

# Conference Program

## **Wednesday, 24 September 2026 – *Young scholars' workshop***

- 11.00-11.30    Opening and presentations
- 11.30-13.00    Discussions with the mentor
- 13.00-14.00    Lunch
- 14.00-16.00    Planning, writing and publishing: joint discussion and wrap-up
- In the evening: Get-together

## **Thursday, 25 September 2025 – *The first conference day***

- 9.00–10.00    Registration
- 10.00–10.30    Conference opening ceremony
- 10.30–11.30    Keynote speech: Prof. Jeffrey Hall
- 11.30-11.45    Short break
- 11.45–13.00    Session 1. *Overcoming differences through listening*
- 13.00–14.00    Lunch
- 14.00–15.15    Session 2. *Influencing interpersonally through mediated communication*
- 15.15-15.45    Coffee break
- 15.45-17.00    Session 3. *Supportive communication as an asset*
- 20.00            Conference dinner (Restaurant: Casa Manolo)

## **Friday, 26 September 2026 – *The second conference day***

- 9.00–10.00    Keynote speech: Dr. Malgorzata Lahti
- 10.00–10.15    Short break
- 10.15–11.30    Session 4. *Becoming together: Ideals, realities and practices in team communication*
- 11.30–12.00    Coffee break
- 12.00–13.15    Session 5. *Creating and overcoming cultural differences in social interactions*
- 13.15–14.15    Lunch
- 14.15–15.30    Session 6. *Towards (social) change: Influence, interaction, and interpersonal dynamics*
- 15.30-16.00    Closing remarks

## Conference Keynotes



### **Overcoming the Distance Between the Social Life We Need and the One We Have**

**Professor Jeffrey Hall**

**University of Kansas, US**

**Thursday, September 25, 10.30**

**Room ICS Siemens Gamesa**

People could talk to strangers, reach out to old friends, and make time for social engagements. In countries throughout the West, increasingly people are not as social as they should be for their own well-being. Social time is in decline across countries throughout the West, and solitary activities are on the rise. People often say that one of the primary barriers to social connection is a lack of time and energy – feeling too tired and too stressed to make time for others. What if a lack of energy is a consequence, rather than a cause, of too little social interaction?

In this talk, I will take a close look at the people who “keep the good times rolling.” Several studies have found that the patterns of sociality of people who are well connected defy simple explanations. Such individuals seem to be able to draw on a reserve of energy and time that those who are less socially connected don’t seem to have. They bounce from one interaction to the next, seemingly without energy loss. They even seem to enjoy being with other people to recover from being social. What do they understand about social connection that we don’t know?

I will share new empirical evidence that social interaction satisfies the need to belong, and, through that process, being social builds up our vitality between days. Although the need to belong has been long accepted as a fundamental need, it is rarely tested as a something to be satisfied, like hunger or thirst. Similar to physical nourishment, social nourishment gives us more energy. I will offer empirical evidence that although social interaction is energy depleting, living a life of greater social health both builds up our social battery and restores our vitality between days.



**The Work of Difference: Dialogic Identity Construction in Workplace Interaction**

**Doctor Malgorzata Lahti**

**University of Jyväskylä, Finland**

**Friday, September 26, 9.00**

**Room ICS Siemens Gamesa**

In this talk, I bring together perspectives from intercultural, organizational, and interpersonal communication to rethink how we understand and research “difference” and the idea of “overcoming differences” in social interaction at work. While traditional intercultural communication theory often treats difference as fixed—tied to stable, preexisting categories that determine people’s identities—I argue for the value of seeing difference as socially constructed: actively produced and negotiated, talked into (and out of) being in everyday interaction within the context of organizing. More than that, I propose viewing “overcoming differences” as an ongoing process of navigating alternative (and sometimes incompatible) ways of being oneself in relation to others at work.

I build on Deetz’s (2001) dialogical paradigm, which sees organizational life as shaped by competing, multivocal, and often contradictory discourses, and connect this with recent developments in critical interculturality (e.g., Dervin, 2023). This shift in perspective moves us away from static notions of identity and toward the dynamic, messy processes through which people co-create fractured, turbulent, and even paradoxical identities in situ.

To examine how people navigate difference dialogically, I introduce three interaction-focused, metatheoretical approaches: the underutilized but powerful frameworks of membership categorization analysis and critical discursive psychology, along with a new analytical method my colleagues and I have developed—blocking and threading analysis (Karppinen et al., in press). Together, these lenses offer a richer understanding of how people collaboratively make sense of being both differently different—and similar—in workplace interactions, and what kinds of social actions this navigation work accomplishes. My aim is to show how a closer study of these processes can open up new possibilities for fostering more ethical and inclusive relations in the context of organizing.

# Detailed Program of Conference Sessions

## Session 1: Overcoming Differences through Listening

*The Art of Listening: When Polarization Becomes Dehumanization.* Francisco J. Pérez Latre. University of Navarra, Pamplona, Spain

*Bridging Rhetorical Listening and Invitational Rhetoric: Strategies for Presentations That Embrace Difference as Enriching and Decrease Polarization.* Daniel Chornet. Saint Louis University-Madrid Campus, Madrid, Spain

*Lurking Minds: How Silent Listening Shapes Understanding in Digital Spaces.* Sanna Ala-Kortesmaa. Tampere University, Tampere, Finland

*What Truly Connects Us? The Power of Extreme Social Experiences.* Aurelio Fernández. University of Navarra, Pamplona, Spain

## Session 2: Influencing Interpersonally through Mediated Communication

*Communicative Trust Cues in E-commerce: A Systematic Literature Review of Internal Website Features.* Alexander Blanco Chang, University of Navarra, Pamplona, Spain. Clara González-Tosat, University of Navarra, Pamplona, Spain

*"All about My Abuser." An Exploratory Study of Parasocial Interaction, Shitstorm, and Empowerment in Influencer-Generated Content.* Julia Szambolics, Babes-Bolyai University, Cluj-Napoca, Romania. Andreea Voina, Babes-Bolyai University, Cluj-Napoca, Romania

*From Headlines to Influencers: Understanding Youth Hybrid News Consumption Practices.* Catarina Feio. University of Aveiro, Aveiro, Portugal

*Culture in Context: A Multilevel Analysis of Face-to-Face News Discussion Across Eight Countries.* Aurken Sierra, University of Navarra, Pamplona, Spain. María Fernanda Novoa, University of Navarra, Pamplona, Spain. Javier Serrano-Puche, University of Navarra, Pamplona, Spain

## Session 3: Supportive Communication as an Asset

*Crisis and Courtesy: A Content Analysis of Emotional Support in Jordanian Group Chats During Personal Emergencies.* Ruba Mustafa Mohd, Al-Balqa Applied University, Salt, Jordan

*Interpersonal Relationships as the Cornerstone of Elite Athletes' Supportive Networks.* Marja Eklund, Tampere University, Tampere, Finland. Pekka Isotalus, Tampere University, Tampere, Finland

*What makes Leaders Feel Supported? How C-suite Executives Define and Experience Supportive Communication.* Emma R. Nordback, Tampere University, Tampere, Finland. Pekka Isotalus, Tampere University, Tampere, Finland. Leena Mikkola, Tampere University, Tampere, Finland

*Resilience beyond Similarity: Communicative Dynamics of Burnout Recovery in Peer Support Groups.* Jonna Leppäkumpu, University of Jyväskylä, Jyväskylä, Finland. Malgorzata Lahti University of Jyväskylä, Jyväskylä, Finland. Sari Rajamäki, University of Jyväskylä, Jyväskylä, Finland

#### **Session 4: Becoming together: Ideals, Realities and Practices in Team Communication**

*Ideals of a Health Care Team Communication: Identifying the Frames and Discourses of Teamwork in Interprofessional Education Collaborative and Practice.* Leena Mikkola, Tampere University, Tampere, Finland. Stephanie Fox, University of Montreal, Montreal, Canada

*Of Mirrors and Machines: Perceptions of AI Colleague's Communicative Characteristics as Reflections of Group Conversational Ideals and Aversions.* Kaisa Lindholm, University of Jyväskylä, Jyväskylä, Finland. Minna Koivula, University of Jyväskylä, Jyväskylä, Finland. Mia Leppälä, Tampere University, Tampere, Finland. Salla-Maaria Laaksonen, University of Helsinki, Helsinki, Finland. Jukka Huhtamäki, Tampere University, Tampere, Finland

*Group Communication Competence from the Perspective of University Students: Constructing a Practical Theory from Critical Incidents.* Tessa Horila, Tampere University, Tampere Finland. Lotta Kokkonen, University of Jyväskylä, Jyväskylä, Finland. Mitra Raappana, University of Jyväskylä, Jyväskylä, Finland

*Talking about Physicians Behind Their Backs to Get Things Done: Interactional Construction of Physician's Authority in Health Care Team Meetings.* Emma Sallinen, Tampere University, Tampere, Finland. Malgorzata Lahti, University of Jyväskylä, Jyväskylä, Finland. Stephanie Fox, University of Montreal, Montreal, Canada. Leena Mikkola, Tampere University, Tampere, Finland

#### **Session 5: Creating and Overcoming Cultural Differences in Social Interactions**

*Expressions of Romantic Love in the Universe of Manele Music.* Culic Lorina, Babes-Bolyai University, Cluj-Napoca, Romania. Pridea Casiana, Babes-Bolyai University, Cluj-Napoca, Romania. Pavelea Anișoara, Babes-Bolyai University, Cluj-Napoca, Romania

*From Marginal to Mainstream: The Spread of Online Extremist Discourses on Immigration in Romania's Digital Press.* Diana-Maria Cornea, Babeș-Bolyai University, Cluj-Napoca, Romania.

