



CALL FOR PAPERS

ORBICOM'S ANNUAL INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE

27-30 October 2026

University of Quebec in Montreal

QUEBEC, CANADA

Media, Artificial Intelligence and Democracy Communication Imaginaries in a Fragmented Digital World

More than ever, recent years have demonstrated the ambivalence of the role of communication—through the media, digital platforms/technologies, and Artificial Intelligence (AI)—in democratic and anti-democratic processes. The widespread digitisation of society (Georges, 2019) reconfigures participatory mechanisms (Dufrasne, 2022), between intervention, reaction, and engagement (Greffet & Wojcik, 2014), while the media restructure the public sphere (Loveluck, 2017; Vitalis, 2015). AI, in particular, disrupts the legal frameworks of democracy (Revel, 2024; Lemoine, 2025) and reconfigures the conditions for the exercise of rights, as well as the forms of democracy (Konin & Beugré, 2024) and participatory mechanisms (Dufrasne, 2022).

These dynamics call for a reflection on the forms of participation and contestation (Cardon & Granjon, 2013; Loveluck, 2008, 2015, 2017; DurandFolco & Martineau, 2021), while digital practices transform sociabilities and forms of subjectivation. Casilli (2010) and Turkle (2015) shed light on how digital connections reshape social ties, sometimes enriching them, sometimes impoverishing them. In doing so, new tensions between inclusion and exclusion (Bardin et al., 2018) emerge, as media and digital apparatuses produce hierarchies among groups, knowledges, and languages, contributing to the minorisation of certain voices (Bourdelloie & Bénistant, 2024) and transforming the stakes of cultural, linguistic, and epistemic diversity (George, 2019; Tchéhouali, 2020) as well as the global imaginary (Constantopoulou, 2025).

As the boundaries between the private sphere, the public sphere, and counterpublic spheres are being redefined in the digital realm (Fraser, 2001; Fuchs, 2014), Brotcorne (2018) and Noble (2018) emphasise the importance of understanding the power of algorithms and the logics of discrimination reinforced by search engines and recommendation systems.

The rise of an “artificial democracy,” where big data and algorithmic systems play a structuring role in the datafication of society and the design of public policies, leads to a profound rethinking of the mediations between the governing, the governed, and technical apparatuses (Biancalana & Montigny, 2025), while also prompting us to reflect on our own practices. Cardon’s work on internet democracy, and the power of algorithms has already demonstrated the promises and limitations of a public sphere mediated by platforms that filter, rank, and personalise information flows (Cardon, 2010, 2015, 2018). Rouvroy and Berns (2013), for their part, describe an “algorithmic governmentality,” while we are witnessing the emergence of population management regimes based on modelling and prediction, which profoundly transform the conditions of emancipation and lead us towards surveillance capitalism (Zuboff, 2020) and technofeudalism (Durand, 2020).

In this configuration, the GAFAM and major platforms occupy a central position, both as new actors of sovereignty (Byk, 2022; WatinAugouard, 2022; Vigneau, 2022) and as operators of an Internet whose future oscillates between unity and fragmentation (Perarnaud et al., 2024). Research on the geopolitics of the digital realm and AI further underscores the growing power of non-state actors in the redefinition of the international order (Hamel, 2025; Tchéhouali, 2022; Sagna, 2023).



The effects of AI on political participation and on the production and circulation of public discourse call for a critical reflection on digital citizenship (Greffet & Wojcik, 2014; Collin, 2021) and on the need for enhanced algorithmic and informational literacy (Le Deuff & Roumanos, 2022; Proulx, 2020). In this context, education in media and information literacy (MIL) and critical thinking become central democratic competencies (Collin, 2021; Greffet & Wojcik, 2014). Regulation and governance are thus crucial areas to be incorporated into the broader reflections on the requirements of transparency, accountability, and democratic oversight of infrastructures (Le Deuff & Roumanos, 2022; Grumbach, 2022; Zuboff, 2020).

To discuss all of these issues and envision possible paths forward in a fragmented digital world, **the Chaire Unesco en communication et technologies pour le développement (CUCTD) and the network of UNESCO Chairs in communication (ORBICOM) invite you to participate in their annual international conference, to be held in Montreal, Canada, from 27 to 30 October 2026.**

Centred on the theme “**Media, Artificial Intelligence, and Democracy: Communication Imaginaries in a Fragmented Digital World,**” this event aims to create a space for critical, interdisciplinary, and international dialogue on the evolving relationships between media, technology, democracy, and human rights, in order to propose pragmatic approaches and perspectives, viable solutions, and pathways for the future of public policies through education, governance, and civic imaginaries.

