

Call for Papers

Scandalogy 6: Power, Protest and the Politics of Emotions

This call for papers invites submissions for the 6th International Conference in Scandalogy.

Scandalogy is an initiative that conducts interdisciplinary research in scandals, media, and society. The research initiative hosts regular conferences and maintains a network of international scholars from the broader academic field, such as political communication, journalism studies, public relations, digital communication research, and cultural studies.

Since ancient times the term scandal signifies schemata of communication in which groups mediate events and actions that involve the breaching of moral and legal codes by evoking strong collective emotional responses in public. From a functional perspective scandal is a communicative means to (re)negotiate social power by clarifying moral and legal codes and symbolically punishing those who break them by exercising collective shaming and ostracization of transgressors. However, during the political or social ruptures of the 21st century, scandal has become an instrument used by social groups to sow distrust in the power of institutions and their agents, mobilize collective outrage against political opponents or social groups, and eventually reshape public discourse about moral and legal certainties. This conference explores how power, protest, and the politics of emotions intersect in scandalization, and invites scholars to critically engage with these dynamics across disciplines.

Recent interdisciplinary scholarship has underscored the central role of emotions in amplifying the impact of scandals. Scandals rely on emotional triggers such as anger, indignation, and moral shock to gain traction in public spheres (Mau, Lux, & Westheuser, 2023; von Sikorski & Matthes, 2020). Research in political communication shows that moral outrage intensifies media attention and accelerates the diffusion of scandal narratives, particularly in hybrid media systems where digital platforms foster rapid circulation (Chadwick, 2017; Bennett & Pfetsch, 2018; Joller, 2018). Emotions also shape the interpretation of scandalous events, with partisan identity influencing selective exposure and perception (Walter & Redlawsk, 2019). Negative emotions such as anger and disgust have been found to strengthen collective memory of scandals, reinforcing their political consequences (Powell et al., 2019). Yet some self-directed and therefore extremely painful negative emotions, such as shame (Neckel, 1991), may also serve as a consequence of or punishment for the scandal, therefore a shaming frame is not that uncommon in the scandalization either (Corcoran, 2006). Moreover, emotional intensity can extend a scandal's lifespan by sustaining public debate beyond the original incident, thus increasing its capacity to damage reputations and alter power dynamics (Thompson, 2000). These findings highlight that understanding scandalization requires an integrated perspective on emotional and communicative power.

The emotional dimension of scandals is closely tied to protest culture. Studies on contentious politics demonstrate that scandals can act as catalysts for mobilization when they resonate with pre-existing grievances (Tarrow, 2011). Emotional narratives within scandals, especially those invoking injustice, significantly boost the likelihood of protest participation (Jasper, 2018). Research on digital activism reveals that emotionally charged scandal frames spread more effectively on social media, fostering networked protest communities (Theocharis et al., 2015). These dynamics are

visible in movements such as #MeToo, where personal testimonies of scandalous misconduct triggered global mobilization by blending individual emotional accounts with collective outrage (Fileborn & Loney-Howes, 2019). Empirical evidence shows that scandals perceived as emblematic of systemic problems—rather than isolated incidents—are more likely to sustain protest momentum (Vasi et al., 2015). Emotional resonance also shapes protest tactics: outrage can drive confrontational forms, while hope and solidarity encourage sustained, organized activism (van Stekelenburg & Klandermans, 2013). The interplay of scandal emotion and protest culture thus constitutes a powerful force in contemporary social movements.

The “politics of emotion” frames emotion not as a private response but as a strategic and political resource (Ahmed, 2014). In scandalization, emotional appeals are deliberately mobilized by political actors, media outlets, and activists to frame events and influence public perception. Research demonstrates that emotional framing can determine whether a scandal reinforces existing power structures or destabilizes them (Entman, 2012). Political elites may use scandal-induced emotions to delegitimize opponents, while grassroots movements harness them to challenge authority (Hutchison & Bleiker, 2014). Studies of media framing reveal that partisan outlets selectively amplify scandal aspects that align with their audience’s emotional predispositions, deepening polarization (Iyengar & Hahn, 2009). The affective turn in communication studies emphasizes that emotions are integral to meaning-making, influencing not only what audiences think but how they feel about political actors and issues (Papacharissi, 2015). In transnational contexts, the politics of emotion also mediate cross-cultural interpretations of scandals, affecting their international resonance and diplomatic consequences (Waisbord, 2020). This body of research shows that the strategic orchestration of emotions in scandalization is central to understanding its political impact.

With this interdisciplinary scope, the organizers call for proposals in all subfields of communication studies, political communication research as well as related disciplines in the field of the humanities and invite conceptual, empirical, and methodological proposals reflecting on scandals and the role which media and/or communication plays therein. The conference encourages submissions of both empirically and theoretically focused work from advanced scholars as well as graduate students or doctoral candidates.

Proposals may focus on – but are not limited to – such topics as:

- moral emotions such as anger, shame, or indignation as drivers of scandal dynamics (e.g., Jasper, 2014; Joller, 2018; Verbalyte, 2020)
- media scandals and emotional triggers in shaping public discourse, legitimacy, and political authority (e.g., Thompson, 2000; Wahl-Jorgensen, 2018; Mau, Lux, & Westheuser, 2023)
- scandals as catalysts for protest mobilization, activist strategies, and collective resistance (e.g., Adut, 2008; Claudio, 2014)
- scandals in “alternative news media” and emotionalized digital media environments as danger to democracy (e.g., Humprecht, Amsler, Esser, & Van Aelst, 2024)
- historical perspectives and comparative on scandals and their emotional impact (e.g., Keplinger, Geiß, & Siebert 2014)
- emotional dissonance and identity work within scandalized groups, political parties, companies, and other organizations (Frandsen, Grant, & Kärreman 2025)

In this context, topics that are more general can still be relevant to the theme of this conference, e.g.:

- scandal management and crisis communication
- cross-national or cross-cultural studies on dissemination of scandals
- scandalization techniques in political communication and campaigning
- challenges to professional norms of objectivity in journalism and their ethical dilemmas
- media effects studies in the context of scandals and emotions

Hosts

The conference will be hosted by Steffen Burkhardt, Hendrik Michael and André Haller at Hamburg University of Applied Sciences from May 7 to 9, 2026. For more information visit our conference website: haw-hamburg.de/scandalogy.

Organization: Papers & panels

The conference will feature both presentations of individual research papers, and thematic panels.

Paper submissions will be grouped in sessions of 3-4 papers by the conference program chair.

A limited number of slots will be available for coherent panels where one topic is addressed in 3-4 presentations, followed by responses. Preference will be given to panels with presenters from diverse backgrounds and affiliations.

Submission Guidelines

For individual research papers: Please send an MS Word (.doc, .docx) file including (a) the title of your paper and an abstract of no more than 400 words, and (b), on a separate page, the names and affiliations of the authors.

For panel submissions: Please send an MS Word (doc., docx) file including (a) a rationale of no more than 300 word; (b) summaries for all the presentations in the panel (no more than 150 words for each summary); and (c) the names and affiliations of the chair, presenters, and respondents.

All submissions will be evaluated on relevance and originality, clarity of research purpose, grounding of theoretical and methodological approach, focus, and organization.

Only one proposal per first author can be accepted. A publication of selected articles is planned.

Please send all submissions to scandalogy@haw-hamburg.de

Deadline for submissions: **November 15, 2025**

Date of notification: **December 1, 2025**