*Timisoara Refugee Art Festival: Overcoming Differences, Building Bridges through Culture.* Stefana O. Ciortea-Neamtii, West University of Timisoara, Timisoara, Romania

*Promoting Interpersonal Understanding among Culturally Diverse Students through Dialogue-Based Workshops: A First-Year Seminar Case Study Utilizing Collegiate Sports and Intercultural Fieldwork.* Mitsuyasu Oda, Meiji University, Tokyo, Japan

## **Session 6: Towards (Social) Change: Influence, Interaction, and Interpersonal Dynamics**

*Populism on Display: The Power of Language in Shaping Political Narratives on Social Media.*

Veronica Campian, Babes-Bolyai University, Cluj-Napoca, Romania

*From Battlefield to Newsroom: Narrative Warfare in Zelenskyy's Discourses mirrored in the Romanian Media.* Bogdan Podar, Babes-Bolyai University, Cluj-Napoca, Romania

*The Emergence of Technology in the Teaching of Public Speaking: Perspectives on Design, Interaction, and Learning.* Karoliina Karppinen, Tampere University, Tampere, Finland. Marja Eklund, Tampere University, Tampere, Finland. Pekka Isotalus, Tampere University, Tampere, Finland

*Empowering Interdisciplinary Ambassadors: Teaching Persuasive Communication on Palliative Care.* Ana Paula Salas Moreira, University of Navarra, Pamplona, Spain. Carlos Centeno Cortés, University of Navarra, Pamplona, Spain. Beatriz Gómez Baceiredo, University of Navarra, Pamplona, Spain

*Exploring Sustainable Fashion Intentions Through Family Reverse Socialization: An Extension of the Theory of Planned Behavior.* Ioana Iancu, Babes-Bolyai University, Cluj-Napoca, Romania. Veronica Campian, Babes-Bolyai University, Cluj-Napoca, Romania

# Conference Sessions

## Session 1: Overcoming Differences through Listening

### The Art of Listening: When Polarization Becomes Dehumanization

**Francisco J. Pérez Latre, University of Navarra, Pamplona, Spain**

In the digital age, the proliferation of social networks and accelerated communication has intensified social polarization, threatening both coexistence and meaningful public dialogue. What began as a promise for greater understanding through digital tools has, two decades after the rise of platforms like Facebook, YouTube, and X, devolved into a more pessimistic reality. Recent global crises—including pandemics, wars, and the rise of disinformation and artificial intelligence—have deepened societal unease and eroded trust in public debate and the broader community, or “polis”.

At the core of this crisis is not mere disagreement, but a process of dehumanization. Polarization transforms the “other” into an adversary to be defeated, rather than a person to be understood. Echoing Benedict XVI, building a healthy society requires moving beyond viewing others as threats to be eliminated and instead recognizing the mysterious solidarity that unites all people, a theme also explored by Dietrich Von Hildebrand during the Second World War.

Trust emerges as a central concept in this context. Defined as a firm hope placed in someone or something, trust today is under constant threat. Ethical lapses in business can spark reputational crises, while growing distrust in political institutions undermines democracy. On social media, contempt and insult often dominate, eroding the ability to accept those who think differently (Author, 2024).

Polarization drains hope and fosters a climate where short-term gain and the defeat of adversaries become primary objectives, pushing real solutions further away. This dynamic breeds widespread distrust, fragments society, and diminishes the possibility of genuine dialogue.

To counteract these trends, trust must be rebuilt on three pillars: honesty, competence, and empathy. Honesty entails ethical integrity and consistency between words and actions. Competence refers to the ability to fulfill promises and perform effectively. Empathy, or benevolence, is the sincere interest in the well-being of others, reflecting a willingness to transcend self-interest. These qualities are essential for fostering public debate in which participants are seen as people, not mere opponents.

Active listening is central to this approach. Respectful listening, recognizing that opposing views may contain seeds of truth, and creating authentic spaces for dialogue are crucial practices. The *disputatio* method of Thomas Aquinas, which sought to integrate elements of truth from different viewpoints, exemplifies this attitude. The rapid pace of digital communication further demands a

renewed commitment to reflection, resisting the urge for immediate, forceful opinions, and instead cultivating patience to thoughtfully weigh arguments (Author, 2024).

A final caution is warranted: in striving to avoid polarization, we must not sacrifice the pursuit of truth for superficial consensus. Truth must be sought persistently, but always with peace and respect. Drawing from classical and contemporary thinkers and recent papal teachings, this analysis calls for rethinking the community in an individualistic, polarized world. It proposes listening as both an art and a fundamental tool for restoring solidarity and democratic coexistence

### **Bridging Rhetorical Listening and Invitational Rhetoric: Strategies for Presentations That Embrace Difference as Enriching and Decrease Polarization.**

**Daniel Chornet, Saint Louis University-Madrid Campus, Madrid, Spain**

Public speaking is a foundational communication skill taught across universities in the US. When tackling “rhetorical problems” (Ratcliffe & Jensen, 2022)—controversial topics that ignite strong polarizing reactions—most public speaking courses teach Aristotelian argumentation alone. While useful, Aristotelian argumentation alone may be insufficient to foster understanding and reduce polarization. There are other rhetorical approaches that can help construct speeches that embrace difference, foster harmony, and decrease polarization.

This paper explores two complementary rhetorical approaches and their connections that can help speakers and audiences overcome differences around controversial topics: Rhetorical listening (Ratcliffe, 2005; Ratcliffe & Jensen, 2022) and invitational rhetoric (Foss & Griffin, 1995; Foss & Foss, 2012). Rhetorical listening is a predisposition or stance of openness to locate and try to understand the diversity of perspectives around a controversial topic during the process of writing a speech. Ratcliffe (2005) calls this stance “a trope for interpretive invention” (p. 203). According to Ratcliffe (2005) “perhaps through listening we can avail ourselves with more possibilities for inventing arguments that bring differences together, for hearing differences as harmony....” (p. 203). The rhetorical listener practices these four moves (Ratcliffe, 2005): (1) listening to learn about all discourses surrounding a topic and acknowledging their stance; (2) preparing speeches within a logic of accountability that presumes that all people should be invested in each other’s well-being; (3) considering both similarities and differences are places for identification; and (4) analyzing arguments and the cultural premises that underlie them.

In turn, invitational rhetoric “constitutes an invitation to the audience to enter the rhetor’s world and... to see the world as [they] do and to consider [their] perspective seriously (Foss & Foss, 2012, p. 9). The public speaker invites an audience by “offering” (p. 30) perspectives—usually through personal narratives—with the intent for the audience to understand the speaker’s lived experience and see where they are coming from. This offering must happen in a way that that fosters a communicative atmosphere of “safety, freedom, openness, and value” for the audience (Foss & Foss, 2012, p. 39).

Rhetorical listening and invitational rhetoric complement each coherently: The former guides a speaker to consider difference as enriching during the process of writing a speech, and the latter



provides the speaker with the communicative tools to deliver it in a way that invites the audience to understand difference as enriching.

I posit that these two theories align with Mikhail Bakhtin's dialogic view of communication "as a contradiction-ridden, tension-filled unity of (at least) two embattled tendencies (Bakhtin, 1982, p. 272). In this view, when we deliver a speech, the meaning of our arguments is inextricably linked to other arguments with which they coexist in perpetual tension. Therefore, a speaker's position acquires its meaning, unavoidably, from the interaction among all the different positions that constitute a controversial topic. For example, in the post-COVID-19 context, an argument that advocates for facemask wearing to protect vulnerable populations (discourse of responsibility) is born from its clash with other counterarguments: that masks infringe on personal liberty and that masks are ineffective (discourse of freedom and scientific skepticism, respectively). In sum, rhetorically listening to these tensions to understand them and presenting them invitationally helps speakers and audiences engage with each other in a non-polarizing way.

### **Lurking minds: How Silent Listening Shapes Understanding in Digital Spaces**

**Sanna Ala-Kortesmaa, Tampere University, Tampere, Finland**

As digital platforms increasingly mediate public discourse, individuals often engage in *silent listening* when they are consuming content without visible interaction. This study examines how silent engagement, shaped by algorithmic curation and surveillance infrastructures, is related to the cognitive, emotional, and ethical dimensions of understanding in online environments. Drawing on 21 semi-structured qualitative interviews, the research explores how users describe their listening practices, how these practices affect belief formation, and how they interpret their ethical responsibilities as silent participants.

Framed through cybernetic, sociocultural, and critical traditions of communication theory, the study reconceptualizes silent listening as a structurally embedded form of participation. Prior literature suggests that low-involvement cognitive states can reinforce biases and subtly shift ideological orientations. This study extends those insights by demonstrating that silent listening is profoundly shaped by platform dynamics, such as recommendation algorithms, surveillance mechanisms, and curated exposure, which render listeners infrastructurally entangled in digital discourse.

