

Audiences? The familiar unknown of communication historiography

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Sponsor: ICA Communication History Division

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ECREA Communication History Section, IAMCR History Section, DGPuK Communication History Section

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Media consumers have largely remained in the shadows of communication history research. Methodological hurdles abound, and the relevance of this type of research to the broader field of communication scholarship has not always been clearly articulated. These challenges present an opportunity to advance the conversation on audiences, and to chart new directions for communication research. This ICA preconference is dedicated to bringing together scholars from across the spectrum of communication research and from around the globe to illuminate the history of audiences, media practices and media use. Submissions are invited to consider the full breadth of intellectual engagement with audiences, media users and media practices in the past. This scope includes examination of the historical interaction between audiences and various media technologies. It also includes the historical engagement of audiences with various types of journalistic sources and content as well as the connections of different audiences with one other in various social and public contexts of the past. Submissions that address audience history from transnational and/or de-Westernized perspectives are especially encouraged. We welcome papers on a wide array of historically grounded themes that shed light on the current state of historical research on audiences and media practices as well as potential directions for future research:

(1) Audiences as they were then and are remembered now

Case studies on past media and communication practices from a variety of perspectives are invited to shed light on current knowledge about past audiences. These can range from exceptional audiences in extraordinary circumstances (e.g. clandestine practices of media use in totalitarian regimes or during war times) as well as mundane and everyday practices of media users in the past. Nostalgic memory reveals how we imagine past media audiences, and to what extent those audiences appear different from today. The inter- and transgenerational exchange of media memories and the designated role of media technologies in family life can also help us understand past patterns and logics of media use.

We also welcome studies that emphasize the changing role of audiences in different situations: Audience as civic public and its role in public debate, audiences of journalism in contrast with audiences of entertainment as well as the history of media use between collective and individual practices in private or in public (e.g. while on the move in public

transport or in the family home). This includes not only mass media but also the history of means of communication and technological devices (e.g. the temporal liberation of audience experiences by the video recorder).

(2) Historical ideas of the audience in popular and public debate

Historical understandings of media audiences are not only shaped by academic knowledge but also by public debate and representations in popular culture. Examining the regulation of and protection of audience members' media activities helps in the understanding of past conceptions of audiences as well as implicit ideas of media effects. The perceived impact of technological developments on audiences by politicians, regulators and social pressure groups is also an area of interest for the preconference. This includes critical and journalistic notions of media audiences and associated fears (such as the notorious campaigns of newspaper editors against the perils of radio or television). How media users are depicted in a wide variety of popular culture formats makes ideas of audiences visible, especially in regard to stereotypes. How do depictions and characterizations of readers, listeners or viewers vary depending on the media they use? We are interested in popular and public ideas of the audience and their interplay with academic concepts and their influence on research (e.g. in terms of funding).

(3) Histories of audience research: Schools of thought, theoretical implications and change over time

We are interested in past developments within audience research and their intellectual implications as well as their legacy for audience research today. Papers are invited that probe or reconstruct shifting understandings of the nature of audiences in relation to different schools of thought. What epistemological shifts are to be observed in how audiences were implicitly and explicitly addressed in different areas, subfields and traditions of the field? For example, papers could ask if the audience in social science-oriented effects research is the same as in television studies, which were strongly influenced by British media studies and cultural studies. Differences between the role of audiences in transmission or ritual models of communication or the differentiation of audiences and civic publics and their implications for research are just a few further examples.

The field is characterized by changing ideas of audiences as rather passive, homogeneous and highly influenced by strong media effects as well as highly selective and active, participating, heterogeneous audiences and minimal-effect media. Temporal aspects of media use have also fluctuated over time. New media technologies have impacted the practices and roles of media users throughout history; how can conceptions of audiences be

adapted accordingly? Are conceptions of audiences fit for research on media practices in new media environments?

(4) Methods and sources for researching historical audiences

Most of the methodological approaches of contemporary audience or reception research are not applicable for historical audiences or can grasp past media practices only in limited ways. Historical audience data may lack texture about the specific quality and meaning of media engagement. Historical audience researchers thus often have to resort to indirect methods and to reconstruct from obscure, scarce and incomplete source material. Papers are invited that make use of diverse original sources for historical audience research and discuss their value and potential pitfalls. How might the shift toward big data and digitization enhance our understanding of audiences of the past? Is the digital media user more accessible for historical reconstruction?

Methodologies specifically designed to reconstruct media practices of the past are also relevant. Oral history can be considered an invaluable method for historical audience research, with the caveat that this method is reconstructing shaped ideas and understandings of the meaning of media uses from the contemporary. Although often idealizing memories or highlighting the extraordinary while neglecting the mundane, the approach to personal media memories can help us to understand the discursive formation of media audiences. Submissions are invited that employ oral history or that reflect innovative uses of other historical methodologies to understand past media practices.

The composition and the practices, roles and possible actions of audiences change over time and in different cultural or geographical spaces. Media-centric perspectives on past media practices may neglect the contextual dimensions of communicative practices. Thus papers are also invited that help to reconstruct past media practices as embedded in everyday life and the daily routines of audience members in various cultures and geographies.

Abstracts of **300 words** (maximum) should be submitted no later than **30 November 2016**. Proposals for full panels are also welcome: these should include a 250-word abstract for each individual presentation, and a 200-word rationale for the panel. Send abstracts to: **christian.schwarzenegger@phil.uni-augsburg.de**. Authors will be informed regarding acceptance/rejection for the preconference no later than **11 January 2017**. Full papers will need to be submitted no later than **1 May 2017** as these will be posted online and made available to all those participating in the preconference. Early career scholars and graduate students are highly encouraged to submit their work. Please indicate if the research submitted is part of your thesis or dissertation project. The organizers will aim to arrange for discussants to provide an intensive response for graduate students projects.