

Political Communication Section

Annual Report 2017

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1. Development of the section

The section has again continued to grow. In November the section held another Interim Conference in Zurich, entitled: “Political Communication in Times of Crisis: New Challenges, Trends & Possibilities” (22-23 November, 2017). Invited Keynote speaker was prof. Homero Gil de Zúñiga (U of Vienna) who talked about ‘*Social Media and Democracy: Evidence from the Digital Media Influence Around the World Project*’. The number of submissions was 130, the highest in the history of the section for an Interim conference and an increase of 30% compared to the last Interim Conference two years earlier. Compared to previous Interim conferences (Madrid, Milan, Odense) the section and participation in its events and activities is consistently growing. Currently, the section has 300 active members and has launched several new activities and initiatives (see below).

2. Interim Conference in Zurich

In total we had 130 submissions to the conference of which 80 have been accepted. This equals an acceptance rate of 62%. We worked with a total of 120 reviewers, with an average of 3 reviews per reviewer. It is notable that the reviewer pool was almost twice as big as for the last main conference, indicating a strong and active membership base willing to get engaged. The conference has been a success, thanks to the good work of the local organizer team consisting of Frank Esser, Benjamin Fretwurst and Florin Büchel (all U Zurich).

3. Top Abstract Award at Prague Conference

At the Zurich Business Meeting, the Top Abstract Award, based on the highest average reviewer scores, was presented to Melanie Magin (Trondheim), Pascal Jürgens (Mainz), Birgit Stark (Mainz) for their paper entitled: “*In Search of Echo Chambers. How Information Intermediaries Influence Political Opinion Formation*”. The award was accepted by Melanie Magin (Trondheim) on behalf of the co-authors.

4. Social media – new Facebook group

The section has started its own Facebook group to facilitate contact and communication among section members and is also open to non-members who are interested in the work of the section. The group is moderated by the section management team. The group was started in August 2017, it already had 145 active members by the end of the year (31.12.2017) and has become an active communication forum for the section.

5. New YECREA representative

At the Zurich Business meeting our new YECREA representative of the Political Communication Section was introduced. Erik Knudsen is a postdoctoral fellow at the Digital Social Science Core Facility (DIGSSCORE), University of Bergen, Norway. He works on topics related to media effects, selective exposure, trust in journalism, and methodological innovations in survey and experimental research.

6. New section initiative: Mentoring program

After the Business meeting at the last general ECREA conference in Prague in 2016 the new section management team had developed plans for a new *Mentoring program* within our section. These plans were introduced and discussed with the section members during the Business meeting at the Interim conference in Zurich (2017). The overarching aims are a) the promotion of young scholars in political communication research, and b) to increase young and senior scholars' integration into and identification with the Political Communication section. The idea is to match "*Mentees*", i.e. young scholars (e.g. PhD students, post-docs) in the section, with "*Mentors*", i.e. senior scholars in the section. The initial plan is to start with a test phase of two years, in which Mentees and Mentors can sign up on a voluntary basis and then be matched based on their research profiles and interests. There was support from the section members for these plans to install a new mentorship program in the section.

7. New section initiative: Membership survey

The section management team has developed plans to conduct a *membership survey* ahead of the forthcoming next general ECREA conference (see below). The goal is to learn more about our membership base, their research interests, methodological profiles, but also their expectations regarding the section and their availability to become active in the section themselves. Some more topics with regard to the section which are intended to be covered in this membership survey include, for example: service quality, sense of community, strategic development of the section, membership communication, conference information.

8. Next conferences

In 2018, the 7th European Communication Conference will take place in Lugano (Switzerland) (31 October – 3 November). Possible locations for the next Interim Conference in 2019 have been discussed during the Business meeting in Zurich and especially the junior section

members stressed that both Zurich and Lugano have been, and will be, comparatively expensive conference locations. The section management team, as part of its ambition to increase the section membership base in Eastern Europe, has reached out to partners at the University of Poznan (Poland) to discuss the possibility for them to host the next Interim Conference.