Using reflexive thematic analysis, the research identifies three key findings:

1. **Silent listening is infrastructurally structured:** Participants describe their listening habits as shaped by platform design, where algorithmic curation determines what is seen, heard, and ultimately absorbed.
2. **Understanding emerges through ambient exposure and emotional attunement:** Rather than explicit engagement, participants report gradual, often unconscious shifts in beliefs and attitudes, influenced by repeated exposure and affective resonance with content.

3. Ethical agency extends to attention: Silent engagement contributes to content visibility and circulation, implicating listeners in the dynamics of misinformation, polarization, and ideological drift even in the absence of overt interaction.

These findings challenge traditional models of influence and participation, suggesting that silent listeners are active nodes in a networked system of meaning-making. The study highlights the paradox of surveillance-driven listening: individuals unknowingly absorb algorithmically selected narratives, blurring the boundary between engagement and manipulation. It argues that ethical responsibility in digital spaces must be redefined to include the silent, attentive act of listening, which carries implications for platform governance, public discourse, and moral accountability.

By framing silent listening as a critical force in online interaction, this research advances discussions on digital ethics, cognitive influence, and the hidden mechanics of persuasion in surveilled environments. It offers new perspectives for scholars, designers, and policymakers seeking to understand and address the ethical complexities of attention, exposure, and participation in contemporary digital life.

## **What Truly Connects Us? The Power of Extreme Social Experiences**

**Aurelio Fernández, University of Navarra, Pamplona, Spain**

Human beings have a fundamental need to belong, which requires maintaining a minimum level of interpersonal relationships marked by frequent interaction and enduring care (Baumeister & Leary, 1995). Everyday social interactions are therefore central to the study of belonging, as they form the basis for creating and sustaining meaningful and positive interpersonal bonds (Duck, 1994). Social interactions can be thought of as the bricks of social relationships. This raises a natural question: is it more important to have more bricks, or better ones?

In this article, I investigate the daily and weekly effects of both the quantity and quality of social interactions on perceived closeness and loneliness among emerging adults. A central question is whether overall interaction frequency and average quality, or the presence of exceptionally positive or negative encounters, plays a more decisive role in fostering belonging. To address this, I distinguish between the mean quality of interactions and the occurrence of extreme interactions – those that stand out as substantially more positive or more negative than typical experiences.

Data were collected through an experience sampling study of 257 emerging adults in Spain across 21 days. The dataset included 21,158 completed momentary questionnaires (63.4% compliance), 5,316 daily assessments (79.8% compliance), and 1,087 weekly questionnaires (91.1% compliance). Results showed that both the quantity and quality of social interactions significantly enhanced feelings of social connectedness and reduced perceived loneliness at both daily and weekly levels. Additionally, extremely positive uniquely contributed to stronger connectedness, whereas neither positive nor extremely negative interactions yield significant impact on loneliness.

These findings highlight that while frequent and high-quality interactions broadly support well-being, the presence of exceptionally positive encounters plays a distinct role in deepening social connectedness. This suggests that everyday belonging is not only a matter of how often and how well we connect but also of experiencing moments of particular valuing within our relationships. Further research is needed to deepen our understanding of these extreme experiences.

## **Session 2: Influencing Interpersonally through Mediated Communication**

### **Communicative Trust cues in e-commerce: A Systematic Literature Review of internal website features**

**Alexander Blanco Chang, University of Navarra, Pamplona, Spain**

**Clara González-Tosat, University of Navarra, Pamplona, Spain**

Trust plays a pivotal role in digital interactions, especially within the context of ecommerce, where traditional interpersonal cues are absent. In online shopping environments, consumers must rely on mediated communication through website interfaces, making the design and communicative affordances of digital platforms key in shaping perceived trustworthiness (Bauman & Bachmann, 2017; Rousseau et al., 1998). Despite the increasing relevance of trust in e-commerce literature, previous research has predominantly emphasized external or contextual factors such as corporate reputation, consumer risk perception, or cultural dimensions (Hendricks & Mwapwele, 2024; Soleimani, 2022). However, there is a surprising lack of systematic exploration regarding the internal communicative mechanisms embedded within e-commerce websites that influence consumer trust. This paper presents a systematic literature review aimed at identifying, categorizing, and synthesizing the internal elements of e-commerce websites that act as communicative signals of trust during user interaction. These elements represent the primary interface through which firms convey reliability and transparency to users (Pandey et al., 2017; Pavlou & Gefen, 2004). Drawing on PRISMA 2020 methodological guidelines (Page et al., 2021), 192 peer-reviewed articles published between 2014 and 2024 were systematically analyzed. The review focused exclusively on business-to-consumer (B2C) environments, incorporating only studies that explicitly addressed trust as a central construct and examined elements within the direct control of the firm and visible to the consumer during their browsing experience. The findings from the review reveal four main thematic clusters that consistently appear across the literature: (1) design and layout features, including aesthetics, consistency, and usability (Bylok, 2022), (2) privacy and security cues, such as seals, data protection policies, and secure payment options (Kim et al., 2016), (3) interactivity mechanisms, including live chat, chatbot responsiveness, and adaptive content (Maguire & Delahunt, 2017) and (4) user-generated content and eWOM, such as reviews, testimonials, and product ratings (Jarvenpaa et al., 2000). Each of these categories reflect specific communicative strategies employed by e-commerce platforms to simulate interpersonal trust and compensate for the lack of face-to-face interaction. This research offers a communicative perspective on how trust is co-constructed in digital commerce environments through interface design and mediated interaction. It contributes both theoretically and practically: theoretically, by proposing an updated categorization of internal trust-building mechanisms from a communication-centered lens and practically, by providing actionable insights for platform designers and marketers seeking to enhance consumer trust through digital communication choices (Meskaran et al., 2013). By focusing on the internal, controllable components of trust formation, this paper responds to an urgent need in the literature

for a more interactional and communicative understanding of trust in online commercial contexts. In doing so, it expands the conversation on how mediated interaction, ranging from layout decisions to automated agents, shapes not only user experience but also relational constructs such as credibility and reliability.

## **“All about My Abuser.” An Exploratory Study of Parasocial Interaction, Shitstorm, and Empowerment in Influencer-Generated Content**

**Julia Szambolics, Babes-Bolyai University, Cluj-Napoca, Romania**

**Andreea Voina, Babes-Bolyai University, Cluj-Napoca, Romania**

Parasocial interaction refers to one-sided relationships where individuals feel connected to media figures or personalities. Often associated with social media influencers, parasocial interaction is a popular term in the field of media and media effects. Parasocial interaction is perceived by social media users “as an intimate reciprocal social interaction (with a media persona), despite knowing that it is only an illusion” (Dibble et al., p. 3).

Hate speech, especially online, is a growing concern due to its impact on attitudes, empathy, and behavior. Online platforms have amplified the reach and impact of hate speech, making it a global threat. Research indicates that 2 in 3 people often encounter hate speech online (Fleck, 2024). Furthermore, the shitstorm phenomenon, described as rapidly accumulating negative comments on social networks, directed against institutions or individuals, driven by outrage at their behavior (Stefanowitsch, 2020), is enabling users to proceed to cybermobbing, hate speech, and trolling.

In this context, the present research addresses the topics of parasocial interaction, (self-) perceived authenticity, and gendered experiences shared in affective narratives (Pelttari, 2022) with their audiences. In particular, we look at the impact of a Romanian macro-influencer who shared her experiences of domestic violence, physical and psychological abuse and her IVF journey on various social media platforms. We conducted a reflexive thematic content analysis on N = 188 minutes of video content published by the social media influencer on YouTube, along with N = 8,400 1st-level comments from viewers.

Our primary findings show that users responded to the influencer's narrative with a range of reactions. The comments reflected a range of emotional responses, from empathy to instances of victim-blaming, suggesting that while reciprocal and disclosive intimacies can cultivate compassion, they may also inadvertently reinforce negative attitudes toward an SMI (Mardon et al., 2023). Despite the emotional responses, there are also skeptical voices questioning the authenticity of the influencers' portrayal. Some commenters suggest that the influencers might be dramatizing their experiences for content creation, implying that their relationship struggles could be a marketing strategy rather than a genuine narrative; hence, SMIs can be classified as non-ideal victims (Valenzuela-García et al., 2023). Findings from the qualitative content analysis show that sincerity, expertise, and spontaneity cues were the most prevalent in the influencer-generated content, shaping a narrative frame that underscored her credibility and authenticity when addressing experiences of domestic violence, abuse, and her IVF journey. Engaging with

her self-disclosive narratives, audience comments vary from skepticism and derailment (whataboutism) to emotional and network support, generating mutual disclosure from YouTube users who shared their own stories in comments, thus enhancing parasocial identification.

