



AFFECTIVE MEDIA: TRANSFORMATIONS OF PUBLIC COMMUNICATION

Ljubljana, September 3–4, 2026, Faculty of Arts

SYMPOSION PROGRAM

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The symposium is organized as part of the research project Affective Media: Transformations of Public Communication (J5-50172) coordinated by The Peace Institute (Mojca Pajnik) in cooperation with the Department of Sociology, Faculty of Arts, University of Ljubljana (Roman Kuhar) and Faculty of Humanities, University of Primorska (Peter Sekloča). The project is funded by ARIS, Slovenian Research and Innovation Agency, 2023-2026.



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UNIVERSITY OF LJUBLJANA
Faculty of Arts





OVERVIEW

The symposium takes place at a moment when journalism and media are undergoing profound transformations. Digitalisation has altered the infrastructures of news production, platformisation has reconfigured public communication, and the growing dominance of metrics and the attention economy has changed not only how journalism circulates, but also how it is valued and experienced. These shifts extend beyond technology or business models. They reach into newsroom cultures, professional identities, everyday routines, and the conditions under which journalists produce knowledge and negotiate their relationship with the public.

It is within this broader context that the symposium considers the notion of the affective turn. Over the past two decades, affect has become an increasingly important way of thinking about media, not simply as a matter of emotions in news content or audience responses, but as a means of understanding how media institutions function, how professional authority is established and contested, and how public life is organised. Rather than treating emotions as external to rational journalism, or as symptoms of its decline, the symposium approaches affect as constitutive of contemporary media practices and of the changing epistemologies through which journalism makes claims to truth and public relevance.

Affect cannot be understood in isolation from transformations in media ownership, labour, governance, and technological change. The concentration of media ownership, the expansion of platform logics, the intensification of performance metrics, and the precarisation of journalistic work all reshape not only the political economy of media but also its emotional economy. At the same time, journalism unfolds across platformised and networked communication environments, where authority is continually negotiated, publics are mobilised through affective attachments, and the boundaries between professional, personal, and political communication have become progressively more porous.

The symposium brings these developments into conversation through perspectives drawn from media and communication studies, journalism studies, political economy, feminist epistemology, and related fields. Feminist scholarship, in particular, has long insisted that emotions, embodied experience, and everyday practice are not peripheral to knowledge production but integral to it. This offers a relevant point of departure for understanding journalism not only as an institution or profession, but also as a lived practice in which conflict, vulnerability, and resistance are constitutive of how journalistic knowledge and authority are produced.

By bringing together scholars working on these questions, the symposium seeks to open a conversation about what an affective perspective contributes to the study of media today. More broadly, it asks what becomes visible once media are understood as affective environments through which power is exercised, knowledge is negotiated, and democratic life is continuously reconfigured.



PROGRAM & CONFERENCE VENUE

Affective Media: Transformations of Public Communication

Ljubljana, September 3-4, 2026

Conference venue: Faculty of Arts, Aškerčeva 2, room "Rimljanka"

Thursday, September 3

9:30-10:30

KEYNOTE

Birgit Sauer, University of Vienna (Chair: Mojca Pajnik)

Tech Bros Fantasies and State Disruption. Understanding De-Democratisation through the Concept of "Affective Governmentality"

10:30-10:45

Coffee Break

10:45-11:45

Panel 1 (Chair: Majda Hrženjak)

- **Mojca Pajnik, Maja Breznik, Rok Smrdelj**; Affective Governmentality and the Emotional Life of Journalism across Biographical Transitions
- **Marko Ribač, Mojca Pajnik, Lori Šramel Čebular**; Media Oligarchs and the Attention Economy: Ownership Dynamics in Slovenia's Media System
- **Rok Smrdelj, Roman Kuhar**; Between Happiness and Anger: Affective Regimes of Journalists' Facebook Communication

11:45-12:15

Discussion

12:15-12:30

Coffee Break



PROGRAM

12:30-13:30

Panel 2 (Chair: Roman Kuhar)

