

Call for Papers

Special Issue: Journal of Applied History

The Applied History of Strategic Communication

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In today's connected society, scholars and policymakers are acutely aware that information flows are crucial to political outcomes. However, strategic communication has long been an essential dimension of statecraft. Ancient historians documented how rhetoric settled debates and inspired action; emperors minted coins and erected monuments to communicate their power to subjects and posterity.

While there are broad historical continuities in the use of information for political ends, strategic communication has evolved with new developments. The invention of the printing press in the fifteenth century profoundly impacted political affairs by undermining information monopolies and increasing the quantity and availability of information. In modern times, democratization made it imperative to communicate effectively with mass audiences, while totalitarian regimes used propaganda to shape attitudes and behavior. In recent years, the emergence of digital technologies—including the Internet, social media, and artificial intelligence—has presented states with new opportunities, but also new risks. Concerns about disinformation and malign information operations now cast a shadow on discussions about the information and communications revolution.

This special issue aims to apply historical insights to these challenges, seeking to produce a historically informed understanding of the strategic role of communication in statecraft. Research papers between 4,000 and 8,000 words on a wide range of contexts—Western and non-Western, from ancient to modern—are invited. Thematically, the focus should be on the political functions, uses, and effects of communication, rather than purely technological or commercial aspects.



ISSN: 2589-5885

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Article Topics

Submissions on a broad range of topics are welcome, including but not limited to:

- Case studies of relevant historical precedents to phenomena such as disinformation, propaganda, information warfare, the political role of communication and rhetoric, and the political impact of new communication technologies. What role have these phenomena played during key historical episodes, and what lessons can be drawn for today? What can history teach us about the challenges they pose and how they should be managed?
- Histories of strategic communication phenomena that are central today, such as the ones mentioned above. How did these phenomena arise and develop into what they now are? What factors explain their development?
- Historical case studies of leaders or states that have been effective or otherwise significant communicators. What can be learned from their examples? What historical examples exist of how communication has been used to accomplish important political objectives? When have new forms or technologies of communication been skillfully used?

Timeline

- Article pitches (abstracts of around 500 words) together with author bio should be sent to carl.ritter@hhs.se no later than November 1, 2024.
- Authors of articles selected for inclusion notified by November 8, 2024.
- Full articles submitted by June 1, 2025.
- Peer review completed by September 1, 2025.
- Revised articles submitted by October 1, 2025.

About the Journal

The Journal of Applied History (JOAH) offers a platform for historians to bring the results of their historical research to bear on the present, on the issues that (should) concern us today. It seeks to promote historical thinking as an essential element of discussions about the challenges that our societies are now confronted with. Historical thinking involves first and foremost a keen eye for context in the broadest sense: an awareness of the social, economic, cultural, political, demographic, and environmental conditions within which the historical process unfurls, which prompts us to move beyond easy, rhetorically appealing, but often lazy analogies between past and present that obscure the complexity and idiosyncrasy of discrete events. By acknowledging the similarities and differences between seemingly analogous events, we can achieve a better understanding of the situations before us today. If we want to mine the past as a reservoir of “good” and “bad” practices from which to draw inspiration, a critical historical approach is needed. Furthermore, historical thinking is necessary if we are to get to the root of the issues, concerns, crises, and narratives that are shaping contemporary society, as well as to develop informed speculations about what may lie ahead. Finally, historical thinking, particularly in the form of comparisons between past and present, can help interrogate those key assumptions that might seem self-evident today and to illuminate the striking features, struggles, and challenges facing our contemporary societies.