

## Communication Choices, Content, and Consequences

### Research Program, Department of Communication Science

#### SUMMARY SELF-EVALUATION

##### MISSION:

The mission of the research program **Communication Choices, Content, and Consequences (CCCC)** is to conduct research that is both fundamental and addresses societally relevant issues, focusing on newly emerging communication technologies and state-of-the-art empirical methodologies. CCCC incorporates (inter)disciplinary theorizing and conducts innovative cutting-edge research to explain phenomena in society that demand scientific scrutiny to increase understanding and shed light on possible solutions and further research. CCCC aims to excel as an internationally visible, innovative, and recognized player at the forefront of each of the areas propagated in the three themed research groups.

##### EMBEDDING:

The research program **Communication Choices, Content, and Consequences (CCCC)** resides at the Department of Communication Science at the *Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam*. The CCCC-research program is institutionally embedded in the Faculty of Social Sciences ([FSS](#)), consisting of six research disciplines in five departments: Social and Cultural Anthropology; Political Science and Public Administration; Sociology; Organization Science; and Communication Science. Research is organized in five supportive pillars: Institute for Societal Resilience ([ISR](#)), the Graduate School of Social Sciences ([GSSS](#)), and university-wide in the interfaculty Network Institute ([NI](#)), also including research labs. The interfaculty collaborations are substantiating the central VU theme '[Connected world](#)'. CCCC's unique position in FSS is its interdisciplinary perspective and the integration of approaches from psychology, humanities, and computer sciences.

##### STRATEGY:

CCCC research is clustered in three thematic, interrelated research groups: Media Monitoring, Media Psychology, and Social Media, to facilitate its mission. In stimulating multiple partner applications to develop explicit strategies for research impact on society and open science practices, CCCC strengthens its position to obtain substantial funding. CCCC collaborates with the overarching themes of the Institute for Societal Resilience (ISR), in

*Dept. Communication Science*

*Founded in 2003*

*Three thematic research groups:*

- *Media Monitoring*
- *Media Psychology*
- *Social Media*

*Scientific staff in 2019:*

Full profs:	3
Associate profs:	8
Assistant profs:	7
Postdocs:	2
PhD-candidates:	10-17

*(external PhDs are not officially counted)*

*Research time (total in fte): 10.03*

*Research funding (in fte overall):*

Direct funding VU:	4.76 fte (48%)
Research grants:	4.92 fte (49%)
Contract research:	0.35 fte (3%)

Shanghai Ranking 2020  
in 'Communication': VU #10

*Number of publications 2014-2019*

Total (range 59-103 per year): 428  
Peer-reviewed (range 32-70): 250  
Books 3  
Book chapters (9-18): 78  
Dissertations: 17  
10 papers are cited 140—460 times

*Research Grants*

NWO-VENI: 2  
NWO-VIDI: 1  
NWO-PhD-Talent: 3  
NWO-Open Competition: 2  
NWO other (e.g. KIEM, ZonMW): 7  
Ministry/WODC: 4  
EU grant (e.g., DFG/MarieCurie): 4  
EU consortia (VWS/COST/ H2020): 4  
Contract research (partner): 6  
Internal grants (VU/NI/ISR): 7

*Awards (examples):*

Eureka (NWO/KNAW): in 2015  
FSSS Research award: 2014 + 2017  
AEJMC best pub. of the year: 2016

*Public Outreach (examples):*

- NPO-2 documentary "Ik ben Alice"
- National TV, Radio and newspapers (e.g., NOS/NPO; RTL; NRC, Volkskrant; Radio 1, BNR).
- Public debates (e.g. Pakhuis de Zwijger)

*SIM-lab (Societal Impact of Media)*

- Digital traces: Big Data and Computational Methods;
- The Internet and Social Media;
- Social Robotics and AI;
- Virtual and Mixed Reality Application;
- Communication as Experience.

*Societal partners (selection):*

Amsterdam Sustainability Institute,  
Deloitte, Wilhelmina  
Kinderziekenhuis, VIVA eldercare,  
Eating Disorder Clinic Ursula,  
Kieskompas, KLM, Logeion, Sanquin.

particular regarding: 1. Resilience through communication, organization and interconnectedness (e.g., media's role in crisis resilience and polarization) and 2. Care and welfare in a resilient society (e.g., new communication technology in today's healthcare systems such as social robots in reducing loneliness). Collaboration in the interfaculty Network Institute (NI) strengthens CCCC's mission and uniquely positions CCCC to excel in computational methods, content and (linguistic) communication analyses, social media analytics, virtual reality, social robotics, AI-driven research, and neuroscientific approaches. Implementing policies for research integrity, stimulating diversity, and proper training of PhD-candidates (e.g., in GSSS), ensures a high-quality research climate facing the challenges of the future.

**RESEARCH QUESTIONS AND RELEVANCE:**

The study of communication and media is an exciting field wherein new developments in communication technology emerge continuously, leading to new media, new types of content, and new ways that people use the content. The societal challenges that come with these new trends are at the heart of the research program **Communication Choices, Content, and Consequences (CCCC)**. Studying the impact of technological advances on individuals and on society is as important and urgent today as at the inception of the discipline. Central research questions of the discipline are studied in CCCC: How are changes in the media affecting political engagement and influencing democracy? What are the psychological, societal, and ethical influences of exciting, but also potentially threatening, new developments such as robotics, artificial intelligence, machine learning, and more? How are developments in (new) media affecting young people? With today's ubiquitous media use, understanding what media use means, and does, has become one of the most crucial questions in human existence.

**EXAMPLE 1:**

*Media Psychology on Social robots (chair: prof. dr. Elly Konijn)*  
Robot Alice features in research to address the societal implications of seniority and loneliness in a currently ageing society. Robot Zora is used in research to address increasing diversity and learning issues in education. The researchers collaborate with computational linguistics and computers sciences and have acquired substantial grants and awards through which PhDs and postdocs could be attracted. The projects provided the basis for several professional documentaries and TV-items, broadcasted repeatedly at national TV, and intensified the public debate of whether and how social robots can be implemented responsibly in a society under pressure.

**EXAMPLE 2:**

*Media Monitoring of Politics (chair: dr. Wouter van Atteveldt)*  
Research from this group provided the basis for two research companies that launched 'Vote Advice Applications' (VAAs) to guide voters in national and international elections (Kieskompas), 'Media Monitoring Tools' (e.g., AmCAT: successful Amsterdam Content Analyses Toolkit) to guide organizations that are strongly dependent on media (e.g., LSJ Nieuwsmonitor), such as through sentiment mining algorithms. The group analyses the news on actual topics like immigration, elections, rise and fall of political parties, financial markets and acquired substantial research grants. They actively contribute to the public debate through Dutch Television, radio, and national newspapers.