## **From Headlines to Influencers: Understanding Youth Hybrid News Consumption Practices**

**Catarina Feio, University of Aveiro, Aveiro, Portugal**

Social media currently plays a central role in several aspects of people's daily lives. New infocommunication dynamics are emerging on these platforms and key players are taking center stage. Social media has established itself as platforms for the dissemination of the latest headlines, and it is on these platforms that young people consume news the most, since they are becoming less interested in traditional media (Bengtsson & Johansson, 2021). In these media, news content simply “pops up” in their feeds (Russmann & Hess, 2020), being confronted directly or indirectly with informative content. New, more appealing formats, such as short videos, are also fueling this preference (Lowenstein-barkai & Lev-on, 2021). In this environment, new opinion leaders have emerged, the influencers (Cheng et al., 2023). These new content creators, who focus their content on disseminating information on current events and commenting on the news, are increasingly narrowing the line between journalistic and non-journalistic content on social media platforms (Wunderlich et al., 2022). These new dynamics of news production and consumption require consumers to distinguish between facts and disinformation (Ohme et al., 2022). It is important to understand where these figures, the influencers, stand in the news consumption habits of the new generations, to discuss mediated interactions between new actors as mobilized by new formats. The research focuses on young people aged between 15 and 29 living in Portugal. The research is based on a quantitative methodology and the data was collected through an online questionnaire, built on existing scales and based on an exploratory study phase that employed focus groups. The questionnaire was distributed nationwide between September and December 2024, with a sample of 1,547 participants. Through inferential statistical analysis, the study concluded that it is on social media that young people consume the most news. Frequent consumption of news on social media is also associated with higher traditional media use. The favorite platform for social media consumption is Instagram. Regarding the type of accounts that young people follow, 71% of participants claim to follow newspaper or TV news accounts on social media, 53% of young people declare that they follow influencers and 49.8% of young people follow other types of accounts. No evidence was found linking consumption of official pages and influencer content, and many participants do this double consumption. Only 5.3% of respondents only follow influencers for their news consumption on social media. However, Women tend to follow more influencer accounts, and education level also influences this behavior, since people with a higher level of education have a lower tendency to follow influencers. The results highlight the diverse news consumption patterns among youth, underscoring the complexity of digitally mediated interactions and the social and educational influences involved. This diversity emphasizes the critical need for media literacy and critical thinking, particularly given influencers' role in disseminating personal opinions. Such pluralistic

insights reinforce the importance of interdisciplinary approaches to better understand contemporary communication processes.

## **Culture in Context: A Multilevel Analysis of Face-to-Face News Discussion Across Eight Countries**

**Aurken Sierra, University of Navarra, Pamplona, Spain**

**María Fernanda Novoa, University of Navarra, Pamplona, Spain**

**Javier Serrano-Puche, University of Navarra, Pamplona, Spain**

In an era of increasingly digital information flows, face-to-face conversations about news remain a potentially underappreciated form of informal civic communication (Kim, Wyatt & Katz, 1999; McLeod, Scheufele & Moy, 1999). This study investigates how both individual-level traits and national cultural dimensions shape the likelihood of discussing news across three channels: in person, on social media, and via messaging. Drawing on Hofstede's framework, we focus on two dimensions—Individualism (IDV) and Power Distance (PDI)—due to their documented influence on interpersonal interaction. We hypothesize that in more individualistic societies, informal news talk may be less frequent due to looser social bonds, while in more hierarchical cultures, face-to-face discussion may be inhibited and shift toward digital channels.

We analyze data from the Digital News Report 2025 (Reuters Institute), using nationally representative surveys from eight countries (Sweden, Norway, France, Spain, Greece, Brazil, Indonesia, and Japan), selected to maximize cultural variation while ensuring geographic and media-system diversity. The final sample includes 16,104 weighted respondents. Hofstede's indices (range 0–100) were treated as heuristic approximations of dominant norms and rescaled by tens, so that one coefficient unit represents a 10-point change, facilitating interpretation in logistic models.

We estimate three separate multilevel logistic regressions—one for each dependent variable: whether respondents reported, in the last week, (a) discussing news face-to-face, (b) posting a news comment on social media, or (c) sharing or discussing news via private messaging.

Individual-level predictors include interest in news, political ideology, age, sex, education, and two indicators of social media use (total platforms and platforms used for news, both winsorized at 20). Country-level variation is modeled with random intercepts. This structure allows direct comparison of how the same set of predictors functions across different communicative environments.

Results show that interest in news is the strongest individual-level predictor. Each one-point increase on a 1–5 scale raises the odds of face-to-face discussion by 38% ( $OR \approx 1.38$ ), and by over 60% in online settings ( $OR \approx 1.62$ ). Political ideology has a modest but consistent negative effect ( $OR \approx 0.92$ ), while age and education show negligible associations ( $ORs \approx 1.00$ ), underscoring the primacy of motivational and contextual factors.

At the cultural level, Power Distance is negatively associated with face-to-face discussion ( $OR \approx 0.98$ ), but positively with social media and messaging-based interactions, suggesting that digital platforms may serve a compensatory role when horizontal dialogue is less accessible offline.

Individualism is negatively associated with news talk across all formats ( $OR \approx 0.97$ ). A 30-point change in either dimension yields an estimated 20% difference in the likelihood of face-to-face news discussion.

Adding IDV and PDI nearly doubles the model's between-country explanatory power (McFadden's pseudo- $R^2$  increases from  $\sim 0.04$  to  $\sim 0.08$ ). Results remain robust under bootstrap resampling, outlier treatment, and alternative platform codings.

Our study shows that face-to-face news talk, though practiced by a minority (27.5%), remains a meaningful civic behavior, structured not only by personal engagement but also by deeper cultural patterns. The findings highlight the need to integrate micro- and macro-level perspectives when analyzing how citizens interact with news.



## **Session 3: Supportive Communication as an Asset**

### **Crisis and Courtesy: A Content Analysis of Emotional Support in Jordanian Group Chats During Personal Emergencies**

**Ruba Mustafa Mohd, Al- Balqa Applied University, Salt, Jordania**

The study at hand probes into how group messages in Arabic offer emotional support during personal crises, such as illness, loss, and other emergencies, through both spoken words and visual expressions. Drawing on a content analysis of WhatsApp and Facebook conversations among university students in Jordan, it examines the ways empathy and solidarity are woven into these digital exchanges, and how cultural traditions interact with the affordances of contemporary communication platforms.

For young people in the Arab region, group chats have become more than casual social spaces. They are hubs for daily interaction, channels for sharing news, and—at times—critical lifelines during moments of personal hardship. These spaces allow for quick, collective responses that carry emotional weight. While earlier research has examined how digital platforms enable expressions of solidarity during large-scale public crises, such as the use of emojis following Hurricane Irma (Santhanam et al., 2019)—far less attention has been paid to the subtler, small-scale acts of support that take place in everyday life, particularly within Arab cultural contexts.

This research builds on the concept of the “social sharing of emotions,” which proposes that people instinctively turn to others to discuss emotionally charged experiences (Rimé, 2009; Rimé et al., 1998). The study situates this theoretical lens in a uniquely Jordanian setting, where communication norms are deeply influenced by religious expression, social courtesy, and collective values.

The findings reveal a repertoire of culturally rooted strategies that students employ to express care and solidarity. Common verbal forms include religious phrases such as “Allah yeshfh” (“May God heal him”) and short prayers, which carry both spiritual and social resonance. Visual communication plays an equally important role: symbolic images, religious calligraphy, and carefully chosen emojis often serve as immediate yet profound gestures of empathy. In some cases, deliberate silence—pausing or refraining from sending further messages—functions as a meaningful sign of respect. Such patterns echo earlier observations that emotional support can be conveyed through both verbal and non-verbal means (Cutrona & Russell, 1990).

These practices also align with research emphasizing the growing role of visibility in online solidarity (Garas et al., 2012; Santhanam et al., 2019). Garas et al.’s work on emotional persistence in online communities is particularly relevant here: just as emotional tones can endure across long-running online interactions, sustained expressions of empathy in group chats help reinforce a shared sense of solidarity, even after the immediate crisis has passed.

By documenting these communicative strategies, this study highlights the resilience of local traditions in shaping online interaction, even within rapidly changing digital environments. It adds to research on politeness and courtesy in mediated contexts, showing that empathy is not limited

to overt verbal messages but can also emerge through symbolic gestures, strategic imagery, and intentional restraint.

In sum, the study foregrounds culturally nuanced emotional support in everyday digital interactions among Jordanian university students. By merging content analysis with established theories of social sharing, emotional support, and digital communication norms, it sheds light on how Jordanian youth navigate moments of crisis and courtesy in the digital age—bridging long-standing cultural practices with the evolving landscape of online expression.

## **Interpersonal Relationships as the Cornerstone of Elite Athletes' Supportive Networks**

**Marja Eklund, Tampere University, Tampere, Finland**

**Pekka Isotalus, Tampere University, Tampere, Finland**

Elite sport plays a multifaceted role in society—offering entertainment, promoting physical and mental health (Descheemaeker et al., 2025; Frick & Wicker, 2016; Walton et al., 2019), driving economic growth (Wu, 2024) and fostering social cohesion by uniting individuals from diverse backgrounds (Malkinson & He, 2014). It also contributes to national identity and belonging (Popek, 2024; Teare et al., 2021). These societal benefits are made possible by the dedication and performance of elite athletes.

Elite athletes frequently exemplify the ability to overcome differences, while coming from diverse ethnic, socioeconomic, cultural or geographic backgrounds (Book et al., 2021; Godfrey et al., 2022; Stura & Johnston, 2018). Particularly in team sports they demonstrate inclusivity and encourage broader acceptance of diversity (Valiente et al., 2024). However, the demands placed on them are immense, and adequate support is essential for sustaining both performance and well-being.

