

**Department of
Communication and Media Research DCM**

Learning Objectives in the MA Programme «Digital Media and Communication for Social Impact»

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1. Introduction

The master's programme in "Digital Media & Communication for Social Impact" is guided by the principle of **"Shaping Media and Communication in the Public Interest"**. The programme focuses on understanding how media and platforms function in a digital society as well as dealing with the question of how they can be designed to promote democracy and used for the common good. The master's programme qualifies you for responsible positions in the media and communications industry, in politics and administration, in non-governmental organisations, and in media and communication research.

2. Contact

For everyday questions regarding your studies, please get in touch with our study advisor, Dr. Daniel Beck (daniel.beck@unifr.ch).

For general feedback and strategic questions, you are welcome to contact the acting Study Programme Coordinator, currently (08/2026-07/2028) Prof. Dr. Andreas Fahr (andreas.fahr@unifr.ch).

3. Modules and Courses

Module "Research Competencies" (6 ECTS)	
Learning Objectives ▪ You will acquire advanced methodological skills for collecting data using a breadth of approaches and data sources and for conducting quantitative and qualitative data analysis, enabling you to plan, carry out, and present demanding empirical research yourself. ▪ You will further develop your analytical and critical skills for assessing the design, quality, and evidence of existing research. You will be able to read studies critically and contextualize their output in light of your own research endeavours. ▪ You are familiar with methodological issues in current discussions about best practices (e.g., open science, the replication crisis, evidence-based policy-making) in science and are able to situate both existing research and your own work within these debates. Module Content ▪ The module "Research Competencies" consists of compulsory courses that teach you methodological competencies. We highly recommend taking this module during your first semester. ▪ The exercise "Research Designs & Data Collection" (fall term) builds on foundational methodological knowledge and deepens students' understanding and practical application of research design and data collection in communication science. ▪ The exercise "Data Analysis & Visualisation" (fall term) extends methodological and statistical knowledge and provides an in-depth introduction to various analytical methods and strategies	
Exercise "Research Designs & Data Collection" (3 ECTS)	Learning Objectives ▪ You will be able to select and implement an appropriate research method for a specific research interest, including choosing a suitable research design and developing corresponding data collection instruments. ▪ You will be able to independently design quantitative and qualitative surveys in accordance with research ethics and high scientific standards. ▪ You will be able to independently design quantitative and qualitative content analyses in accordance with research ethics and high scientific standards. ▪ You will be able to implement measures to ensure research quality. ▪ You will develop a research plan to conduct a research project systematically. Course Content ▪ Developing a research project: identifying research gaps, formulating research questions and hypotheses, selecting appropriate research designs, and

	reflecting on research ethics as well as qualitative and quantitative research approaches. ▪ Preparing data collection: developing suitable data collection instruments, such as surveys, codebooks, and interview guides; operationalizing research questions and theoretical constructs; and using the literature to derive scales, items, questions, and categories. ▪ Conducting and assessing data collection: pretesting data collection instruments, applying sampling strategies, critically reflecting on research aims and design decisions, and assessing the quality of the research process. Assessment ▪ The course will be evaluated in form of project works during the semester. Students will develop research plans and research instruments in small groups.
Exercise “Data Analysis & Visualisation” (3 ECTS)	Learning Objectives ▪ You will be able to conduct essential statistical analyses, including descriptive statistics, regression analysis, and dimensionality reduction techniques. ▪ You will acquire (or sharpen) your applied coding skills with the statistical software R. ▪ You can effectively visualize and communicate key outputs from data analyses. ▪ You will understand and be able to interpret advanced techniques such as meta-analysis and automated text analysis in research contexts. ▪ You can reflect critically on contemporary methodological topics, including open science practices. ▪ You are able to explore and integrate qualitative approaches to enhance data analysis and visualization skills. Course Content ▪ Foundations & Core Analyses: Strengthening statistical and data-analytic fundamentals through weekly hands-on work with key techniques used in communication research (descriptive statistics, regression analysis, dimensionality reduction), with a strong focus on effective visualization and reporting. ▪ Advanced Quantitative Methods: Introduction to more specialized approaches such as meta-analysis, automated text analysis, and basic machine-learning techniques, combined with critical reflection on contemporary methodological debates (e.g., open science). ▪ Qualitative Data Analysis: Exploration of qualitative approaches to data interpretation and visualization to develop a comprehensive, multimethod understanding of data. ▪ Software Skills & Practical Competence: Intensive use of the statistical software R for data processing and analysis. Note that prior experience with R is helpful but not required. Assessment ▪ The course will be evaluated in form of a one-hour open-book exam, consisting of an applied data analysis and visualisation task. In addition, students will complete two pass or fail mini-exercises during the semester in preparation for the final exam

