

15-17 May 2024, 16th Global Communication Association Conference “The Future(s) of Communication: Promises and Predicaments”

15-17 Mayıs 2024, 16. Küresel İletişim Derneği Konferansı “İletişimin Geleceği: Vaatler ve
Çıkılmazlar”

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The 20th century marked a dramatic acceleration in the evolution of communication, driven by advancements in information technologies. Communication became a central paradigm in a globalized world, impacting politics, sociology, psychology, and production. Its recognition within social sciences spurred interdisciplinary studies, enabling in-depth exploration of phenomena influenced by mass media and yielding valuable insights.

In this context, the Global Communication Association (GCA), since its establishment in 2007, has served as a non-profit organization that facilitates interaction among esteemed scholars, corporate executives, communication experts, policymakers, and industry professionals worldwide through conferences and academic journals. The GCA has provided a platform for generating new ideas and enabling free discussion. In this regard, the 16th Global Communication Association Conference was hosted by the Faculty of Communication at Marmara University and took place from May 15-17, 2024. The event was chaired by Assoc. Prof. Süheyla Nil Mustafa, with Asist. Prof. Büşra Tosun

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Durmuş serving as the co-chair. The conference, titled “The Future of Communication: Promises and Challenges,” saw participation from 15 countries, including the United States, Canada, Germany, the United Kingdom, Kenya, Iran, the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus, India, Morocco, Qatar, the Philippines, Finland, Saudi Arabia, and Norway. Additionally, scholars and communication experts from 30 universities, with 23 participants from abroad and seven from Türkiye, contributed to the event (GCA Marmara University, n.d.).

The Conference commenced on Wednesday, May 15, with opening and gratitude remarks from the President of the Global Communication Association, Prof. Yahya Kamalipour. This was followed by opening and welcome speeches from Assoc. Prof. Süheyla Nil Mustafa, Dean of the Faculty of Communication at Marmara University, Prof. Mehmet Emin Babacan, and Vice Rector of Marmara University, Prof. Mustafa Çelen. The opening session concluded with a keynote speech by Prof. Fahrettin Altun, Communications Director for the Republic of Türkiye.

In the days that followed, the conference featured several panels on various topics, including “Crisis of Democracy and The Media,” “Journalism in the Digital Age,” “Media Psychology and Representation,” “Communication and Sustainability,” “Public Relations and Crisis Communication,” “Politics, Communication, and Media Literacy,” “Social Media, Gender, and Society,” and “Artificial Intelligence and Communication.”

In his opening speech, Prof. Fahrettin Altun, Communications Director for the Republic of Türkiye, underscored the profound impact of rapid digitalization on the future of communication, emphasizing the need to maximize its benefits while addressing its risks. He stressed the importance of data security and the regulation of social media and technology companies that often operate beyond legal frameworks. Highlighting global crises such as the Russia-Ukraine War and the ongoing violence in Gaza, Altun criticized the misuse of digital platforms for manipulation and disinformation, warning of a humanity increasingly dominated by a “Frankenstein” it struggles to control. He raised concerns about inadequate policies addressing privacy, cyber threats, hybrid wars, and digital fascism, which foster a global communication caste system that obscures war crimes and perpetuates a crisis of truth. Altun advocated for a more just international communication order and introduced the “Türkiye Communication Model,” aimed at positioning Türkiye as a proactive force in shaping global communication amidst the challenges of digitalization and technological advancements (Directorate of Communication, 2024).

Crisis of Democracy and Media

The panel, chaired by Assoc. Prof. Yenal Göksun from the National Intelligence Academy, explored the evolving relationship between media, democracy, and political communication in a rapidly changing global landscape. Prof. Kai Hafez from the University of Erfurt, Germany, examined the functions of “non-mediated political communication,” offering a comparative perspective on international communication forms. He highlighted that such forms remain rare in developed countries, where authoritarian tendencies increasingly dominate political communication. Building on this theme, Prof. John Allen Hendricks from the University of Texas, USA, analyzed how social

media has transformed traditional election campaigns by creating a direct connection between voters and candidates, reshaping democratic engagement. Adding a critical perspective, Dr. Sabrina Schmidt from the University of Erfurt, Germany, investigated the media's role in addressing protests by the far-right populist party Alternative für Deutschland (AfD), emphasizing how media can either defend or undermine democratic principles in times of populist crises.