- **Majda Hrženjak**; Feeling the Crisis, Building the Alternative: Women Journalists in Nonprofit Digital Media through the Lens of Feminist Epistemology and the Affective Turn
- **Tinca Lukan, Jožica Čehovin Zajc**; Boiled Watchdogs: The Affective Turn in Journalism and the Slow Normalisation of Precarity
- **Dejan Jontes, Vasja Vehovar**; Affective Boundary Work: Emotional Publics and the Transformation of Journalistic Authority

13:30-14:00

Discussion

14:00-15:00

Onsite Lunch

15:00-16:00

KEYNOTE

Mark Deuze, University of Amsterdam (Chair: Mojca Pajnik)

What Makes You Happy Can Also Make You Sick: Developing an Affective Notion of 'Good Work' in Journalism

19:00

Dinner, Restaurant Moji štruklji Maxi (Trg republike 1)



PROGRAM

Friday, September 4

9:30-10:30

Panel 3 (Chair: Brankica Petković)

- **Marko Ribač**; 'The New Way' of Media Reorganization: Transformation of Journalistic Epistemology and Affective Change in Slovenian Newswork
- **Peter Sekloča**; Rent, Value and Affect: Platformization of Slovenian Media System
- **Igor Vobič, Boris Mance**; From Structural Homogenization to Evaluative Convergence? Mapping Content Reuse, Source Diversity, and Evaluative Patterns in Slovenian News

10:30-11:00

Discussion

11:00-11:15

Coffee Break

11:15-12:15

Panel 4 (Chair: Peter Sekloča)

- **Lori Šramel Čebular**; Interweaving Metrics and Affect: Structures of Feeling and Negotiation Practices in Data-Driven Newsrooms
- **Nana Čemas**; Media and Journalism for Whom? Analysis of Affective Epistemologies of Actors in the Amendment of the Mass Media Law (2023–2024)
- **Mojca Pajnik**; Beyond Audience (Dis)Trust: Emotionology and Epistemic-Emotional Repertoires in Digital Media

12:15-12:45

Discussion

12:45

Closing remarks, Mojca Pajnik

13:00

Lunch, Restaurant Most (Petkovškovo nabrežje 21)



ABSTRACTS

Birgit Sauer

Tech Bros Fantasies and State Disruption. Understanding De-Democratisation through the Concept of “Affective Governmentality”

The tech bros of Silicon Valley, along with their self-appointed philosophers of “longterminism”, “longevity” and “effective acceleration”, have transformed the significance of the media both in democracy and in people’s lives. Their aim is to dismantle, disrupt and destroy state governance so that they can better achieve their objectives – in particular, their aim of profit maximisation. These tech bros are supporting right-wing authoritarian actors around the world. How is it that these policies and fantasies take hold in people’s everyday understanding, in the common sense?

The talk suggests that the concept of “affective governmentality” can help us to understand these changes. Otto Penz and I developed the concept to emphasise the significance of bodies, affect and emotions as technologies of conduct and government thus as central media for governing people as well as for self-government. Affective governmentality, I will argue, is a constellation that contributes to the normalisation of far-right discourses and feeling rules: only if people introduce far-right ideologemes and norms in their everyday practices – only if they subjugate “freely” to far-right fantasies of domination, inequality, and authoritarianism – can a new right-wing normative affective order emerge, and the fantasies of inequality and white male supremacy can take hold in people’s common sense.