Module “Project Management & Transfer” (6 ECTS)

Learning Objectives

- You will acquire practical competencies to plan, lead, and manage projects and teams effectively and to translate scientific knowledge into audience-oriented communication strategies in order to transfer academic expertise into professional practice and public discourse.

Module Content ▪ The module “Project Management & Transfer” consists of compulsory courses that teach you practical skills. We highly recommend taking this module during your first semester. ▪ The practical course “Project Management & Leadership” (fall term) will teach you to lead confidently in a multicultural, AI-driven world by combining hands-on practice – simulations, real cases, and a capstone project – with agile execution skills, intercultural effectiveness, and deep self-reflection, so that you leave with a defined leadership identity and a clear personal roadmap. ▪ In the practical course “Communication Strategies & Science Communication” (fall term) you will learn the core models of science communication and, through case discussion, strategy workshops, and a hands-on production session, develop both a written communication concept and a low-threshold prototype for a self-chosen scientific topic and audience.	
Practical course “Project Management & Leadership” (3 ECTS)	Learning Objectives ▪ You are able to select and justify a project management approach for a given project, taking its goals, constraints, and stakeholders into account. ▪ You are able to plan and steer a multi-week team project: defining scope and work packages, assigning roles, setting milestones, tracking progress and risks, and adjusting the plan when conditions change. ▪ You are able to lead and influence without formal authority, by structuring decisions in a team, negotiating conflicting positions, and giving and receiving structured peer feedback. ▪ You are able to analyse the cultural assumptions at work in a team or stakeholder setting and to design a communication plan that addresses them. ▪ You are able to assess where AI tools support project and leadership work and where they do not, and to justify decisions on their use with reference to quality, responsibility, and ethics. Course Content ▪ In this course, students will embark on an immersive leadership journey together – designed for master’s students who want to lead in a multicultural, AI-driven world. ▪ The course focuses on building the capabilities that modern organizations demand, including adaptive leadership skills, intercultural effectiveness, and making decisions in an AI-shaped environment. ▪ Leadership is learned by doing. Throughout the course, students will actively engage in simulations, real business cases, role-plays, and a hands-on capstone project – and will use these experiences to bring theory to life together. Assessment ▪ Continuous evaluation: Capstone Project Presentation (30%), Self-Assessment & Essay on Personal Leadership (30%), Digital Leadership Persona Blueprint (20%), Cultural Bridge / Communication Plan presentation (20%)
Practical course “Communication Strategies & Science Communication” (3 ECTS)	Learning Objectives ▪ You understand the central models of science communication (deficit, dialogue, participation) and can relate them to media logic and public discourse. ▪ You are able to analyse selected audiences, stakeholders, and communication contexts relevant to a specific scientific topic. ▪ You can design a basic science communication strategy, defining objectives, key messages, and stakeholder-oriented measures. ▪ You are able to reflect critically on knowledge transfer, participation, responsibility, and credibility as part of the societal role of science communication. ▪ You can translate scientific knowledge into accessible messages for a selected audience and produce a low-threshold (visual or multimedia) communication prototype. Course Content ▪ Foundations of science communication & media logic: media logic and public

	discourse; central models of science communication (deficit, dialogue, participation); selected case examples. ▪ Audiences, stakeholders & strategy: audience analysis and stakeholder mapping; defining communication objectives and key messages; ethics, responsibility, and credibility in science communication. ▪ Visual science communication & prototyping: principles of responsible visual science communication; introduction to formats (short video, visual, policy brief); hands-on development of a communication prototype. ▪ The course is taught as a compact block course (three blocks of four on-class hours, fall term) combining short expert inputs, case-based discussion, guided strategy workshops, and a hands-on production session. Assessment ▪ Continuous evaluation: (1) a written strategic communication concept (ca. 1.000 words) covering objectives, audiences and stakeholders, and a reflection on knowledge exchange, and (2) a low-threshold communication prototype (visual, video, or short format)
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Module “Core Topics” (18 ECTS)

Learning Objectives

- You get familiar with key concepts useful for the analysis of how digital media and communication shape democratic societies and how they can be shaped in the public interest.
- You can critically assess the contribution of empirical studies in relevant research fields.
- You are enabled to apply concepts and methods to communication phenomena and practical cases.