The event will be structured around the following thematic tracks:

Track 1: Media and Digital Literacy in a Geopoliticised World

This track examines the role of media and digital literacy in the formation and development of competencies among citizens, social actors, and public decision-makers, in a context where political, geopolitical, and diplomatic tensions linked to disinformation, propaganda, and information conflicts are exacerbated. Contributions will also address the role of digital platforms and AI systems as infrastructures of power and information manipulation. Accordingly, issues of informational sovereignty will be discussed, as well as North–South asymmetries in this domain, and the continuity and discontinuity between digital and analogue authoritarianism. Attention will also be given to the forms of intervention, reaction, mobilisation, and engagement that unfold in digital spaces. Contributions analysing the geopolitical dimension of information circulation, hybrid warfare, influence campaigns, and strategies of citizen resilience are also welcome.

Track 2: Emerging Technologies, Human Rights, and Regulation

Track 2 focuses on the tensions between the deployment of emerging technologies (generative AI, surveillance systems, big data) and the protection of human rights. It examines how algorithmic biases, automated discrimination, and the massive collection of data reconfigure the notions of privacy, public freedoms, and social justice (Revel, 2024; Konin & Beugré, 2024; Noble, 2018). Indeed, generative AI has, for instance, contributed to bringing algorithmic biases and discrimination to light and has complicated matters related to data protection, surveillance, and privacy. The transformation of democracy is also illustrated by the fact that public, private, and multilateral actors are now brought together at the negotiating table. Finally, our digital rights and freedoms are questioned by two sometimes contradictory trends: on the one hand, the principle of freedom of expression, and on the other, content moderation and the responsibility of platforms in protecting diversity. Proposals may thus address: the legal and normative frameworks governing AI and platforms, as well as their limitations; the global governance of AI and the respective roles of public, private, and multilateral actors; issues of data protection, surveillance, and security in different contexts (democratic, authoritarian, post-conflict); tensions between freedom of expression, content moderation, the fight against hate speech, and platform responsibility; and new forms of sovereignty and vulnerability generated by digital architectures. Critical reflections on the very notion of “regulation” in the age of algorithms, as well as comparative studies across world regions, are particularly encouraged.



The articulation of these various tracks aims to nourish the scholarly debate on the democratic implications of platformisation, algorithmic governance, and AI, while constituting a laboratory of ideas for a democratic, inclusive, and sustainable future. Particular attention will be given to comparative perspectives and to voices from different regions of the world, notably from countries in the Global South and from Francophone spaces.

Calendar

Deadline for abstract submission:	15 May 2026
Evaluation of abstracts	15 May – 15 June 2026
Notification of acceptance for selected papers	15 June 2026
Publication of the conference programme	15 July 2026
(Optional) Deadline for full paper submission	15 October 2026
Conference	27–30 October 2026

Publication

A collective publication will be considered for those wishing to contribute a chapter.

Conditions of Participation

Participation may take two forms: as a visitor or as a speaker/panellist.

- **Visitors:** Individuals who wish to attend the event as visitors and who require a visa are asked to contact the organisers by email, indicating their name/position/organisation/country/passport number in order to receive an invitation as soon as possible.
- **Speakers:** Prospective speakers may submit an abstract of their paper and will be contacted once the selection process is complete.

Instructions for Participation

- **Visitor requiring a visa:** please express your interest as soon as possible by email, indicating your name, position, organisation, country, and passport number.
- **Visitor (not requiring a visa):** stay tuned! The registration link will be communicated shortly.
- **Speaker:** please send us an abstract (300 to 500 words) by 15 May 2026, specifying 1) the thematic track; 2) the proposed contribution and its relevance; and 3) the institutional affiliation of the author(s).

Language and Format: The conference will be held primarily in English and French, with some sessions offered in Spanish. Panel discussions may be conducted in any of these languages.

Scientific Committee

- Afioni Rania, Université du Québec à Montréal (UQAM)
- Agustina Anna, Universitas Pancasila
- Aimé Aminahuel, National University of Villa María (UNVM)
- Akhchichine Ahmed, Université Internationale de Rabat
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- Tchéhouali Destiny, Université du Québec à Montréal (UQAM)
- Welt Dominique, Université du Québec à Montréal (UQAM)

Contact & website: Please send your proposals to: orbicom.montreal2026@uqam.ca For further information, a website is under construction.

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