

Research Topic Innovation Communication
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Symposium Rethinking Innovation Communication 2024

Symposium on Research and Practice of Innovation Communication in Public Relations, Public Affairs
& Marketing for Technological and Social Innovations.

05th and 06th Juni 2024
in Nuernberg

Call for Participation

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Summary, subject and aim of the symposium:

Innovations have a decisive influence on the course of social, economic and technical development (Mast and Spachmann 2021) and especially in phases of transformation. Terms such as innovation state (Prange 2006) or innovation society (Hutter et al. 2016; Schulz-Schaeffer, Seibt and Windeler 2023) or the Innovation campaign (BDI 2023a) underline the focus on novelty and innovation in Germany and in Western industrialized nations. The innovative strength and potential are placed side by side in a country comparison and nations or locations are rated as "Innovation Leaders" or "Strong Innovators", as in the EIS European Innovation Scoreboard (EU 2023) or the Innovation Indicator 2023 (BDI 2023b) or the Global Innovation Index 2023 (WIPO 2023). One of the essential conditions for the success of innovation and transformation processes, namely targeted communication and, building

on this, targeted and participatory discourse and deliberation of innovations, is currently considered less or only marginally. It is undisputed that both technical and social innovations are made possible, prepared, changed and disseminated in discourses through communication. This is because technological fields are constructed through discourse (Schaper-Rinkel 2010), markets for innovations are prepared through communication (Banholzer 2018) and social innovations take shape and form through negotiation processes (Noack 2015). Technical change or technical transformation must be shaped through communication (Jakobs and Renn 2023). The establishment of innovation agencies such as SPRIND or DATI in Germany also underline the relevance of innovations for both the technical and social spheres (Banholzer 2024). However, the concepts for these intermediaries in the field of research and innovation in particular lack an institutional anchoring of innovation communication that goes beyond the organization's pure media work. Here, narratives are of crucial importance and they must be adapted to the cultural framework and connectable, for example to public narratives about social reality (Blümel 2018, 77).

After communication science's preoccupation with innovation communication in the early 2000s (cf. Huck 2007, Waldherr 2008a and 2008b, Zerfaß and Möslein 2009), interest seems to have waned in the meantime, interest seems to be increasing again (Fink and Gruppe 2022, Mast and Spachmann 2021, Banholzer and Siebert 2021; Pfeffermann 2023; Hohenauer, Schulz and Gericke 2024) - nevertheless, research on innovation communication and the systematization of strategic concepts of innovation communication continue to show desiderata (Krugsberger 2019). More recent aspects of constructive innovation communication, communication from the perspective of Responsible Research and Innovation (RRI) and research into gender aspects of innovation are also still in their infancy. The symposium aims to address these desiderata, outline the state of research and provide impetus for a (renewed) examination of the communicative conditions of innovation.

- *Analyses and proposals from the fields of communication, economics and political science are needed that deal specifically with best practice, strategies and concepts and their theoretical positioning.*
- *But the analysis of practical implementations by agencies, companies and organizations are also relevant for the contouring of a special discipline within organizational communication.*
- *The same applies to the presentation of projects and initiatives that communicate innovation to the outside world and generate narratives for social discourse.*

e symposium sees itself as a platform for exchange and discussion. This means that presentations of concepts and ideas, best practice or campaigns are just as welcome as the presentation of study results and theoretical discussions. The results will subsequently be published as a peer-reviewed anthology.

Innovation Communication and Innovations

According to the definition of Zerfaß and Huck (2007a, 848), innovation communication is the systematically planned, implemented and evaluated communicative conveyance of new products, services, technologies, processes, concepts and ideas with the aim of creating understanding for and trust in the innovation and positioning the organization behind it as an innovator. The authors identify the problem that innovations fail because they do not reach the relevant public. Against the background of an extended concept of innovation that goes beyond technologies, product and process innovations in the manufacturing industry or related services, social innovations and innovative business models must also be understood, but all of these must be publicized, discussed, used or socially accepted in order to be effective as innovations. Innovation communication is therefore more than just product or specialist PR and scientific communication. Mast and Spachmann (2021, 4) define innovation communication as all communication processes that are related to the innovation process and its result, the innovation itself. Innovation communication is a process of conveying social meaning about innovations to different stakeholders (Mast and Spachmann 2021, 5). Communication at the macro level creates transparency and enables a discourse that can lead to approval, acceptance or rejection. The meso level of innovation communication comprises the internal and external communication of organizations, companies or associations. This means that communication has an influence on the innovation culture within the organizations as well as on the acceptance of the organization's activities in the direct and indirect environment. At the micro level, the focus is on the actions and motivation of individuals to generate innovations or to accept and adapt innovations (cf. Mast and Spachmann 2021, 6). Innovation communication supports individuals in finding and implementing their own creative solutions to problems (Al-Ani 2016).