Mark Deuze

What Makes You Happy Can Also Make You Sick: Developing an Affective Notion of 'Good Work' in Journalism

There is a mental health crisis among creative professionals across all media industries worldwide. Both industry reports and scholarly research on the mental health and well-being of media professionals suggest that they tend to score high on depression, stress and burnout, and suicidality. The main contributing factors to these problems tend to be particular to the working conditions of the media as industries. Some of these stressors are internal to media work, such as operating with constant threats regarding lay-offs, management restructuring, and budget cuts, a prevalence of atypical working arrangements and widespread precaritization of labor; facing continuous reskilling requirements on the job, and so on. Specifically for journalists, all of this gets amplified by having to cover emotionally laden events, being subject to (online and offline) abuse and attacks from people who distrust or even hate reporters, and various forms of state/political pressures and repression. Underneath all of this runs a concern for the extraordinary amount of emotional labor journalists and editors must do to keep (it all) going: to handle, manipulate, and control the emotions of their colleagues, sources, the audience, as well as their own feelings. In this keynote, we explore aspects “on the job” that make so many people happy and excited to work in the media while also making them sick, mapping the various ways in which the industry responds to its health crisis, and offer some 'best practices' for researchers, educators and practitioners alike.

Mojca Pajnik, Maja Breznik, Rok Smrdelj

Affective Governmentality and the Emotional Life of Journalism across Biographical Transitions

This article examines the emotional dynamics underpinning journalists' professional transitions, positioning affect as central to the modality of governance in the media. We address a gap in understanding how journalists experience and manage work-related emotional dynamics throughout their professional trajectories. Drawing on the concepts of affective governmentality and manufacturing consent, we conceptualize affect as socially and institutionally regulated, embedded in governance structures that organize the media field and its work processes. Based on fifteen narrative-biographical interviews with journalists in Slovenia we show that professional trajectories are shaped not only by structural and economic pressures but also by affective attachments that regulate journalism. Emotional investments such as passion, resilience, and civic responsibility enable journalists to endure precarity and restructuring, yet they also normalize exploitation by converting enthusiasm into obligation and reframing burnout as professional commitment. At the same time, moments of resistance, refusal, and exit reveal the limits of affective governmentality, showing how emotional investments can both sustain and destabilize journalistic careers. This study contributes to media research by foregrounding how journalistic work is governed through affect.

Marko Ribač, Mojca Pajnik, Lori Šramel Čebular

Media Oligarchs and the Attention Economy: Ownership Dynamics in Slovenia's Media System

This paper examines the transformation of the Slovenian media ownership from the early 2010s to the present, focusing on horizontal and vertical integration strategies employed by media entities and their effects on public communication in an increasingly competitive attention economy. Conceptually, the study contrasts the political economy of "hybrid" media companies – shaped by technological advancements, competitive pressures, and profit-driven imperatives – with the normative role of media as a democratic pillar that ensures credible information and fosters public participation. This tension highlights the inherent conflict between commercial priorities, which emphasize revenue and market dominance, and democratic ideals, which envision the media as a watchdog and a forum for public debate. Employing social network analysis the study reveals a highly concentrated media market with significant shifts in ownership over the last decade. Findings show a decline in print media, substantial growth in online media, and increasing ownership consolidation around a small number of individuals, resulting in a more centralized media landscape. By comparing data from 2010 and 2022, the study identifies key media clusters that dominate the field, including local conglomerates, regional media giants, and politically affiliated media networks, emphasizing their visibility and influence in shaping the Slovenian media landscape.

Rok Smrdelj, Roman Kuhar

Between Happiness and Anger: Affective Regimes of Journalists' Facebook Communication

While scholarship has increasingly recognized the centrality of affects in social media communication, their role in journalists' social media communication remains relatively underexplored. This study examines which affects are expressed in journalists' Facebook posts, how audiences engage with them, and how journalists themselves understand affective posting practices. The theoretical framework draws on the concepts of affective regimes, which are understood as relatively stable patterns of affective communication emerging from the interplay of affective affordances, professional norms, audience expectations, and journalists' individual decisions. Based on an analysis of Facebook posts produced by 12 Slovenian journalists in 2025 and semi-structured interviews with them, we found that a wide range of affects is expressed on Facebook, with happiness and love generating the highest audience engagement, while anger constitutes the dominant conflict affect. Journalists are aware of Facebook's affective affordances but, due to professional norms, often distance themselves from practices aimed solely at maximizing audience engagement. "Private" posts generally generate higher engagement than professional ones, although the disclosure of personal information is largely subordinated to professional objectives. Editorial offices rarely exert direct pressure regarding journalists' social media activity; however, journalists experience an internalized expectation to maintain an active and visible online presence. We identify six affective regimes that demonstrate different ways in which journalists negotiate Facebook's affective affordances, ranging from their acceptance to their rejection. Overall, the findings suggest that journalists strategically negotiate Facebook's affective logics while maintaining professional norms. The study contributes to journalism research by developing affective regimes of journalistic communication and, methodologically, by combining data donation and data scraping.