Journalism in the Digital Age

Another panel, chaired by Assoc. Prof. Münevver Çağın from Cyprus International University, explored how technological advancements are reshaping journalistic practices, media production, and societal communication in the digital era. Prof. Agnes Lucy Lando and Anthony Wambua from Daystar University in Kenya presented their online Thesis Management System (TYS), which has addressed challenges of time and distance, particularly after the disruptions of the COVID-19 pandemic. Assoc. Prof. Aysel Ay from Marmara University noted that artificial intelligence in journalism remains limited to data journalism, despite technological progress. Similarly, Prof. Mehmet Özçağlayan and Research Assistant Safa Görkem Aktaş emphasized the value of tools like Google Trends for analyzing content data to enhance visibility and achieve strategic objectives. Aslihan Bedier, drawing from her doctoral research, argued that the health sector has become a vital nexus between public health initiatives and national image-building efforts. Research Assistant Oğuz Gülleb added a critical perspective, warning that the growing dependence on technology in news production has sidelined fundamental journalistic practices like firsthand witnessing and interviewing. Finally, Somayeh Tyabi and Prof. Mohammad Reza Rasouli from Islamic Azad University in Tehran examined the broader implications of artificial intelligence, offering insights into its transformative role in shaping both the future of journalism and humanity. Together, the panel illuminated the opportunities and challenges posed by digitalization in the field of journalism.

Media Psychology & Representation

A panel that delved into the intersections of media, societal ideologies, representation, and individual psychology was chaired by Dr. Mesut Bostan from Marmara University. Prof. Burton Lee Artz from Purdue University, USA, began by examining how independent media across different nations navigate the constraints of dominant ideologies, cultures, and norms ingrained in their societies. Assoc. Prof. Yenal Göksun from Türkiye's National Intelligence Academy focused on the propaganda strategies of IS-KP, highlighting their use of a published magazine and violent tactics to capture media attention. Sahra Öztürk provided a unique analysis of wearable technology through the lens of media psychology. Sezgi Başak Kavaklı from Temple University, USA, in collaboration with Assoc. Prof. Didar Akar from Boğaziçi University, explored the media's portrayal of individuals who migrated to Türkiye between 1950 and 2017, offering insights into shifting narratives over time. Research Assistant Elif Konaç from Nişantaşı University, together with Research Assistant Ahmet Necati Gül from Yeditepe University and Sefa Barış Gölcü from Marmara University, analyzed how companies strategically use advertising to associate themselves with Atatürk's values. Closing the

session, Busenur Sevim, a doctoral student at Marmara University, critiqued the idealized portrayals of women in Turkish television series, revealing a pattern of patriarchal norms that prioritize women as married, emotionally driven mothers. The panel provided a multifaceted understanding of media's role in shaping and reflecting psychological and cultural dynamics.

Communication & Sustainability

The panel, chaired by Assoc. Prof. Ayşe Binay Kurultay, focused on the evolving role of communication in promoting sustainability across various media and societal contexts. Dr. Anne Grüne from the University of Erfurt, Germany, discussed the pivotal role of journalists in bridging the gap between individuals from different national backgrounds, emphasizing the need to further develop the principles of “constructive dialogue” within the new ethics of constructive journalism. Assoc. Prof. Münevver Çağın from Cyprus International University, Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus, examined the transformative effects of digital media on news presentation and consumption, highlighting the immediacy of viewer feedback. She compared the language used by Al Jazeera and Reuters in their coverage of Israel's attacks on Gaza to illustrate her points. Prof. Christine Horz-Ishak from the University of Cologne, Germany, advocated for integrating a diversity approach into transcultural communication studies, particularly in Germany. Assoc. Prof. Alparslan Nas from Marmara University explored the intersection of public diplomacy, cultural influence, soft power, and nation branding. Asst. Prof. Oylum Tanrıöver from Marmara University discussed the critical role of alternative media outlets, such as Açık Radyo, in challenging societal inequalities and hegemonic structures while providing diverse perspectives. Concluding the panel, Elif Akçay and Prof. Cem Sefa Sütçü from Marmara University presented their research on computational propaganda, describing it as a cyber-political tool designed to distract the public, manipulate opinions, and flood online spaces with automated agents, thus influencing multiple media platforms. This panel provided a comprehensive look at the diverse ways communication can address societal issues and foster sustainability.

