Thinking change in communication: from modernization to mediatization

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Citation: MIHELJ, S. and STANYER, J., 2016. Thinking change in communication: from modernization to mediatization. Annual conference of the International Association for Media and Communication Research (IAMCR), Leicester, UK, 27th-31st July 2016.

Additional Information:

- This is a conference abstract.

Metadata Record: https://dspace.lboro.ac.uk/2134/24294

Version: Accepted for publication

Publisher: International Association for Media and Communication Research (IAMCR)

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Please cite the published version.
Thinking Change and Communication: From Modernization to Mediation

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Abstract for IAMCR 2016 Leicester

Questions of change are of central importance to communication and media research, and over the course of decades, several different macro-concepts have been mobilized to make sense of the ways in which modern means of communication become involved in processes of transformation. It is rarely acknowledged, however, that such macro-concepts also bring with them particular implications for our perceptions of the past, present and future of mediated communication. This article examines the different paradigms of change that have dominated the field of communication and media research from the 1950s onwards, starting with discussions about media, modernization and development in the early post-war decades, and ending with debates about mediatization and personalization in recent years. To this end, the article draws on a comprehensive analysis of articles published in four communication and media studies journals chosen to broadly represent both the historical range and the theoretical and methodological variation in the field: Journal of Communication (1951), International Communication Gazette (1955), Media, Culture & Society (1979-) and Political Communication (1980-). After providing an overview of the changing paradigms of change and communication, the article reflects on what these patterns tell us about the history of the field, its shifting assumptions about temporal change, and the implications these assumptions have for the ways we ‘remember’ past forms of communication, and for our projections of future developments. The article concludes with a reflection on the open questions and future directions of research on media and change.