Majda Hrženjak

Feeling the Crisis, Building the Alternative: Women Journalists in Nonprofit Digital Media through the Lens of Feminist Epistemology and the Affective Turn

This paper draws on feminist standpoint epistemology and the affective turn to examine how women journalists respond to deteriorating working conditions in Slovenian mainstream media. The study is based on an exploratory set of 15 individual autobiographical interviews with journalists across diverse media contexts and focuses on three cases in which women journalists co-founded nonprofit, women-led digital media outlets. Their narratives articulate experiences of marginalization alongside agentic responses that critically interrogate developments in the legacy media system and call for a rethinking of journalistic ethics and labor organization. Journalism is approached as affective labor, marked by the entanglement of passion, self-exploitation, and precarity, in which emotions such as anger, care, and responsibility, combined with digital affordances, enable the creation of alternative media spaces. These initiatives are interpreted not merely as individual survival strategies but as micropolitical and epistemological interventions that reclaim professional autonomy and integrity. While embedded in neoliberal conditions and structurally fragile, they demonstrate the potential of alternative practices to reimagine journalism from the margins.

Tinca Lukan, Jožica Čehovin Zajc

Boiled Watchdogs: The Affective Turn in Journalism and the Slow Normalisation of Precarity

While examining precarious journalistic labour, we observed that journalists' working conditions were shaped not only by economic and organisational pressures but also by strong affective attachments to the profession. Although not the initial focus of the study, the affective turn emerged as a key framework for understanding journalists' acceptance of precarious working conditions. Based on longitudinal study of interviews with precarious millennial journalists working in Slovenian national news media, conducted in 2017 and 2021, we explored how passion for journalism shapes career trajectories, boundary-management strategies, and perceptions of professional autonomy. The findings show that journalists initially embraced a labour-of-love ethic, prioritising journalistic ideals and public responsibility over economic security and work-life balance. However, prolonged exposure to precarious conditions gradually transformed enthusiasm into cynicism and emotional exhaustion. Building on boundary-work theory, the study identifies not only behavioural, temporal, physical, and communicative boundary work tactics, but also a psychological tactic rooted in emotional attachment to the profession. While some respondents eventually left journalism, others adapted through freelancing or lowered economic expectations. The findings demonstrate how affective attachment sustains journalistic ideals while simultaneously contributing to the long-term normalisation of precarious work and undermining professional autonomy.

Dejan Jontes, Vasja Vehovar

Affective Boundary Work: Emotional Publics and the Transformation of Journalistic Authority

The presentation examines how the affective turn intersects with structural transformations in journalism by analysing the changing nature of digital press criticism in platformed environments. Drawing on a qualitative study of user comments on Slovenian news outlets' Facebook pages, it situates these developments within the theory of journalistic boundaries and metajournalistic discourse, conceptualising audience interventions as forms of boundary work that actively reconfigure journalistic authority.

The analysis demonstrates that digital press criticism is increasingly dominated by affective expressions rather than rational argumentation. Comments directed at journalists and media institutions are characterised by anger, cynicism, ridicule, and hate, frequently displacing deliberative critique. This shift signals a transformation in how journalistic boundaries are negotiated: rather than being primarily defined through professional norms and institutional discourse, they are increasingly contested through emotionally charged, participatory practices. Empirically, the study identifies three principal strands of anti-press discourse: conspiratorial narratives about the media, direct attacks on journalists, and criticism of content framed through its perceived societal effects. These discursive forms illustrate how external actors, enabled by platform affordances, engage in boundary work that both challenges and destabilises journalism's epistemic authority. In this context, affect operates as a structuring force in boundary negotiations, shaping judgments of legitimacy, credibility, and professional identity. The findings suggest that the affective turn is inseparable from broader structural transformations, particularly the platformisation of public communication and the redistribution of interpretive authority. As emotional publics become central to metajournalistic discourse, journalistic boundaries are rendered more porous, contested, and situational which raises important questions about the future of journalistic authority and democratic communication.