Future Project

The closing session of the day was chaired by Assoc. Prof. Aliaa Dakroury from Saint Paul University, Canada, who is also the editor of the Global Media Journal's Canada edition. The session, titled “Global Media Journal Global Edition – Between the Past and the Present,” featured participation from the journal's Germany editors, Carola Richter from Freie Universität Berlin and Christine Horz-Ishak from TH Köln. During the session, Prof. Yahya Kamalipour, the President of the Global Communication Association, delivered a speech in which he emphasized their goal of contributing to the communication discipline without a profit motive. The editors discussed the journal's objectives and achievements, provided insights into future projects, and invited researchers to contribute to the journal.

Public Relations and Crisis Communication

On May 17, the first session of the ongoing conference, chaired by Prof. Ali Murat Yel from Marmara University, presented a wide range of perspectives on media, technology, and social issues. Faezeh Etemad Golastani from the University of Tehran, in collaboration with Assoc. Prof. Abbas Ghanbari Baghestan, advocated for rethinking traditional media analysis to better align with the technological landscape, proposing innovative tools and strategies to combat disinformation and create effective content. Expanding on the role of technology, Mutaz Alotaibi from King Abdulaziz University in Saudi Arabia, with Prof. Susan Kinnear from Cardiff University, analyzed how social media platforms foster public engagement, offering insights into improving Public Relations practices in Saudi Arabia. Ferhat Demirağ from Marmara University critically assessed the EU's response to Italy during the early phase of the COVID-19 pandemic, noting the insufficient solidarity from EU countries. Sidharth Verma from Guru Gobind Singh Indraprastha University in India, alongside Assoc. Prof. Durgesh Tripathi, examined how social media use by flood-affected populations in New Delhi's Yamuna River region helped mitigate disaster impacts. Burçin Sarı from Galatasaray University focused on Türkiye's ongoing housing crisis, highlighting its socio-economic consequences. The session concluded with Faezeh Etemad Golastani presenting another study with Assoc. Prof. Abbas Ghanbari Baghestan and Sayed Nabi Sajjadi, emphasizing the importance of accurate news dissemination by media in Afghanistan for effective disaster management. These presentations collectively highlighted the crucial intersections of media, technology, and societal challenges in the contemporary world.

Politics, Communication, and Media Literacy

The second panel of the day, chaired by Assoc. Prof. Alparslan Nas from Marmara University, explored the evolving relationship between media, politics, and society. Dr. Sidra Tariq Jamil from ICESCO—The Islamic World Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization in Morocco, opened the session by discussing how new media arts, such as artificial intelligence, robotics, and digital arts, are shifting civilization diplomacy towards an “intercivilizational” paradigm. Building on this, Assoc. Prof. Banu Akdenizli from Northwestern University in Qatar presented findings from her long-term study on social media usage in the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries, revealing how platform preferences are strongly influenced by cultural and linguistic contexts. Haitham Numan from the University of Exeter in the United Kingdom focused on the impact of political repression on activists, illustrating how restrictive environments shape resistance methods and communication strategies. Zeynep Coşkun Koç from Istanbul University then addressed how the recent Gaza conflict exposed the failure of elected governments to reflect the will of their people, proposing a governance model based on more direct citizen involvement. Independent researcher Shahriar Khonsari from Iran analyzed how Iranian users framed the 2023 Palestinian-Israeli conflict on social media, highlighting the role of digital platforms in shaping public opinion on geopolitical issues. The session concluded with Zahra Abbasi from Tehran University of Medical Sciences, who presented a quantitative study showing significant correlations between media literacy, health literacy, gender,

and internet use, demonstrating how these factors collectively influence health outcomes and information engagement in the digital age.