Mental health in elite sport has gained visibility, with athletes like Simone Biles, Naomi Osaka, and Michael Phelps publicly sharing their struggles. In response, organizations such as the American Medical Society for Sports Medicine (Herring et al., 2012) and the International Olympic Committee (IOC, 2023) have issued guidelines and action plans to support athletes' mental well-being.

The link between interpersonal communication and well-being is well recognized (eg. Crossman, 2023; Hofsöe et al., 2019; Manning, 2014; Mikkola & Valo, 2020). Fundamental to human life—interpersonal relationships instill a sense of accountability, while also shaping identities, fostering belonging and purpose, and providing essential support. Supportive communication—inherently interpersonal phenomenon (Jones et al., 2014; Mikkola & Valo, 2020), traditionally studied through individual interactions and relationships (e.g., High & Solomon, 2016; Rains et al., 2020; Youngvorst & Jones 2025). It is unlikely that single relationships can meet all support needs. Moreover, experiences in one relationship can influence others; for example, stress may become transitive (Haines et al., 2006), highlighting the need to examine networks holistically.

This study explores elite athletes' experiences of supportive communication within their social networks, guided by two research questions:

RQ1: Who provides support to elite athletes, and what kinds of support networks emerge?

RQ2: What kinds of support are communicated within these networks, and how?

Data were collected through semi-structured interviews with 15 Finnish elite athletes between spring 2022 and spring 2023, totaling 23 hours and 29 minutes. The data were analyzed using qualitative abductive thematic analysis.

Findings reveal that athletes' supportive networks include coaches, medical staff, fellow athletes, chaplains, sponsors, societal institutions, media, family, friends, neighbors and work colleagues. While network structures vary, they consistently offer meaningful, reciprocal communication that acknowledges (1) individual needs, (2) personal development, and (3) the athlete as a whole person—not merely a performer. The study also highlights disparities across sports: some disciplines benefit from institutional support and visibility, while others depend on personal initiative and informal networks.

### **What makes Leaders Feel Supported? How C-suite Executives Define and Experience Supportive Communication**

**Emma R. Nordback Tampere University, Tampere, Finland**

**Pekka Isotalus Tampere University, Tampere, Finland**

**Leena Mikkola, Tampere University, Tampere, Finland**

Introduction: In 2024, CEO turnover in the United States rose by 48% compared to the previous year, with many leaders expressing that the stress, pressure, and isolation made their role increasingly undesirable (Mohamed 2024). The lack of interest in leadership positions has been linked to increasing expectations for personal leadership qualities and the complexity of today's work environment (Auvinen, Huhtala, Kinnunen, Tsupari & Feld, 2020). Leadership often involves emotional strain, including loneliness and limited social support, with leaders frequently facing challenges in isolation (Solvason & Kington, 2019). Empirical research further indicates that leader loneliness mediates the relationship between social support, communication, and job satisfaction (Lam, Steffen, Giessner, Shemla & Werner, 2024)—underscoring the critical need to examine supportive communication from leaders' perspective to ensure better support for future leaders and to foster the overall development of leadership. Aim: This study examines interpersonal communication, more specifically supportive communication, a key element of social support and a crucial element in managing uncertainty. As Mikkola (2020) noted, supportive communication “produces resources with which to solve situational problems and manage emotional strain.” Research often tends to disregard leaders' own occupational, personal, social, and emotional needs in favor of concentrating on the social support they provide to others. To fill the gap of understanding executive leaders' support needs, this study aims to understand the essence of supportive communication directed at C-suite leaders in their workplace. This study addresses two research questions: Q1: What kind of communication do C-suite leaders perceive as supportive in the context of their professional roles? Q2: What kind of outcomes are associated with perceived supportive communication among C-suite leaders? Data and methods: The data

were collected in the years 2021–2022 through semi-structured individual interviews with 25 Finnish C-suite executives from diverse public and private sector organizations. The sample was gender-balanced (12 women, 13 men). Interviews were transcribed verbatim, yielding 50 hours of material. The data were analyzed using Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-phase qualitative thematic analysis, supported by Atlas.ti software. Findings and discussion: The results indicate that leaders recognize and acknowledge the importance of supportive communication. Supportive communication directed at leaders is associated with a multidimensional approach to uncertainty management emphasizing the importance of informational support, the experience of trust, and a sense of purpose. Supportive communication contributes to leaders' ability to navigate relational, emotional, and operational challenges effectively. Supportive communication is linked to improved decision-making, a stronger sense of autonomy, and an enhanced feeling of belonging. Supportive communication is also manifested through supportive relations and underscores the collective dimension of leadership. Results challenge the traditional unidirectional view of support in which the leader is primarily seen as a provider rather than a recipient of support in workplace. These results offer new perspectives for leadership development and support practices, while also contributing to a more comprehensive understanding of leaders' occupational well-being.

### **Resilience beyond Similarity: Communicative Dynamics of Burnout Recovery in Peer Support Groups**

**Jonna Leppäkumpu, University of Jyväskylä, Jyväskylä, Finland**

**Malgorzata Lahti, University of Jyväskylä, Jyväskylä, Finland**

**Sari Rajamäki, University of Jyväskylä, Jyväskylä, Finland**

Occupational burnout has been described as the “new pandemic” of modern working life, affecting individuals across sectors and disrupting both personal and professional spheres. While some are temporarily or permanently distanced from work, others manage to stay or return—often requiring substantial personal effort and structural support. Burnout is frequently linked to systemic issues such as unhealthy organizational culture (Huhtala et al., 2015) and ineffective leadership (Vullings et al., 2020). Despite these challenges, peer support has emerged as a vital grassroots resource for recovery, yet little is known about how formal peer groups process burnout through lived experience. In our presentation, we introduce our project that explores how resilience is constructed, disrupted, and negotiated within peer support groups formed around burnout recovery. We focus on how individuals develop the communicative capacity to adapt, recover, and reengage with working life after exhaustion or crisis. This study builds on organizational communication and Buzzanell's (2010) communication theory of resilience, which frames resilience as a relational, co-constructed process. Drawing on a constitutive view of communication, we examine how interaction shapes meaning-making, emotional coordination, and collective adjustment. We challenge the assumption that support depends on shared experiences by exploring whether resilience can also emerge through acknowledging and holding space for difference. Our focus is on how peer support groups navigate varied perspectives on

work, burnout, and recovery. By applying a communicative lens to burnout-related peer support groups, this project offers a more nuanced understanding of resilience, not as a smooth or uniformly positive process, but one marked by tension, negotiation, and complexity. Drawing on both participants' reflections and observations of real-time peer support group interactions, this study investigates how group communication fosters or hinders the emergence of resilience. While earlier research highlights peer support as a valuable means of reducing stigma, loneliness, and anxiety, it also points to the complex dynamics at play in group settings, such as support gaps (Pederson et al., 2020), co-rumination (Boren, 2014), and identity threats (Crowley & High, 2020). By focusing on these issues, our work aims to uncover the specific communicative processes through which resilience is either fostered or blocked-in peer support settings. Methodologically, the study proceeds in two phases: first, through qualitative interviews with individuals who have recently participated in burnout related peer support groups, and second, by collecting naturally occurring interaction data from group meetings. The study aligns closely with the conference theme, *Overcoming Differences*. Peer support groups gather individuals with diverse backgrounds, identities, and coping strategies, who share a common yet differently experienced challenge. Instead of assuming a unified narrative of burnout, we approach resilience as a communicative process that emerges through the negotiation of multiple, sometimes conflicting perspectives. These groups serve as microcosms of difference, where resilience is shaped not by uniformity but through dialogue, tension, and mutual meaning-making. By examining how participants bridge perspectives and co-construct support, we aim to reconceptualize resilience and thus expand the communicative theory of resilience as a plural, socially constructed process of collective survival.

## **Session 4: Becoming together: Ideals, Realities and Practices in Team Communication**

**Leena Mikkola, Tampere University, Tampere, Finland**

**Stephanie Fox, University of Montreal, Montreal, Canada**

Interpersonal communication is widely recognized as a cornerstone of interprofessional collaborative practice, particularly within educational guidelines that aim to establish norms for interprofessionalism in health and social care. Yet, despite its centrality, communication is often undertheorized in these documents. We were interested in how communication is framed in these guidelines. Furthermore, we pursued to understand how these frames are aligned with the discourses of interprofessional collaboration.

We utilized frame and discourse analyses to identify frames of communication and to reveal whether and how these frames emerge from the Interprofessional Education Collaborative (IPEC). We analyzed IPEC documents from Canada, the UK, and the US, and identified five communication frames: information exchange, joint meaning making, relational maintenance, negotiation, giving voice, and communication as constitutive of working culture. Each frame offers a different perspective on the nature and function of interprofessional collaboration. Additionally, we identify three dominant discourses—effective teamwork, ethics of collaboration, and institutionalization—and analyze the values they promote. These findings are contextualized within broader ideological currents in healthcare, including the managerial turn, the patient-centered care movement, and enduring professional hierarchies. By exploring the tensions among these discourses, we highlight implications for practice and propose directions for future development of interprofessional education guidelines.