ABSTRACTS

Marko Ribač

'The New Way' of Media Reorganization: Transformation of Journalistic Epistemology and Affective Change in Slovenian Newswork

The paper analyzes gradual reorganization of media companies under intensified economic, commercial and technological pressure. It puts forward the thesis that the internal reorganization of commercial media companies that swiftly adjust to the principles of attention economy, also introduces far-reaching changes in journalistic epistemology: the processing of information, verifying facts, conveying news. Drawing from a Slovenian case study, author first shows how business leadership in commercial media companies have transformed the internal workings of media organizations. Author observes an intensification of three interconnected processes: (a) commodification of news items, (b) implementation of advanced technological and analytical tools in data processing (use of metrics), and (c) organizational integration of advertising and journalism in the news production process. A series of economic, technological and personnel changes also indicate a change in the practical forms of journalistic work, i.e. journalistic epistemology. Newswork is under pressure to succumb to the algorithmic logic of digital giants (visibility, sensationalism, personalized access, distribution of news). Editorial rooms and advertising departments, once clearly separated, have become more closely integrated and are incentivised to cooperate. This intensification of managerial demands indicates a wider transformation of affective structures in the journalistic field: transformation of journalists' experiences, their trajectories and a range of emotional responses to a profession in flux.

Peter Sekloča

Rent, Value and Affect: Platformization of Slovenian Media System

The author incorporates affect into the explanation of the business operations of commercial daily news media that increasingly assume the role of merchant capital at the end of global capitalist value chains. Affect is defined as a raw material that acquires value only through its incorporation into technologically and socially organized processes of its capture and processing. The empirical part of the study consists of an analysis of interviews with twelve directors and editors-in-chief of Slovenian daily news media organizations. The analysis of the interviews demonstrates that platformization pressures manifest themselves as exercises of power on three levels: power over individual decisions coincides with the enclosure of media space; power over agenda-setting in public debate is connected to editorial consent to the application of techniques for eliciting and recording affects; while structural domination becomes visible in the technologically and commercially unequal relationship between platforms and media organizations. The intersection of these three themes foregrounds the question of managing the consumers' affective relations to commodities on the market. The processes of capturing and predicting affects become one of the central criteria of the cost-efficiency of the platform business model, which thus appears as a historically specific form of organizing merchant capital.

Boris Mance, Igor Vobič

From Structural Homogenization to Evaluative Convergence? Mapping Content Reuse, Source Diversity, and Evaluative Patterns in Slovenian News

Building on a large-scale analysis of Slovenian news production, this paper examines how formal media plurality can coexist with substantive similarity. An analysis of nearly 14,000 news items from 141 outlets reveals segmented rather than uniform homogenization: content circulation is concentrated within ownership, ideological, and media-type clusters. Extensive reuse of news-agency and shared content, combined with the predominance of political and public-administration sources, limits the diversity of actors and perspectives represented in news. The same findings also raise the issue of whether content reuse reproduces evaluative orientations as well as information. To address it, the paper presents the ongoing development of an AI-assisted adaptation of Charles Osgood's Evaluative Assertion Analysis. Unlike conventional sentiment analysis, which assigns overall polarity scores, this approach treats evaluation as a relational, proposition-based structure, identifying who evaluates whom or what, in which direction and with what intensity. Human-annotated nuclear propositions are used to train and validate transformer-based models. By linking macro-level patterns of content circulation with micro-level evaluative structures, the study develops a method for testing whether media homogenization entails not only repeated stories but also recurring affective orientations toward political actors, institutions, and social groups.