Social Media, Gender, and Society

The panel, chaired by Assoc. Prof. Esra Atilla Bal from Acıbadem University, Türkiye, delved into the complex intersections of digital media, gender, and societal transformations, illustrating how digital platforms both reflect and shape contemporary dynamics. Hila Haumand from the University of Hamburg, Germany, began by analyzing climate crisis protests, particularly focusing on water scarcity in Khuzestan. She argued that the X platform's algorithm-driven amplification of similar content exacerbated polarization. Building on this, Assoc. Prof. Fatmanur Altun introduced the concept of "techno-apartheid," highlighting the growing concentration of power among technology-driven elites in the digital realm. Lin Zhang from the University of Turku, Finland, shifted the focus to user behavior, exploring fan migration in cyberspace and how digital platforms shape user interactions during online mobility. A cultural perspective was added by Assoc. Prof. Süheyla Nil Mustafa from Marmara University, in collaboration with Assoc. Prof. Bahar Öztürk from İnönü University, who analyzed Instagram posts inspired by the Barbie film, uncovering feminist discourses and arguing that the film's popularity has fostered a postmodern consumption culture. Asst. Prof. Büşra Tosun Durmuş from Marmara University expanded on the digital evolution of feminism, discussing how digitalization has diversified feminist movements and sparked debates on new feminist subjects, like "women+" spaces. Concluding the session, Serkan Sever, in collaboration with Assoc. Prof. Serkan Bayrakçı from Marmara University, explored why audiences are increasingly turning to YouTube football channels instead of traditional media, highlighting shifts in viewer preferences and behaviors. Collectively, the panel offered a comprehensive exploration of how digital platforms intersect with societal structures, cultural expressions, and gender dynamics.

AI and Communication

The final session of the conference, chaired by Asst. Dr. Oylum Tanrıöver from Marmara University, delved into the transformative potential and ethical implications of artificial intelligence in various domains. Assoc. Prof. Ayşe Binay Kurultay began by discussing how AI is reshaping the advertising industry, emphasizing its ability to enhance targeting, personalization, and efficiency, which points to a broader trend of AI-driven disruption across industries. Building on this theme of transformation, Azade Asadi Damavandi from Bowling Green State University, USA, and Hyacinth Balediata Bangero from the University of San Agustin, Philippines, examined the surge in online learning applications during the COVID-19 pandemic. Their findings emphasized the importance of incorporating user feedback and market insights to improve mobile learning technologies, demonstrating AI's role in responding to global crises and shifting user needs. Prof. Dr. Ali Murat Kırık from Marmara University expanded the discussion to national advancements, highlighting Türkiye's strategic investments in AI through companies like ASELSAN, HAVELSAN, and Baykar, which have significantly enhanced the country's defense capabilities and underscored AI's geopolitical impact. Shifting to cultural implications, Assoc. Prof. Sinem Güdüm from Marmara

University analyzed the AI-produced comedy series *Nothing Forever*, inspired by *Seinfeld*, warning of the potential risks of unregulated AI-generated content and its effects on media consumption. Closing the session, Asst. Prof. Dr. Alaattin Arslan and Asst. Prof. Dr. Muhammed Akif Albayrak from Marmara University addressed the broader ethical challenges posed by AI, such as privacy violations, bias, and the erosion of trust and authenticity, which linked back to the overarching theme of balancing technological advancements with ethical considerations. Together, the presentations painted a comprehensive picture of AI's profound influence on communication, society, and ethics.

In conclusion, the 16th Global Communication Association Conference successfully addressed the complex challenges and opportunities facing the field of communication in the 21st century. It reinforced the importance of interdisciplinary research and collaboration in tackling these issues and emphasized the need for ongoing dialogue to navigate the promises and predicaments that lie ahead. The conference left participants with a deeper understanding of the critical role communication will continue to play in shaping the future of our interconnected world. It also highlighted the importance of adapting to rapidly changing technological landscapes, ensuring that communication practices evolve in ways that promote inclusivity, ethical standards, and the public good. By bringing together scholars, practitioners, and thought leaders from diverse fields and backgrounds, the conference facilitated meaningful exchanges that will undoubtedly inspire further research and innovation. As global challenges continue to unfold, the event reaffirmed the necessity of using communication as a powerful tool to bridge divides, promote understanding, and shape more equitable and sustainable futures.

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