Module Content

- The module “Core Topics” consists of compulsory courses that teach you central content.
- The course “Democracy, Media and Technology” (fall term) combines democratic theory with an institutional perspective on platforms, algorithms, and artificial intelligence to examine contemporary challenges to democracy and potential responses.
- The lecture “Strategic Communication” (spring term) examines the objectives, theories, and strategies of strategic communication and how organisations build reputation, trust, and value while navigating digital and AI-driven challenges.
- The lecture “Media and Platform Governance” (spring term) discusses how states, industry, civil society and technology offer governance solutions for (perceived) societal problems.
- The lecture “Media Use and Effects” (fall term) systematically introduces the key theories, models, and methods for understanding how media affect individuals, organizations, and society, how such effects arise and are measured, and what shapes their strength.
- The lecture “Persuasion and Digital Mobilisation” (fall term) focuses on the persuasive role of communication, exploring both theoretically and in the form of a practical project how attitudes and behaviour are formed, maintained or changed, potentially leading to mobilization.
- The lecture “Digital Journalism and Content Creation” (spring term) examines how digital journalism and broader forms of online content creation shape today’s cross-platform communication environments, discussing the different logics of content production, dissemination, and monetization.

Lecture «Democracy, Media and Technology» (3 ECTS)

Learning Objectives

- By the end of the course, you will be able to define democracy and explain the role of the public sphere and the functions of news media within it.
- You will also be able to discuss institutional and structural aspects of the technology industry—including platforms and AI—their implications for democracy, and potential remedies.
- Finally, you will explore democratic innovations and measures for auditing AI.

Course Content

Democracy is government of the people, by the people, and for the people. In an increasingly digital society, how can we ensure that established democracies continue to evolve while retaining public trust in and support for the state and its

	policies? In the first block, we develop a foundational understanding of democracy by examining its legitimacy, its origins, and the defining features of different democratic models. In the second block, we examine normative conceptions of the public sphere and the role of the media in democracy and society. The third block examines digital technologies—including algorithms and artificial intelligence—from an institutional perspective and analyses their implications for democracy. In the fourth block, In the fourth block, we turn to democratic innovations and approaches to AI auditing. Assessment ▪ Continuous evaluation
Lecture «Strategic Communication» (3 ECTS)	Learning Objectives ▪ You know the key theories, objectives, and central fields of strategic communication (e.g. identity, branding, reputation, trust, crisis communication, corporate diplomacy) and the challenges they face in a digital environment. ▪ You are able to apply strategic concepts and methods to analyse and address practical cases and challenges in corporate communication. ▪ You can critically assess how digital platforms and AI-driven technologies reshape strategic communication, and reflect on the associated opportunities, risks, and responsibilities. ▪ You are able to plan and evaluate strategic communication, including the use of methods for measurement and controlling (KPIs, evaluation). ▪ You can critically assess empirical studies in strategic communication and discuss their potential to advance key topics in the field. Course Content ▪ Foundations and strategy: key objectives, theories, and strategies of strategic communication and the interplay between organisational strategy and communication strategy. ▪ Central fields and challenges: identity, branding, reputation, trust; crisis communication; corporate social responsibility; corporate and (digital) public diplomacy; social media communication and storytelling. ▪ Digital and AI-driven communication: opportunities, risks, and responsibility in the use of digital platforms, automation, and AI (incl. large language models) for strategic communication. ▪ Measurement, cases, and practice: methods for communication measurement and controlling (KPIs, evaluation); examples and case studies presented in guest lectures by leaders from international organizations and agencies. Assessment ▪ Continuous evaluation based on two marked in-class evaluations. Students choose between (a) two written in-class evaluations or (b) one written in-class evaluation and one short oral presentation in class. Reassessment: 15-minute oral exam.
Lecture «Media and Platform Governance» (3 ECTS)	Learning Objectives ▪ You become familiar with the governance concept and different forms of social ordering, ranging from statutory regulation to technological design. ▪ You gain in-depth knowledge about the opportunities and challenges of platforms and artificial intelligence for communication in the public sphere, as well as the available governance options. ▪ You are able to critically assess the contribution of empirical studies and the suitability of governance for solving alleged problems. ▪ You develop a proposal for a comparative governance research project. Course Content ▪ Introduction into the governance concept with its focus on different forms of social ordering.