### **Of Mirrors and Machines: Perceptions of AI Colleague's Communicative Characteristics as Reflections of Group Conversational Ideals and Aversions**

**Kaisa Lindholm, University of Jyväskylä, Jyväskylä, Finland**

**Minna Koivula, University of Jyväskylä, Jyväskylä, Finland**

**Mia Leppälä, Tampere University, Tampere, Finland**

**Salla-Maaria Laaksonen, University of Helsinki, Helsinki, Finland**

**Jukka Huhtamäki, Tampere University, Tampere, Finland**

In the 19th century, Joseph Faber invented 'Euphonia', an organ-like device with a woman's face emitting human-like sounds (see e.g., Clark et al., 2020). Faber's invention is but one of the examples illustrating how humans have for centuries created and imagined machines that talk like us. Recently, the technological development of LLM-based AI tools has made Faber's imagination a reality as communicative AI (commAI; see e.g., Guzman & Lewis, 2020) agents capable of taking part in conversations in a relatively human-like manner have become

commonplace. In this study, we expand the ongoing work of exploring the ways in which these new kinds of interlocutors shape social interaction in different contexts (e.g., Hepp, 2020; Hohenstein et al., 2023). We focus on the understudied context of small group communication, and ask: How do human team members evaluate their AI colleague's communicative characteristics? What kind of ideals and aversions of AI in group conversations are represented in these evaluative discourses?

To understand human-machine interaction in a group setting, we conducted 10 experimental workshops with a total of 40 participants between February and April 2024. The participants were Nordic knowledge workers and students from different fields, divided into groups of 3 to 6 members. The purpose of the workshops was to test a commAI prototype designed by the research team. The commAI, a bot named 'Effervesce', operated on the Slack platform and was powered by an open-source Mistral 7B large language model (Jiang et al., 2023), specifically fine-tuned to operate in group settings. All workshops followed a similar structure: participants engaged in a creative task together with the bot, which was then followed by a reflexive group discussion, after which the participants had the opportunity to reprompt the bot to their liking before ending with another interview.

The preliminary analysis of the workshop data shows that the human team members' perceptions of their AI colleague as a communicator emerge through four different thematic discourses: style and tone (i.e., if the bot is or should be polite or more authoritative), rhythm and amount (i.e., how often and how much the bot should 'write'), usefulness (i.e., which characteristics help with the task at hand), and nonverbal cues (i.e., what does the bot look like or how its presence is shown on the platform). While discussing their experiences with Effervesce and collectively navigating the limitations of the bot, the team members reveal their underlying ideals and dislikes toward nonhuman communicators. The perceptions of commAI seem to be colored by a continuous balancing act between humanlikeness and machinelikeness. On one hand, the group members wish for human-like, affective character with an easily approachable nature, but on the other hand, they expect the AI to work like a machine and execute its tasks perfectly. Too much of either is seen as aversive. In addition to their evaluation of AI, in some instances, the discussions with Effervesce induced critical self-reflections, as the presence of the bot made the human members conscious of their own communicative behavior in the group and in relation to the commAI.

During the presentation, we will provide a more detailed report on the findings of the study and discuss relevant theoretical and conceptual implications.

### **Group communication competence from the perspective of university students: constructing a practical theory from critical incidents**

**Tessa Horila, Tampere University, Finland**

**Lotta Kokkonen, University of Jyväskylä, Finland**

**Mitra Raappana, University of Jyväskylä, Finland**

Group work is a common feature of university education across disciplines. It is widely promoted as a fruitful platform for engaged and collaborative learning, while preparing students for team-oriented working life. As artificial intelligence is currently transforming work, researchers argue that group communication skills are becoming even more essential (Cardon et al., 2024). At the same time, growing evidence shows that many young adults experience group work, especially in online settings, negatively (e.g., Ledford et al., 2023). With rapid changes, our understanding of relevant group communication competencies for the 2020's remains limited. Furthermore, educators need insight into how to support students in developing these competences.

This study investigates the dimensions and formation of group communication competence by analyzing Finnish university students' self-reported critical incidents of group communication through the lens of Grounded Practical Theory (GPT; Craig & Tracy, 1995). Our aim is to unpack the communicative problems, strategies, and ideals students associate with competent group communication.

Previous research on group communication competence has largely focused on group skills for specific tasks, roles, or professional contexts (Shockley-Zalabak, 2015). However, the traditional situational skill orientation is not enough to grasp students' realities and competence needs when navigating increasingly complex, interdisciplinary, multilingual, and hybrid group communication settings. Theoretically, dominant approaches to competence have been socio-psychological and post-positivist, viewing competence as a set of individual abilities; however, relational and discursive definitions also exist (see Graves, 2021). Our analysis bridges these perspectives by drawing on Horila's (2025) model of shared communication competence, which conceptualizes competence as containing individual elements but being primarily a phenomenon jointly constituted in everyday communication.

Methodologically, we combine the Critical Incident Technique (CIT; Flanagan, 1954) for data collection with GPT as the analytical framework. Data were collected via an online survey distributed to BA students at three Finnish universities in fall 2024 and spring 2025. Following CIT principles, students (N = 147) described one successful and one unsuccessful group communication experience and answered follow-up questions. These accounts are analyzed to explore how students define competent group communication, including (a) the challenges they associate with it, (b) the strategies used to build and maintain competence, and (c) the ideals they link to competence. Our presentation documents findings from our ongoing analysis, and how they inform a novel practical theory of group communication competence in university education.

**Talking about physicians behind their backs to get things done: Interactional construction of physician's authority in health care team meetings**

**Emma Sallinen, Tampere University, Tampere, Finland**

**Malgorzata Lahti, University of Jyväskylä, Jyväskylä, Finland**

**Stephanie Fox, University of Montreal, Montreal, Canada**

**Leena Mikkola, Tampere University, Tampere, Finland**



Interprofessional (IP) healthcare teams operate in complex institutional environments shaped by procedural rules, professional jurisdictions, and organizational hierarchies (Taylor & Van Every, 2014). Within this context, physician authority functions as both a resource and a constraint (Giddens, 1984) in the team's collective work. This tension is further complicated by the frequent absence of physicians from routine team meetings, where much of the interprofessional coordination occurs. Consequently, team members must creatively navigate and enact physician authority in their absence.

This study seeks to understand how physicians are made present in team talk despite their physical absence and how their authority is discursively constructed by team members as they organize work processes (Brummans, Hwang, & Cheong, 2013; Cooren & Fairhurst, 2009).

RQ1: How do team members categorize physician authority to navigate and negotiate their own agency, work responsibilities, and the constraints of organizational structures?

While healthcare literature often conceptualizes physician authority as a structural feature, this study adopts an interactional perspective. Drawing on the Communicative Constitution of Organizations (CCO; Taylor & Van Every, 2014) and Membership Categorization Analysis (MCA; Sacks, 1974, 1995), we explore how authority is enacted, relational, and situated in team discourse. CCO's notion of presentification (Bencherki et al., 2020) helps explain how absent figures are made consequential in interaction, while MCA provides a lens for analyzing how team members construct and mobilize physician categories in context.

The data consist of four audio-recorded IP team meetings in an outpatient clinic, involving nurses, physiotherapists, and ward clerks. Physicians were not present. The meetings focused on organizing care processes. Transcripts were analyzed using MCA to identify how physician categories were constructed and what membership categorization devices (MCDs) were employed.

The analysis revealed six physician categories. When physicians are framed as advocates, they are aligned with the team as part of a unified "us," reinforcing a strong collective identity. The team holds operational knowledge but depends on the physician's authority to act, constructing a shared sense of team identity. In contrast, the public officer category positions physicians as gatekeepers to change, with the team cast as lobbyists who must campaign for their endorsement to implement improvements. The decision maker category reinforces traditional hierarchies, where physicians authorize actions and the team functions as executors, limiting space for collaborative deliberation. The academic category introduces a divide between theoretical and practical knowledge, often marked by irony or critique, as physicians are seen as detached from the realities of practice. When described as guest stars, physicians appear as symbolic figures who step into a performance prepared by the team, highlighting the team's adaptability. Finally, the medical expert category supports a model of interprofessional collaboration, where the physician's specialized knowledge complements the team's process expertise, fostering peer-like teamwork while still acknowledging the physician's unique role.

This study reveals how physician authority is not merely inherited from organizational structures but actively constituted in team interaction.



## **Session 5: Creating and Overcoming Cultural Differences in Social Interactions**

### **Expressions of Romantic Love in the Universe of Manele Music**

**Culic Lorina, Babes-Bolyai University, Cluj-Napoca, Romania**

**Pridea Casiana, Babes-Bolyai University, Cluj-Napoca, Romania**

**Pavelea Anișoara, Babes-Bolyai University, Cluj-Napoca, Romania**

This paper explores how romantic love is represented within the musical genre of manele, focusing on how emotional dynamics are constructed and conveyed through lyrical content. Although manele have been previously studied from ethnographic, cultural, or musicological perspectives, this research introduces a social psychology and intercultural communication lens to explore emotional expression and gender dynamics in song lyrics. Grounded in Sternberg's Triangular Theory of Love and complemented by attachment theory and relational style frameworks, the research analyzes a corpus of 150 songs, collected between 2005-2025, using thematic content analysis. The findings highlight the predominance of passionate love, expressed through intense emotions, direct affective language, and rhetorical strategies that affirm female value and desirability. While manele are often marginalized in public discourse, the genre articulates a familiar emotional landscape shaped by desire, longing, and romantic aspiration. The study reveals complex gender roles and symbolic dynamics within romantic communication, offering insights into how popular music reflects and shapes interpersonal meaning-making. It concludes that manele both reflect and shape relational ideals in Romanian society, blending hyper-romanticized and transactional love models, opening new pathways for research into popular music as a mirror of evolving interpersonal norms and cultural identity. The research contributes to the study of affective communication by proposing an interdisciplinary lens at the intersection of musicology, social psychology, and cultural studies.

