

Call for Papers

Early Digital Multimedia in Motion

Guest Editors

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Deadline for submission of full papers: 15 September 2026

This thematic section aims to examine the convergence and migration of technologies, standards, content, and practices that underpinned the digital transition and the emergence of *multimedia* in the 1980s and 1990s. The term became a 1990s buzzword, referring at once to the convergence of different media formats (audio, video, text, graphics), a broad category of “new media” applications (digital encyclopedias, virtual museums, interactive games, and art installations), and a shifting set of technological affordances (Rockwell & Mactavish, 2004; Wise & Steemers, 2000) that defined both the personal computing experience and the core development of web and mobile technologies then.

This thematic section proposes revisiting and historicizing the concept of multimedia, framing it as a socio-technological and communicative configuration rooted in the context of the 1980s and 1990s.

We are first particularly interested in the multiple layers that made this configuration possible, from standards (for sound, video, memory storage) and hardware (ranging from cables and connectors to early multimedia PCs and CD-ROM drives) to services (technical support, training programs), middleware and software (such as DirectX, HyperCard, or early authoring tools) and their usages. We also seek to understand the interactions between these technologies, the hybrid ensembles they formed in the early digital era, and the challenges they presented – from compatibility issues to the need for evolving formats and user expectations (Chapman, 2009; Savage & Vogel, 2013).

A second key interest lies in the reconfigurations in media and IT companies and markets (mergers, partnerships, competition, rivalries between hardware manufacturers, software companies and/or content producers/studios), the historicization of convergence (Jenkins, 2006; O’Sullivan & Fortunati, 2021) but also divergence (and deconvergence, see Balbi, 2017) through multimedia reconfigurations. The emergence of new jobs, marketing strategies, and targets, as well as changes in the professional world (including producers, consumers, and datafication practices), are also fully part of this second axis.

Our third key axis is related to users' experience, design, interfaces, early UX experience, as well as the connected discourses, imaginaries, and communication surrounding the development of multimedia devices, software, and content. While multimedia has generated an enormous body of literature, particularly during its heyday in the 1990s, we aim to revisit it from a historical perspective, critically reflect on its conceptual and technological promises, and analyze how these were shaped by and embedded in specific sociotechnical imaginaries. Such a perspective also requires attention to the transfer, migration, and adaptation of content, to its persistence (Sparviero et al., 2023), in some cases, as well as the emergence of new genres and practices enabled by media affordances and interactivity (Lyons & Plunkett, 2007).

Finally, papers related to the preservation, heritagization, and archaeology of early multimedia, as well as the stakeholders, communities, and challenges at stake, would also be very welcome.

The thematic section, therefore, welcomes papers related to early digital devices, content, and artifacts, such as floppy disks, CD-ROMs, CD-i, Enhanced CD, that may address the following topics:

- **Multimedia as a technological assemblage:** What technologies made multimedia possible, and how did they evolve across different industries? How did analog and digital systems coexist and interact during this transitional period, creating hybrid media environments in the 1980s and 1990s?
- **Material Cultures:** How was multimedia represented, communicated, and sold through advertising, packaging, guides, discourses, etc.? What were the challenges of compatibility, interoperability, and standardization that shaped the evolution of multimedia? What are the infrastructural tensions? How were established storage, display, and interaction formats (e.g., optical media, video codecs, and scripting environments) adapted for multimedia applications?
- **Early professionalization:** How did early digital multimedia differ from traditional forms of media in terms of production and distribution? Who were the key professionals or pioneers in the early development of digital multimedia? How did freelance and independent creators navigate the early professional landscape of digital multimedia? What were the main challenges faced by early digital multimedia professionals? How was multimedia adopted in some professional fields (libraries, publishing, education, etc.)?
- **Imaginaries and early digital cultures:** How was early multimedia framed and represented? What were the discourses surrounding its emergence in terms of edutainment, cyberculture, digital revolution, future of computing, to name but a few notions?
- **User practices, experiences and interactivity:** How did the interplay between technical affordances and user practices influence the development of multimedia, its content and marketing strategies, copyright infringements and sometimes piracy?
- **Heritage and archaeology of early multimedia:** What are the preservation challenges, the communities and institutions which are part of heritagisation, and the memories at stake?

Key dates

- Abstract submission deadline: 5 October 2025
- Confirmation of acceptance to authors: 15 October 2025
- Full paper submission deadline: 1st March 2026
- Rounds of Peer reviews: March to September 2026
- Submission of the final paper no later than: 15 September 2026

Submissions Guidelines

SComS welcomes submissions in English, German, French, or Italian. However, English and French are the preferred languages of this Thematic Section. Abstracts should be a maximum of 500 words in length and should explain the main research question(s), scientific literature, methodology, and case studies the authors plan to use. Please submit your abstract via e-mail to valerie.schafer@uni.lu.

Manuscripts should be a maximum of 6000 words in length (including the abstract and all references, tables, figures, footnotes, and appendices). In addition, authors may submit supplementary material that will be published as an online supplement. Authors are invited to submit original papers that are not under consideration for publication elsewhere.

Articles shall be submitted using the APA reference style, 6th edition. The manuscript itself must be free of any information or references that might reveal the identity of the authors and their institution, allowing for double-blind peer review. Manuscripts should be submitted via the SComS platform:

<https://www.hope.uzh.ch/scoms/about/submissions>. We ask authors to carefully prepare their submissions according to all the rules outlined in the [SComS Submission Guidelines](#).

While the expected publication date of the Thematic Section is the end of 2026, early submissions that successfully pass the review process will also be immediately published online first. Contributions that receive positive reviews but are not accepted for the Thematic Section may be considered for publication in a subsequent SComS issue within the General Section. Papers are published under the Creative Commons license CC BY-NC-ND 4.0. Authors retain the copyright and full publishing rights without restrictions.

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Studies in Communication Sciences (SComS) is a peer-reviewed, platinum open-access journal dedicated to advancing academic research and debate in communication and media research. Focused on building bridges between different research cultures, SComS welcomes high-quality original articles from various communication-related disciplines. The journal publishes research that crosses disciplinary boundaries and encourages contributions in English, German, French, and Italian. The journal, founded in 2001, is jointly edited by the Swiss Association of Communication and Media Research (SACM) and the Faculty of Communication, Culture and Society of the Università della Svizzera italiana (USI Lugano).

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