	- Methodological fundamentals of researching media and platform governance in a comparative perspective. - Investigation of how prevalent alleged problems are and whether existing or proposed governance contributes to their solution. - Reflection on the interplay between research and policy-making. Assessment - Continuous evaluation
Lecture «Media Use & Effects» (3 ECTS)	Learning Objectives - Review, consolidate, and extend key theories of media use, media exposure, and media effects. - Critically discuss and evaluate exemplary empirical studies. - Understand methodological approaches used in media effects research. - Apply theoretical perspectives and empirical findings to contemporary media phenomena. Content - A systematic introduction to the central theoretical approaches to media use, exposure, and effects, grounded in James Potter's <i>Media Effects</i> and extended to contemporary media environments and current research topics. - How media shape individuals (motives, emotions, cognition, behaviour) and how they shape broader social structures and institutions—including how effects emerge, how they can be measured, and which individual and contextual factors influence their occurrence and strength. - Current forms of media use such as social media environments, algorithmic curation, and emerging modes of mediated communication, connecting classic studies and research designs to today's digital landscape. Assessment - Written exam (during exam session)
Lecture “Persuasion and Digital Mobilisation” (3 ECTS)	Learning Objectives - Students are able to identify the main theoretical approaches that address the persuasive role of communication. - Students are able to critically discuss these approaches and the assigned readings. - Students are able to apply the principles of persuasion and mobilization to a practical case. Course Content - One of the main objectives of communication is to convince an interlocutor to adopt or agree with a message. This course focuses on the persuasive role of communication. It first presents the main theories that explain the mechanisms of persuasion and examines the effects of source characteristics, recipient attributes, and message types on individual attitudes. The course then explores the complex relationship between attitudes and behaviour, notably by addressing the role of (digital) mobilization. - Students will carry out a practical project on persuasive communication. This project aims to connect the theoretical concepts taught in class, the knowledge acquired in other courses, and a practical implementation that fosters students' creativity while teaching them to meet the expectations and quality requirements of a corporate or public client. Assessment - Group practical project including a presentation - Written exam (during exam session)
Lecture “Digital Journalism and	Learning Objectives Identify and compare journalistic and non-journalistic logics of digital content

Content Creation” (3 ECTS)	production across platforms and actor types. - Analyse how business models, monetization strategies, and platform incentives shape content creation practices. - Evaluate the technological opportunities and constraints that influence digital storytelling, distribution, and audience engagement. - Critically interpret contemporary empirical research on digital journalism, creator cultures, and platformized media environments. - Assess the ethical, political, and societal implications of digital content production, including issues of visibility, credibility, and power. - Apply theoretical frameworks to develop informed, critical perspectives on the role of digital media in social impact communication. Course Content - Digital Journalism & Content Ecosystems: Examination of how digital journalism and online content creation shape contemporary communication environments, with attention to shifting boundaries between journalistic and non-journalistic production logics. - Actors & Practices: Analysis of how newsrooms, influencers, activists, creators, and platform-native media develop content, build audiences, and sustain themselves economically, drawing on empirical research and real-world cases. - Digital Economies & Technologies: Exploration of emerging monetization strategies, economic rationales, and the technological infrastructures that enable or constrain creative and journalistic work. - Critical Perspectives & Societal Implications: Engagement with theoretical frameworks to assess power dynamics, ethical tensions, and broader societal consequences of digital content ecosystems. Assessment - Students will hand in graded written work <i>during the semester</i> with a focus on theory (50% of final grade) - Students will critically discuss an example of digital content creation at a 15 min oral exam during exam session (50%)
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Module “Project Seminars” (27 ECTS)	
Learning Objectives - You acquire in-depth knowledge about a central subject of communication studies. - You practice working in a small project team. - You learn how to exchange scientific knowledge with various stakeholders. Module Content - As part of the module “Project Seminars”, you can choose three project seminars from the range of project seminars on offer. We recommend that you only take project seminars from the second semester onwards, as they partly build on knowledge taught in the first semester as part of the modules “Research Competencies” and “Project Management and Transfer”. - In project seminars of your choice (fall term or spring term) you will work on projects in small groups during the semester. - At the end of the seminar, you will present the results of your work and submit a project report.	
Project Seminar (3 ECTS) (max. 20 students)	Learning Objectives - You acquire in-depth knowledge about the subject of the project seminar. - You learn to collaborate effectively and to manage a small project team. - You can formulate a clear research question as well as critically reflect on existing research and data. - You are able to synthesize theoretical concepts and empirical results, and to communicate your insights in presentations, discussions, a project output, and a project report. Course Content