### **From Marginal to Mainstream: The Spread of Online Extremist Discourses on Immigration in Romania's Digital Press**

**Diana-Maria Cornea, Babeș-Bolyai University, Cluj-Napoca, Romania**

The phenomenon of immigration, portrayed in the media under the label of the "immigrant crisis", marked a turning point in European public discourse on immigration (Krzyżanowska & Krzyżanowski, 2018), leading to a significant reconfiguration of social and political perceptions. Recent research (Krzyżanowski, 2020; Stoencheva & Mileva Boshkoska, 2024) highlights how extremist discourse has been gradually normalized, including through the use of borderline discourse (Krzyżanowski & Ledin, 2017). The concept of "borderline language" refers to a subtle form of discourse in which extremist rhetoric is masked by appearances of rationality, humor, or political correctness, thereby facilitating the acceptance and legitimization of radical ideologies in the public sphere (Krzyżanowski, 2020). Such mechanisms have contributed to the

normalization of extremist discourse in everyday life (Åkerlund, 2021), ultimately leading to the legalization of violent behaviors.

Grounded in framing theory and the concept of discursive change (Ekström et al., 2025), the current study analyzes how Romanian mainstream media has represented the phenomenon of migration, particularly within the narrative frame of a “crisis.” This exploratory investigation examines the recurring themes, linguistic elements, and visual strategies through which Romanian media constructs the image of immigrants. The paper approaches these dynamics from a discourse-analytical perspective, aiming to reveal how anti-immigration rhetoric is articulated and normalized in the Romanian context, emphasizing the links between discourse, ideology, and the transformation of public opinion. The study's methodology is based on the thematic analysis of 145 articles from the top ten Romanian media outlets, using Atlas.ti software for coding and data interpretation.

### **Timisoara Refugee Art Festival: Overcoming Differences, Building Bridges through Culture**

**Stefana O. Ciortea-Neamtiu, West University of Timisoara, Timisoara, Romania**

The Timisoara Refugee Art Festival TRAF is a unique event in the Romanian landscape of festivals and the first and only art festival with and about refugees in Eastern Europe. Since its first edition in 2017 it aimed to bring together locals and refugees from Timisoara and Romania, trying to build bridges and create a communication space for them. In 2025, the ninth edition of the festival is taking place.

Each edition has proposed new projects and ideas to be developed by refugees and people from Timisoara together. Over the years the participants experienced this togetherness through a variety of creative processes from different fields, theater, music, film, visual arts, debates etc.

The festival is organized by the Association LOGS – Grup de Initiative Sociale (LOGS – Social Initiatives Group), a grass-roots organization from Western Romania. Its aims are to promote the integration of vulnerable migrants, to fight human trafficking, using education as an instrument to overcome social vulnerabilities. Professionals in the field of social assistance of refugees from Timisoara and volunteers like directors, painters, actors and musicians work together to coordinate the events of the festival.

This paper looks at the history of the festival from its beginning until today and the way it was depicted in several local media outlets. To analyze the phenomenon of a refugee art festival this analysis works with the concepts of art, culture and communication as well as the concepts of migration and globalization, focusing on the role of the arts and the co-creation processes in educating people to live together.

The analysis focuses on local online media outlets, mainly TiOn, Renasterea banateana, Banatul Azi, Opinia Timisoarei, DeBanat as well as the regional public radio and TV station Radio Timisoara and TVR Timisoara. The aim is to find out how much coverage the festival received, and, on the other hand, to analyze the discourse looking at following questions: What kind of

genres covered the story on TRAF: news, interviews, reports, features etc.? What did they emphasize? Did they focus on the information to be delivered and the context? Did any of the articles express opinions? If this is the case, what kind of opinions? Finally, looking at the comments sections: How did the public react?

This content analysis should mirror the way local media reacts and feels about the event. Looking at the comments posted by online readers we can find out about some of the public's reactions. The aim is to see the evolution of the coverage and the reactions about TRAF during the years.

### **Promoting Interpersonal Understanding among Culturally Diverse Students through Dialogue-Based Workshops: A First-Year Seminar Case Study Utilizing Collegiate Sports and Intercultural Fieldwork**

**Mitsuyasu Oda, Meiji University, Tokyo, Japan**

This paper presents an instructional communication case study focusing on the enhancement of interpersonal relationships, group communication, and communicative competence among culturally and academically diverse students. Conducted within a first-year seminar at Meiji University's School of Information and Communication in Tokyo, Japan, this study responds to the growing presence of international students—particularly from China and South Korea—and the communication challenges they face with domestic peers and student-athletes. Meiji University, while highly competitive and historically established, lacks the national brand recognition of Waseda or Keio, resulting in weaker school identity and limited student pride. Within the seminar, students from different admissions tracks—general admission Japanese students, athletic scholarship students (university athletes), and international students—rarely interacted. The challenges were multifold:

1. international students struggled with Japanese language proficiency; 2. Japanese students were culturally unaccustomed to open discussion; 3. student-athletes, often academically underprepared, frequently failed to progress; and 4. the three groups shared few common topics due to divergent upbringings. To address these issues, I as an instructor implemented a four-part, dialogue-based workshop initiative: 1. Students were encouraged to attend and support athletic competitions of university athletes, fostering emotional bonding and shared pride. 2. Academic support groups were formed to assist both athletes and international students through peer tutoring and mentoring.

3. Fieldwork for first-year annual research projects was conducted in the home countries of international students, allowing them to lead discussions and share cultural narratives. 4. First-year annual research projects were redesigned as collaborative research efforts, mixing students from different backgrounds to enhance group cohesion and intercultural competence. The outcomes were substantial. Communication among students became more active and inclusive. Shared experiences at sports events generated a strong sense of belonging and pride in both the seminar and the university. Student-athletes improved their academic performance. International students gained access to valuable job-hunting information through peer networks, resulting in improved internship opportunities in Japan. Most notably, students developed interpersonal

confidence and mutual respect across cultural and academic divides. This study employed mixed-methods research, combining qualitative observation of classroom interaction and fieldwork communication with quantitative assessment of academic performance, participation frequency, and self-reported communicative confidence. The findings underscore that shared extracurricular experiences and reciprocal cultural exchange can function as effective catalysts for interpersonal integration in instructional settings. By utilizing emotionally resonant contexts like collegiate sports and student-led ethnographic fieldwork, educators can facilitate trust-building, listening skills, and sustained intercultural dialogue. This research contributes to scholarship on group and team communication, communicative competence, ethnography of speaking, and intercultural education by offering a scalable model for inclusive pedagogical practice. It illustrates how embracing differences, rather than erasing them, fosters dynamic interpersonal engagement and empowers students as co-constructors of their own communicative environment.

## **Session 6: Towards (Social) Change: Influence, Interaction, and Interpersonal Dynamics**

### **Populism on Display: The Power of Language in Shaping Political Narratives on Social Media**

**Veronica Campian, Babes-Bolyai University, Cluj-Napoca, Romania**

The success of populist parties in Central and Eastern Europe stems from factors such as economic liberalization, communist legacies and fragmented party systems. Weak political competition allows them to flourish by capitalizing on public dissatisfaction with mainstream political actors (Wiesehomeier et al., 2025). This rise reflects broad political distrust in democracy, prompting voters who feel excluded to support populists who promise to empower ‘the people’ and challenge corrupt elites (Volk & Ivanov, 2025). Romania recently faced a challenging political situation that could have had wide-ranging consequences.

This paper aims to conduct a comparative analysis of social media posts (from Facebook, Instagram, TikTok, and X) by populist candidates George Simion (president of the Alliance for the Union of Romanians) and independent Victor Ponta and pro-European candidates Crin Antonescu (joint candidate of the governing coalition) and Nicușor Dan (mayor of Bucharest) during the Romanian presidential election campaign of April 2025. By applying Laclau’s (2005) discursive model of populism, the study explores how concepts such as ‘the people’, ‘the nation’, and ‘the others’ are strategically employed as empty signifiers to mobilize political support. It also investigates the stylistic features of their communication—ranging from emotional appeals, pathos and dramatization to provocative and colloquial language (Ekström et al., 2018). The relevance of this comparison lies in the assumption that populism is not confined to marginal actors but permeates mainstream political discourse to varying degrees, often serving as a valuable rhetorical tool (de Bruycker & Rooduijn, 2021).

Preliminary findings indicate notable similarities in the tone of the online political discourse of all actors, predominantly characterized by the use of emotional language, occasionally displaying pathetic and melancholic overtones. At the same time, a diverse repertoire of words is used to describe ‘the people’, ‘the nation’ and ‘the others.’ Although the discourse of pro-European candidates tends to maintain a predominantly neutral tone, largely devoid of open criticism, it nevertheless includes semantically loaded references mostly to ‘others’, constituting a rhetorical strategy that may confer electoral advantages. The analysis also showed notable differences among political actors in their social media platform preferences and posting frequency.

The research sheds light on the evolving role of social media in shaping political identities, providing important insights into the dynamics of electoral campaigns and democratic engagement in contemporary Romania.