Lori Šramel Čebular

Interweaving Metrics and Affect: Structures of Feeling and Negotiation Practices in Data-Driven Newsrooms

Over recent decades, data metrics that quantify audience engagement have reshaped media work in a variety of ways, with research documenting journalistic responses ranging from resistance to such metrics to their adoption as reflexive tools that significantly inform professional practice and decision-making. In this presentation, we advance this line of inquiry through a focus on affect, drawing theoretically from an interdisciplinary framework that brings together Science and Technology Studies and affect studies. Our central claim underscores the importance of attending to the "lived experiences of data-driven technologies" and suggests that moving beyond a purely rational understanding of metrics toward their affective dimensions can provide a richer account of how technologies operate, how they are socially constructed, and how they, in turn, shape the environments in which they are embedded. In line with this emphasis, the empirical component of the presentation draws on narrative biographical interviews with journalists and semi-structured interviews with media executives to examine perceptions of metrics and their affective dimensions within Slovenian media organizations. Our findings indicate that media managers primarily understand metrics through the logic of market-oriented rationality. By contrast, journalists' experiences of metrics can be grouped into three principal categories, with the affective regime of pressure proving to be the most prominent. Drawing on these empirical findings, we therefore propose conceptualizing newsroom metrics as affective artefacts: sociotechnical objects that not only measure and represent audiences but also generate, direct, and stabilize affects within editorial environments, thereby demanding ongoing affective management by the actors involved.



ABSTRACTS

Nana Čemas

Media and Journalism for Whom? Analysis of Affective Epistemologies of Actors in the Amendment of the Mass Media Law (2023–2024)

The media policy process is often fetishized as politically neutral and scientific, while the inequalities and power relationships that shape it remain hidden behind institutional routines and expert jargon (Braman 2004; Freedman 2008, 2015). A critical approach, however, can reveal how the epistemologies adopted in the process are shaped by structural conditions within and beyond the media field (Brand et al. 2022; Strassheim and Kettunen 2014).

This research examines the 'public discussion' period of the recent amendment of the Mass Media Law in Slovenia (2023–2024). Based on the thematic analysis of a combined dataset (responses from the public and institutional actors to the first draft of the law, as well as structured interviews with their representatives), it identifies all relevant actors, moving beyond those in the media centre (Freedman 2008). Crucially, the research investigates their perceptions of not only what they believe the media and journalism should achieve, but also, for whom.

By answering the question of how affective epistemologies (Kotišová 2026) are expressed in actors' perceptions of the field through their values and normative expectations, this contribution brings forth the often-overlooked perspectives beyond the media centre on the role of media and journalism in society.

Mojca Pajnik

Beyond Audience (Dis)Trust: Emotionology and Epistemic-Emotional Repertoires in Digital Media

This article examines how audiences negotiate (dis)trust and emotional attachment toward journalism in fragmented and polarized media environments. Drawing on focus group research conducted in Slovenia, the study explores how citizens navigate competing truth claims, informational uncertainty, and perceptions of manipulation through everyday media practices. The article integrates scholarship on the affective turn with the concept of emotionology to conceptualize audience engagement as shaped by epistemic-emotional repertoires: socially situated combinations of epistemic practices, emotional orientations, and ethical expectations through which audiences evaluate media credibility and democratic legitimacy. The analysis identifies five interrelated epistemic-emotional repertoires: vigilant verification through triangulative cross-checking; platform and genre switching; reputational reassurance through recognizable voices; outsourcing, filtering, and strategic ignorance in response to emotional fatigue; and tales of journalism, accountability, and concealment. The repertoires reveal fluctuating orientations of trust and distrust, as audiences move between scepticism and attachment, vigilance and withdrawal, cynicism and democratic aspiration. The findings demonstrate that distrust frequently functions not as a form of disengagement but as a socially meaningful orientation through which audiences seek to preserve interpretive autonomy, emotional sustainability, and a sense of democratic responsibility in contemporary public communication.