CFP: 2026 ICA Pre-conference on Human-Machine Communication

Title: Human-Machine Communication and Inequalities: Contexts, Challenges, and Opportunities
Date: Thursday, June 4, 2026 (Full day, 8:00am-5:00pm)
Venue: On-site at the ICA26 conference venue

Organizers: Katrin Etzrodt, Marco Dehnert, Jihyun Kim, Autumn Edwards

Description

Debates on inequality and inequity increasingly emphasize that injustice is produced not only through uneven access and outcomes but also through design choices, institutional power, and the infrastructures that make interaction possible. Applied to Human–Machine Communication (HMC), this raises the question of how HMC systems encode advantages and exclusions long before users encounter them: designers decide whose problems matter, which languages and bodies are assumed, and which risks are acceptable. Users then experience HMC differently depending on literacy, resources, and social position, which means that "improved" interaction may benefit already-advantaged groups rather than those most affected. Machines themselves are not neutral intermediaries but operate through data, classification, and optimization logics that may reproduce bias even when intentions are corrective—although it remains unclear whether alternatives could meaningfully counter this. At the societal level, HMC can either reinforce dominant norms under the guise of personalization or open space for repair, but whether it genuinely shifts power or merely redistributes expectations remains an open empirical and theoretical question.

In HMC, inequalities emerge not only because existing social hierarchies become encoded into systems but also because interaction with machines can generate new asymmetries, for example through recognition, misalignment, refusal, repair limitations, or interactional burden placed on users. At the same time, HMC may open potential pathways out of inequality: by making exclusion visible, questioning taken-for-granted communicative norms, or enabling alternative forms of communication that were previously inaccessible. Whether these possibilities lead to genuine repair, merely symbolic recognition, or unintended new harms remains an open question. The task is, therefore, not to document inequity, but to explore what forms of HMC could meaningfully redistribute communicative power rather than reproduce or relocate it.

This pre-conference invites contributions that critically examine how human–machine communication reproduces, challenges, or reimagines individual and social inequalities. We welcome work that analyzes inequity in HMC. We further invite contributions that explore how repair might be envisioned, designed, or enacted in HMC—for example by revealing hidden exclusions, challenging dominant interaction norms, or proposing alternative communicative arrangements—and that critically assess what such pathways might look like in practice rather than in assumption. Key questions include: What inequities or inequalities are emerging in HMC? How could or should we deal with these in and through HMC? Is HMC a pathway beyond inequity, or is it doomed to replicate existing power structures?

We, therefore, invite contributions that address questions related to this consolidating potential, including but not limited to the following:

Designer

- Whose needs, risks, and bodies are assumed in the design of HMC— who is implicitly excluded?
- Which trade-offs between efficiency and fairness are justified, and by whom in HMC?
- Which communicative norms in HMC are intentionally or unintentionally modeled?
- Whose communication styles are modeled, and which are treated as noise in HMC?
- What would a design process look like in HMC that redistributes communicative burden rather than shifting adaptation to marginalized users?

User
- Which groups can meaningfully use HMC, and who faces literacy, cost, or access barriers?
- Does HMC increase autonomy or reinforce dependency?
- Who must adapt more—the human or the machine—and what does that asymmetry imply?
- How do different social positions shape interpretation of the machine?
- When does HMC expand users' agency and when does this, e. g., simply privatize coping?
- Which forms of usage indicate possibilities for repair?

Machine

- Does the machine merely mitigate bias or reproduce it?
- When does misrecognition become structural exclusion rather than a technical error?
- Does the machine's logic generate new exclusion patterns over time?
- When or how does the machine's feedback prompt users to question norms that previously appeared natural?

Infrastructure

- Which labor, resources, and supply chains enable HMC, and who bears their costs?
- How do machine policies and ownership structures allocate control and visibility?
- Which languages, modalities, and connectivity conditions define who can "communicate" at all?
- Are connectivity and language constraints merely mirroring global inequality, or do machine policies actively create differential communicability?
- Which infrastructural changes are necessary for repair to be more than a front-end interaction fix?

Society

- Does HMC normalize or challenge existing societal norms?
- Who benefits from communication with machines, and who becomes replaceable?
- Does HMC shift communicative responsibility onto already marginalized groups?
- Does HMC reproduce institutional bias or introduce new societal harms?
- Could HMC meaningfully contribute to social repair?
- What collective arrangements—not just individual tools—would be required for HMC to support structural rather than cosmetic repair?

Submission Formats

Important to note: Papers must be clearly related to human-machine communication. The HMC Interest Group focuses on the meaning-making that unfolds when people engage directly with technology as a communicative subject rather than as an object used to communicate with other people. HMC includes the empirical, philosophical, and critical examination of these technologies and their integration into daily life; yet merely studying technology without an explicit focus on communication typically falls outside of HMC research and scholarship.

A) Research Abstract (1,000–1,500 words, excluding references, appendix and a cover page**):** Traditional abstract reflecting past or present developments (e.g., empirical research, theoretical analysis, philosophical reflection).

B) Imagination Piece (300–800 words, excluding references, appendix and a cover page): Forward-looking contributions proposing innovative, speculative, artistic, performative, experimental, or science-fiction ideas addressing how HMC could overcome inequality. The piece should describe the imagination and its argumentative, theoretical, and/or technological grounding. Additional 200 words outlining questions or issues for audience engagement

C) Demonstration Piece (300–800 words, excluding references, appendix and a cover page): Showcases of realized or designed applications, prototypes, or projects beyond academia that aim to reduce inequity. We also welcome notes from the field or practical insights. The piece should describe the demonstration and its grounding, implementation, and intended effect. Additional 200 words outlining questions for discussion and interaction plans.

Submission Guidelines:
Submit two separate documents in PDF: (1) cover page and (2) anonymized manuscript. Please adhere to the following guideline. Submissions that do not comply will be returned to the submitter.
- _Cover page_ should include the following: Title of the paper, 4-6 keywords, author information (full name, affiliation, and email addresses for <u>all authors</u>), and word count. Clearly state which of the three submission formats your submission addresses.
- _Anonymized manuscript_ should include a title on the first page <u>without</u> identifying author information. Manuscripts must be properly anonymized, including removing all author names and affiliations from the manuscript and from the name of the file and metadata. Authors should be careful that in-text and reference citations do not disclose aspects of author identity (i.e. references to works "in print" or "in review").

Submissions:
Submissions should be emailed to Katrin Etzrodt (katrin.etzrodt@tu-dresden.de) with the **subject line**: _HMC Pre-Conference Submission._ Please double check the guidelines (see above) before making the submission. You will receive an acknowledgement within 48 hours of submitting.

Reviewers:
To enhance the quality of the review process, we need reviewers. As such, all first authors of the submitted papers will be required/expected to review 3 submissions. Additionally, we still need more

voluntary reviewers. Please contact Marco Dehnert (mdehnert@uark.edu) if you're interested in helping us. Your time and support are greatly appreciated.

Sponsorship Call:
The pre-conference welcomes sponsors. Primarily, sponsorships are being used to support student registration fees. If your organization would like to contribute funds and be recognized on promotional materials at the event, please contact Jihyun Kim (jihyun.kim@ucf.edu). We will facilitate the process with the support from ICA.

Important Dates:
- **Submissions due: January 31, 2026** (12pm ET)
- **Reviews due: February 28, 2026**
- **Decision notifications:** mid-March, 2026 (definitely before the early registration rate expires)