Innovation Imperative and Social Negotiation Processes

Innovations are just as relevant for companies as they are for business locations. Growth and therefore prosperity depend on innovation, which means that there is almost an innovation imperative (Hutter et al. 2016) for all areas of society. Innovations are seen as a "panacea" (Pfothenhauer & Jasanoff, 2017) to solve problems and are therefore used both as a rhetorical tool to increase the acceptance of change and to engage stakeholders outside of an actual field of action (Schulz-Schaeffer and Egbert 2023). Against the backdrop of the discursive construction of innovations, Braunisch, Hergesell and Minnetian (2018) have pointed out the resulting power effects, which have so far received little reflection. Passoth and Rammert (2016, 39) see the innovation imperative as a hegemonic orientation for action in industrialized nations, which leads to an "intensive and strategic search for innovation opportunities everywhere" in view of the challenges posed by globalization, the climate crisis and the digital transformation (ibid.). They refer to the energy transition, which will have effects beyond technical change, "as a political innovation of forms of governance and as a cultural innovation of urban mobility styles" (Passoth and Rammert 2016, 40) and point to the social effects of technical innovations that need to be moderated. The importance of discourse and negotiation processes between legitimate interests in pluralistic, democratic societies (Banholzer 2022) arises in the context of innovation, as does the "paradoxical expectation of creating a more favorable future position in one's own field and beyond the boundaries of one's own field through 'endless innovation' compared to the (already good) present" (Passoth and Rammert 2016, 41). This represents a shift in

emphasis from purely economically calculated innovations to reflexive social innovations with references that go beyond the economic, which affects not only the actors of the innovation network but also institutions whose task it is to "reflexively shape the coordination and conflictual alignment between the various value orientations and interests" (ibid.). The analysis of the conflictual, discursive confrontation is an important object of investigation. The establishment of innovation agencies such as the Cyber Agency, SPRIND or DATI in Germany also underline the relevance of innovations for both the technical and social sphere (Banholzer 2024). However, the concepts for these intermediaries in the field of research and innovation in particular lack an institutional anchoring of innovation communication that goes beyond the organization's own media work.

Communication, Innovation and Socio-Technical Futures

Communication is a central component of innovation ecosystems, innovation societies and R&I policy, because innovation is what is considered innovative (Hauschildt et al. 2016). "Innovations arise above all in people's minds - and these must be achieved under the conditions of the media society (...)" (Zerfaß and Möslin 2009, VI). It is precisely the dependence of innovations on specific cultural and social framework conditions that in turn points to interaction and communication between the actors involved, i.e. innovations must be appropriate to certain situational social contexts (cf. Grunwald 2012a: 75), because imaginations and socio-technical futures, as well as innovations, are part of the respective industrial repertoire (Lamont & Thévenot 2000) of societies. "Different groups inside and outside companies construct innovations with reference to the cultural system and have more or less interpretative power" (Carell & Eutenauer 2006: 25). Grunwald (2012a, 77) also sees a challenge for innovation in the 21st century in the analysis of the social and cultural framework conditions, which go beyond technical and economic issues. The success of innovation "will depend less and less on technical brilliance, but more and more on economic criteria and increasingly on what are sometimes referred to as 'soft' criteria such as cultural fit, conformity with social values and lifestyles and ethical responsibility" (Grunwald 2012a, 84). The discourses of technology assessment or responsible research and innovation are important points of analysis from the perspective of political communication, framing in the media and the deliberate generation of narratives in interest-driven discourses.

