



# THE POLITICS OF THE PRESENT

**SACOMM Conference  
Stellenbosch**  
10 - 12 SEPTEMBER 2024



# The Politics of the Present

Critical Communications Research Here and Now

SACOMM 2024 Conference

Tuesday 10<sup>th</sup> – Thursday 12<sup>th</sup> September 2024

Stellenbosch University

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Conferences are frequently organised around temporal themes of looking back through history, or projecting into the future. For this conference we invite a specific focus on the politics of the present, and practices of being present. We call on fellow researchers and educators in the field of communications research – encompassing media studies, journalism, screen studies, cultural studies, organisational, strategic, and visual communications research – to come together to take stock of the here-and-now of our work, and to share current findings and frameworks on the theme of the “politics of the present”.

Through a focus on the “here”, we invite reflections on the role of place, positionality and the local in communications research in South Africa, and beyond. We welcome both work from any subfield of communications studies that privileges the local yet resists narrow parochialism and exceptionalism. We are looking for research that explores the multitude of connections between localities across geographical differences. Rather than glib celebrations of (neoliberal) globalisation, we are especially interested in work that explores critically how the ‘local’ and the ‘global’ are interconnected in webs of political and economic power and resistance. “Here” gestures towards the importance of roots, routes, space, and place and specific localities from which perspectives of the world and theories about it are framed. It also gestures to a politics of *presence*, of showing up, being in the room, and engaging face-to-face, through human and personal modes of exchange.

Through a focus on the “now”, we gesture to the specifics of the present moment, how it has both been shaped by histories and serves to springboard multiple possible futures, both optimistic and pessimistic. We welcome presentations of work that considers in detail the complexities of the present moment, politically, culturally, socially, environmentally, or economically in relation to communications studies including all its associated fields, as well as research that considers histories that have shaped us, and futures that we could collaboratively build.

2024 is the 30th year of South Africa’s democracy, and it is notable that SACOMM will gather in Stellenbosch, a town that was at the heart of the invention of apartheid and remains a troubling beacon of extreme inequality and segregation in the South African landscape. In relation to the theme and in the spirit of reflexivity, the Local Organising Committee acknowledges the specific location in space and time that we inhabit. We are employees of Stellenbosch University, an institution which has been the site of major, headline-dominating reports of racism in university residences in recent years, and which has responded through commissioning the Khampepe Report and establishing a task team to implement its recommendations. These are arguably just the tip of the iceberg of the challenge of

transformation at SU. Although other universities in the country have their own versions of this challenge, the transformational politics at SU have a specific character. The Local Organising Committee is committed to arranging a plenary session that directly engages with the politics of the present in relation to transformation at Stellenbosch University and the urgency of decolonisation of higher education in South Africa more broadly. We welcome input from colleagues around the country about how to make the conference as welcoming as possible for all.

SACOMM's 2024 theme, "The Politics of the Present" thus invites colleagues to critically consider the current positionality and politics of the media texts, institutions, practices, and technologies that provoke and shape our intellectual work.

### **Submission of Abstracts**

We invite submissions of papers and pre-constituted panels related to the theme of the "Politics of the Present". Research is welcome on any topic in the broad field of media, journalism, and communications, including cultural studies, film and television studies and digital technologies. We also welcome short films of less than 15-min as paper submissions. Poster submissions are also possible.

Some broad questions and themes that could guide submissions, include:

- How might research in the sphere of media and communications be brought more mindfully to the precise locations in space and time of the worlds that we inhabit, for better or worse, and to which our research is intended to contribute positively?
- How might we explore the politics of presence in, and the complex links and relations between, a variety of locations and places?
- What forms of solidarity are manifesting across time and space, seeking empathy and connection with a wide variety of human experience?
- Which theoretical frameworks, research questions and empirical objects have persisted in our field despite the passage of time? Which have not? What new questions might we ask about the status quo?
- What forms of radical presence in our research epistemologies might open new perspectives on our field and its empirical objects?

Submissions should include a title, a 250-word abstract and a 50-word author biography. Panel submissions (of four or five papers per panel) should include a 250-word summary of the panel's theme and focus, as well as abstracts of 150 words for each of the presenters). We are open to proposals of other formats, e.g., roundtables and workshops: please offer a concise 1-page summary of your plan for a 90-min session with details of all presenters and their presentations.

Submissions are due by **15 April 2024**. Abstracts should be uploaded [here](#).

We aim to communicate outcomes by **10 May 2024**.

Registrations will need to be finalised by **2 August 2024**. Please note that only registered speakers will be added to the conference programme, to minimise the possibility of no-shows.

The programme will be confirmed and circulated by **23 August 2024**.

### **Local Organising Committee**

The conference is organised by the Departments of Journalism and Visual Arts at Stellenbosch University. We look forward to welcoming you to Stellenbosch.

Prof Mehita Iqani (committee lead)  
Prof Herman Wasserman  
Prof Stella Viljoen  
Dr Marenet Jordaan  
Dr Meli Ncube  
Dr Rebecca Pointer  
Mr Fumani Jwara

### **Practical Arrangements**

This will be an in-person conference, and the programme will span Tuesday 10<sup>th</sup> September to Thursday 12<sup>th</sup> September 2024. We encourage participants to attend the whole three days of the conference, and to arrange their travel accordingly.

Monday 9<sup>th</sup> is available for pre-conference events. Friday 13<sup>th</sup> is available for post-conference events and local tourism in the winelands, for those who wish to.

The conference will be hosted on-campus at university locations, within walking distance from the Departments of Journalism and Visual Arts, which are co-hosting the conference.

There are many guesthouses, hotels and B&Bs and AirBnBs in Stellenbosch and surrounds. We advise booking early for those who wish to be within walking distance of university buildings, which are in the centre of town. For those who book a little further out of town, it is very easy to use ride-share apps to get around.

Conference fees will be shared shortly.