## **From Battlefield to Newsroom: Narrative Warfare in Zelenskyy's Discourses mirrored in the Romanian Media**

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In times of war, political speeches are not only reactions to events - they are instruments of persuasion, myth-making, and strategic communication. This study explores how Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy constructed his wartime addresses during the first year of Russia's full-scale invasion (February 24, 2022 – February 24, 2023), and how those messages were reflected by Romanian mainstream media. As Ukraine fought for its sovereignty on the ground, Zelenskyy waged a parallel battle through words—crafting speeches that rallied domestic and international support, stir public sentiment, and framed Ukraine's role as a moral and democratic bulwark. But did this rhetorical strategy cross national borders? And if so, how did Romanian media incorporate or reshape these narratives? This investigation emphasizes the power of rhetoric not only to narrate war but to shape its meaning across borders, responding to the question: Was Volodymyr Zelenskyy a political actor who set the Romanian media agenda?

The current research combines critical discourse analysis with computational linguistics in a mixed-method approach, drawing on an original corpus of  $n = 580$  presidential speeches and  $n = 17.080$  news articles from Romania's three most trusted online platforms—ProTV, Digi24, and HotNews. Using text-mining software such as KH Coder and Sketch Engine, the speeches were analyzed for thematic patterns, shifts in emotional language, frequency, and rhetorical structure across the chronology of key military turning points. Central to the analysis was the identification of dominant mythological constructions and archetypes in Zelenskyy's discourse (Myth of Sacred Land, Myth of Eternal Return, The Hero, The Victim, The Evil Other, etc). These myths were tracked chronologically to detect their alignment with battlefield developments and their subsequent appearance in Romanian news narratives.

Preliminary findings reveal that Zelenskyy's communication evolved in three phases. In the early months, his speeches were longer, emotionally charged, and myth-laden—presenting Ukraine as a heroic underdog and moral force. As the war progressed, his messages became more strategic and focused, using precise language and symbolic references tailored to global audiences. Notably, the emergence and retreat of specific myths coincided with important moments such as the siege of Mariupol, the recapture of Kherson, or international summits. During certain phases, particularly the start of the war and its one-year mark, Zelenskyy's dominant narrative frames were adopted by Romanian outlets.



# **The Emergence of Technology in the Teaching of Public Speaking: Perspectives on Design, Interaction, and Learning**

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Although the field of interpersonal communication and social interaction scholarship is vast, many of its sub-disciplines share roots in the study and practice of public speaking. For example, the principles of rhetoric remain relevant in fields such as political, health, and digital communication. Traditionally, it has been assumed that public speaking practice should take place before a live audience, but this assumption is now both challenged and enabled by new technological solutions, such as video conferencing tools, artificial intelligence (AI) and virtual reality (VR). While individual innovations have been studied, a comprehensive understanding of technology-use in public speaking education is still needed. In this paper, we present findings from a research project examining the use of online platforms, AI and VR in teaching public speaking and consider the findings from the perspectives of instructional design, interaction, and learning. The conclusions are based on three studies. The first study (Eklund & Isotalus, 2024) explores students' experiences in a communication skills course that combined in-person and online teaching. The second study (Isotalus et al., 2025) focuses on AI-generated and peer feedback in an online public speaking course. The third study (Eklund et al., in review) examines students' experiences of using VR headsets for public speaking training. From the viewpoint of instructional design, digital tools support public speaking training by offering flexibility and immediate feedback. Students found AI-generated feedback less biased than peer feedback and viewed digital platforms as safe training spaces for those with public speaking anxiety. Training with digital tools thus could be beneficial before practicing in front of a live audience. However, the effectiveness of digital tools depends on clear goals, structured tasks, and teacher involvement. Teacher's guidance is needed in adopting new technologies and interpreting AI feedback. Furthermore, meaningful interaction with teachers and peers remains essential during technology-powered training. Digital environments often limit spontaneity, nonverbal communication, and emotional presence. A key limitation was the lack of audience interaction, which reduced students' perception of authenticity. Students also valued peer engagement and a supportive atmosphere. Instruction should therefore promote dialogue and relational communication. Our findings highlight the importance of teacher-guided reflection before and after public speaking exercises to help students comprehend and achieve learning objectives. From a learning perspective, these studies show that students can effectively develop their public speaking skills with digital tools when learning is well-supported. Independent practice, peer interaction, and teacher feedback together foster deeper learning. Practicing in both online and face-to-face settings helps students adapt to diverse communication contexts and recognize the relevance of digital skills for future work. To conclude, while technological tools offer promising potential for teaching public speaking, educators should critically assess the design and implementation of these tools, ensuring they align with learning objectives. The findings emphasize the importance of combining technological innovations with pedagogical support and interpersonal feedback.

Educators should also consider students' potential resistance to new technologies when incorporating digital tools in teaching public speaking. Ultimately, technology should complement — not replace — human interaction in developing public speaking competence.

## **Empowering Interdisciplinary Ambassadors: Teaching Persuasive Communication on Palliative Care**

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**Introduction:** Despite its well-documented benefits in alleviating suffering and improving quality of life, palliative care remains narrowly understood and is frequently associated only with end-of-life contexts (Hirai et al., 2011; Fliedner et al., 2021; McIlfatrick et al., 2021; Heckel et al., 2024). This misperception not only delays access to care but also perpetuates stigma and weakens public support for compassionate, community-based care models (Collins et al., 2017; Cain et al., 2018; Mills et al., 2024; Graham-Wisener et al., 2025). In Spain, where palliative care infrastructure and education lag behind European benchmarks (Garraalda et al., 2025), communication outside clinical settings becomes essential (Abel & Karapliagou, 2018; Mills et al., 2024; Graham-Wisener et al., 2025). This work presents an interdisciplinary pedagogical initiative where students from diverse academic backgrounds are trained to become advocates, or “ambassadors”, of palliative care. Focusing on the fourth module of the Care and Society course, we explore how students are equipped to engage broader publics through persuasive, socially grounded communication. The module combines a seminar on rhetorical strategies with a workshop analyzing how palliative care is portrayed across media. Students then craft persuasive speeches on topics including illness, caregiving, and death.

**Objective:** To explore students' understanding of the topics taught in the course and their ability to advocate for them through persuasive communication.

**Method:** A dual analysis was conducted: (1) thematic analysis of student-chosen topics and their conceptual framing, and (2) evaluation of rhetorical effectiveness using a structured rubric based on classical and modern persuasive techniques.

**Results:** Of 71 students, 59 submitted speeches for analysis. Results show strong engagement with the subject matter and a clear capacity for logical argumentation (logos), with many students effectively humanizing abstract issues through storytelling. However, emotional (pathos) and ethical (ethos) appeals were less consistently applied, underscoring the need for deeper instruction in these areas of communicative competence. Twenty thematic categories emerged, with “palliative care” dominating as a multidimensional topic encompassing communication, education, timing, societal relevance, and personal narratives. Students framed palliative care not merely as a medical concern, but as a shared social responsibility, advocating for earlier awareness and broader inclusion in public discourse. Reflections often connected classroom

content to lived experience, reinforcing the course's impact on students' communicative and ethical outlooks.

Conclusion: this demonstrates how interdisciplinary, communication-focused education can give students tools to turn into active agents of social change. By teaching persuasive communication in the context of palliative care, the Care and Society course not only bridges disciplinary divides but also fosters meaningful interpersonal engagement with stigmatized topics. This work highlights how embracing difference, in discipline, perspective, and experience, can enrich public understanding and advocacy in healthcare communication.

### **Exploring Sustainable Fashion Intentions Through Family Reverse Socialization: An Extension of the Theory of Planned Behavior**

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The rapid advancement of climate change has heightened the urgency for sustainability across industries, with fashion emerging as the second-largest contributor to global pollution (Mohammed & Razé, 2023). In response, the fashion industry is increasingly adopting sustainability initiatives, while consumers grow more environmentally conscious and ethically driven (Grazzini et al., 2021). While intergenerational family communication significantly influences consumer behavior, preference exchange (Essiz & Mandrik, 2022), and the transmission of sustainability beliefs (Hosany et al., 2022), past research has mainly emphasized parental influence (Davies et al., 2020). However, limited attention is given to the role of children in shaping their families' sustainable behaviors through reverse socialization (Singh et al., 2020).

Thus, this study shifts the focus from parent-to-child influence to how children's pro-environmental attitudes and knowledge shape their parents' behaviors and choices. The research builds on the Theory of Planned Behavior (Ajzen, 1991), which links behavioral intentions to attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived control, and extends the model by adding social group influence, highlighting children's roles in reverse socialization in sustainable fashion. Prior sustainable behavior, perceived importance of sustainability, and relevant knowledge are also investigated.

An online opinion survey (N=252) was conducted. The findings show that favorable attitudes toward sustainable fashion and past sustainable behaviors strongly predict the intention to purchase sustainable fashion items. Surprisingly, reverse socialization did not have a direct effect on purchase intentions. However, reverse socialization is significantly shaped by subjective norms and previous sustainable actions, indicating a more nuanced relationship between family dynamics and sustainability-driven decisions.

Although additional research is needed, this study initiates a valuable scientific and practical conversation about the crucial role children play in promoting sustainability within families as key agents of cultural change.