Innovations in a Corporate and Market Context

Innovation was a topic of communication research, especially at the beginning of the 21st century. The focus shifted to innovation processes in companies, which were then also associated with communication (Huck-Sandhu and Hassenstein 2013). Media, both trade and consumer media, were described as part of the innovation system (cf. Waldherr 2008a, 294). Against this background, Schaper-Rinkel (2010, 34) emphasizes that "new fields of technology (...) are developed discursively". Accordingly, communication and discourses are not a concomitant phenomenon that merely comment on technologies; rather, discourses form a field of technology or innovation. The field of innovation is largely determined by political, i.e. controversial, discourses, because heterogeneously distributed discourses and their material practices, from specialist discourses in industry and environmental associations to technology and science journalism and technology assessment, are condensed into concrete rules (cf. Banholzer 2021). Innovation communication enables new schemes of knowledge

and innovation, contributes to the improvement of previous approaches and increases the performance of innovation clusters and networks (Pfeffermann 2011). The challenges for companies in both B2C and B2B markets are increasingly developing into communication competitions for attention, for the communicative occupation of topics, terms and markets (Banholzer and Siebert 2021, 22). In these contexts, innovation communication contributes both to value creation and to maintaining competitiveness (Nelke 2021), in which customers and suppliers are addressed, and to securing value, which positions companies as future-proof and thus maintains scope for action. Hermann (2024) sees innovation communication together with investor relations or corporate social responsibility as responsible for increasing the value of a company. According to Fink and Gruppe (2022), innovation communication "not only serves to prepare and develop the market, but also opens up considerable opportunities in the age of open innovation processes and digital networking to establish a culture of innovation that increases corporate value and location quality". Pfeffermann (2023) also emphasizes the importance of innovation communication for leadership approaches in management. However, as Mast (2013) notes, the use of the term "innovation" often meets with resistance in journalism. On the one hand, the term is perceived by journalists as meaningless (see also Schützeneder 2023); on the other hand, newsrooms in particular often lack journalists with specialist knowledge who can categorize technical innovations in particular.

Social Innovations

Social innovations are just as fundamental to social developments as technical innovations, and Gillwald (2000) criticized at the beginning of the millennium that their omnipresence in social systems meant that they were a topic that had received little attention. As early as 1989, Wolfgang Zapf formulated the term "social innovations", which triggered discussions but was not yet able to initiate any theoretical reflection. Howaldt and Jacobsen (2010, 9) also note that innovation has become a key concept of scientific and political discussion, but that this discussion primarily revolves around technical innovations as a central driver of economic dynamics. According to Howaldt and Jacobsen, this asymmetry also runs through the social sciences (ibid.). However, social innovation is increasingly becoming the focus of attention in several countries and is being promoted through targeted projects (see also Banholzer 2022 and 2023; Kadyrova 2024). Social innovations are now moving into the focus of academic and political discussions, especially when it comes to modernizing the welfare state (Campomori and Casula 2024, 173). Social innovations are more complex than technical innovations because they relate to social practices and the recombination of social practices of diverse actors. The understanding of new combinations and the immanent value orientation require communication and are the subject of diverse negotiation processes. Howaldt and Schwarz (2022, 20) also emphasize that social innovations "cannot be understood in the spirit of an under-complex technocratic problem-solving mechanism and associated governance concepts". The discussed connection between social innovations and social transformation refers to the analysis of communication and discourses, which is often still lacking.

Innovation and Communication Science

As noted, the focus on communication of innovations and communication science is only slowly returning to the agenda, although innovation as a target, as a concept and as a solution for overcoming the Grand Challenges is appearing all the more in programs and discourses. Research on innovation communication and the systematization of strategic concepts of innovation communication continues to show desiderata (Krugsberger 2019), which should be closed. More recent aspects of constructive innovation communication, communication from the perspective of Responsible Research and Innovation (RRI) (see Grunwald 2012b) and research into gender aspects of innovation are also still in their infancy. A current topic that has also not yet been analyzed are the effects of artificial intelligence on organizational communication (see Banholzer, Quest and Rossbach 2023) and the specification of innovation communication. The symposium aims to address these desiderata, outline the state of research and provide impetus for a (new) examination of the communicative conditions of innovation. The symposium sees itself as a platform for exchange and an opportunity for discussion. This means that presentations of concepts and ideas, best practice or campaigns are just as welcome as the presentation of study results and theoretical discussions. The results will subsequently be published as an anthology.

Submission formalities:

The aforementioned desiderata, current concepts and research approaches for perspectives on innovation communication and their business and economic, political and social relevance are the subject of the symposium "Rethinking Innovation Communication".

Please send contributions and ideas for presentations at the symposium to:

- **as an extended abstract** with a maximum length of 1000 words (excl. bibliography)
- **until May 10, 2024**
- **as a Word-Document**
- **to:** via mail to the conference organization

Conference Organization:

Prof. Volker M. Banholzer (volkermarkus.banholzer@th-nuernberg.de)

Homepage:

<https://www.th-nuernberg.de/en/faculties/amp/research/research-areas/translate-to-en-symposium-2024/>

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