on news sharing patterns on the social media platforms of the 40 most read news media outlets in Hungary during the 2018 legislative election campaign period and one year prior (2017). The investigation revealed that the proximity of the election increases the circulation of news on politics. Data also suggested that political contents tend to generate more comments and shares than other posts. Such findings provided valuable contextual information to the mechanism of the algorithmic publics.

Finally, Agnieszka Stępińska from Adam Mickiewicz University (Poland), Dorota Piontek from Adam Mickiewicz University (Poland), and Agnieszka Hess from Jagiellonian University (Poland) shared the findings of the quantitative and qualitative content analysis of the media coverage of populism and populist actors in Poland. The paper addressed several research questions: (1) Which political actors are perceived by Polish journalists as populist? (2) How much attention the media paid to these political actors during the election and a non-election period? (2) What was a tone of the media coverage (positive, neutral, or negative) of these actors? (3) What are the journalists' attitudes towards populism? (4) What factors may explain Polish journalists' attitudes towards populism? Through content analysis the paper examined an amount of attention paid by the media to populist statements a relation between the media and populist political actors and discussed a potential power (or a lack of power) of the media over populism in Poland.

Text: Agnieszka Stępińska

The 12th Central and Eastern European Communication and Media Conference CEECOM 2019

Sofia, Bulgaria, June 19–21, 2019

The Faculty of Journalism and Mass Communication at the Sofia University “St. Kliment Ohridski” hosted the 12th edition of CEECOM — Central and Eastern European Media Conference. More than 190 experts and researchers from Europe and beyond participated in the three-day event. Participants represented research institutions from Spain, Portugal,