	▪ Development of a proposal for a group project (including research question, theoretical foundation, planned project output and required methods) ▪ Literature review of relevant concept and empirical studies ▪ Implementation of the project (developing the project output) ▪ Preparation of the project report Assessment ▪ Regular check-ins ▪ Submission of the project proposal ▪ Presentation of the project output
Project Report (6 ECTS)	Assessment ▪ Project report (consisting of an introduction, theory and state of research, the design or method of the project, a final project output or its documentation, a reflection on both work process and project results, and a conclusion)

Module “Personalised Choice” (min. 9 ECTS)

Learning Objectives

- You will gain knowledge of theories, methods, and research topics in various academic disciplines.
- You will develop analytical and critical thinking skills to enable you to critically evaluate research in various academic disciplines.

Module Content

- In the module “Personalised Choice” you can expand your knowledge by choosing additional courses that meet your interest.
- Aside from additional lectures and project seminars offered in this master’s programme, you can also attend lectures and seminars from the master’s programme “Business Communication”, lectures and practical courses from the bachelor’s programmes “Kommunikationswissenschaft und Medienforschung” and “Sciences de la communication” (if not already attended in the bachelor’s programme) as well as lectures from other master’s programmes of the Faculty of Management, Economics and Social Sciences (provided that the conditions of participation are met) and lectures and seminars of the master’s programme “Digital Society” (provided that the conditions of participation are met).
- Upon request, you can earn 3 or 6 ECTS credits from the “Personalised Choice” module through a four- or eight-week internship (incl. a written internship report in the language of the internship) in journalism, public relations, media, market and opinion research, or university research at DCM. An internship with 3 ECTS credits can also be earned as a tutoring position (80-90 hours) for teaching duties in bachelor’s programmes at DCM.

4. Master’s Thesis

Module “Master’s Thesis” (24 ECTS)

Master’s Thesis incl. online preparation (21 ECTS)

Learning Objectives

- You are able to develop a research concept for your thesis – comprising the research problem and question, the relevant theory and state of research, the planned method, a provisional structure, and a timeline.
- You are able to independently develop an empirically testable research question for a self-chosen topic, select suitable theories for its analysis, synthesize the current state of research, identify the relevant research gap.
- You are able to develop an appropriate research design and data-collection instrument, collect and analyse the required data, and present your methodological decisions transparently.
- You can summarise and interpret your findings against the theoretical

	background, answer your research question(s), discuss limitations and the study's contribution to the scientific debate, and reflect on its practical and societal implications. - You further develop your written communication, analytical, and reflective skills by presenting your research project in the clearly structured form of a scientific journal article. Content - The master's thesis combines a guided online preparation phase on Moodle with the independent realisation of a research project and the actual writing of the master's thesis. - The online phase supports you in developing and refining your research concept and in meeting the formal, methodological, and ethical requirements of the thesis (e.g. structure, APA 7 citation, and the declaration of independent authorship). - The thesis itself follows the structure and style of a scientific journal article (introduction with research problem and question; theory and state of research; method(s); results; discussion with limitations and implications), with theory and empirical work building on one another. Assessment - Master's thesis (max. 12,000 words, incl. spaces). A research concept accepted by the supervisor is a prerequisite for starting the thesis.
Master's Colloquium incl. Defence (3 ECTS)	Content - Oral defence of the master's thesis Assessment 10-15 minute presentation - Discussion/answering questions about the master's thesis