



ICA

Call for Papers

PRECONFERENCE

Public Relations Division

Metamodern Public Relations:

**Navigating Inequality, Engagement, and
Transformation in Complex Contexts**

June 4th, 2026

Hosted by

Cape Peninsula University of Technology (CPUT)

Call

Metamodernism describes a cultural and philosophical sensibility that oscillates between modernist enthusiasm and postmodernist skepticism. It's not simply a rejection of postmodernism, but a kind of "both/and" structure—where irony coexists with sincerity, skepticism with hope, and detachment with engagement. In communication research, metamodernism has been used to describe emerging cultural forms that aim to engage with complexity, ambiguity, and the search for meaning in an era of crisis and fragmentation.

The ICA 2026 theme invites scholars to examine how structural inequalities (e.g., economic, racial, gendered, geographic) shape and are shaped by communication practices. Metamodernism, with its oscillatory logic and openness to complexity, offers a compelling lens to interrogate how communication—including public relations—can both reproduce and challenge such inequalities.

This preconference will address the following:

1. Reclaiming Ethical Engagement

- Metamodernism allows scholars to explore how communicators might move beyond postmodern cynicism and instrumentalism to embrace purpose-driven, ethically rooted communication that acknowledges complexity without collapsing into relativism.
- This is especially relevant for addressing inequality, as it promotes PR that is not merely strategic but morally responsive and capable of holding space for both critique and care.

2. Oscillation as a Framework for Navigating Tensions

- Public relations professionals often navigate contradictory demands: activism and institutional constraints; brand values and stakeholder critique; local relevance and global messaging.
- A metamodern lens encourages us to see these tensions not as barriers but as dynamic conditions that, if embraced, can lead to more transformative and reflexive practices—particularly around social justice communication.

3. Inclusivity and Epistemic Justice

- Metamodernism's openness to multiplicity and meaning-making across cultures resonates with calls for decolonizing PR theory and practice.
- This aligns well with the ICA theme's emphasis on contextual inequalities, especially when considering global South-North dynamics in theory-building and representation.

4. Imagining New Futures

- Metamodernism invites a “both critical and hopeful” stance, ideal for envisioning emancipatory futures in PR—such as alternative models of stakeholder engagement, community-led campaigns, or reparative narratives around marginalized identities.
- In contexts of systemic inequality, this future-oriented approach allows PR to be imagined not only as a corporate function but as a site of cultural transformation.

This preconference would allow space to:

- Explore new theoretical approaches that move beyond postmodern critiques of PR’s power while still engaging structural issues.
- Embrace uncertainty and ethical ambiguity as part of transformative PR work.
- Create networking and feedback opportunities between PhD and early career and senior scholars in the field of critical PR research and beyond.
- Drive theoretical and empirical innovation, reflect on future directions and discuss shared, and varying interests in the broader area of strategic communication.

Metamodernism is far more accepted in Africa than in Europe, the US, Asia and Oceania. We will build on this recognition, and on the location of the conference in South Africa, to foster dialogue between Global North and Global South scholars around inclusive, context-sensitive approaches and models of PR. We particularly welcome submissions from scholars working in universities across the African continent, who are engaged in the kinds of questions we address above, or related issues.

Keynote speakers

- Prof. (emeritus) **Nina de Klerk** (Cape Town)
- **Daniel Görtz**, PhD (aka Hanzi Freinacht), tbc

Costs

The conference fee is 40 USD and includes a light breakfast on arrival, lunch, and refreshments during session breaks.

Participants attending this pre-conference on June 4th as well as the “Bridging inequality gaps in public relations and strategic communication” pre-conference on June 3rd will benefit from a reduced joint participation fee of 60 USD.

The pre-conference is supported by the Public Relations Division of the ICA.

Abstract submission

The deadline for submissions is **February 15, 2026**.

Abstracts of up to 800 words are invited.

Please make sure that your abstract is a specific contribution to this pre-conference.

Please send your abstract to: prresearch25@gmail.com

Submissions will undergo blind peer review, so please make sure to submit a suitably anonymized text.

Acceptance notifications will be sent out by **mid-March, 2026**. It is understood that by submitting a paper for the pre-conference, you are going to attend the pre-conference.

For further information, check:

<https://www.icahdq.org/mpage/ICA26-prepostconferences>

Publication opportunities

We welcome papers on the above topics, and the pre-conference will be the springboard for

- a special issue of the *International Journal of Strategic Communication* (edited by Howard Nothhaft and Nina de Klerk), and
- an edited volume, the *Palgrave Handbook of Transformative Communication* (edited by Franzisca Weder).

Organizers

- **Franzisca Weder**, Professor, Vienna University of Economics and Business, Austria
- **E. Ciszek**, Associate Professor, The University of Texas at Austin, USA
- **C. Kay Weaver**, Professor, University of Colorado Boulder, USA
- **Lee Edwards**, Professor, London School of Economics and Political Science, UK
- **Jenny Hou**, Associate Professor, Queensland University of Technology, Brisbane, Australia
- **Howard Nothhaft**, Associate Professor, Lund University, Sweden
- **Jens Seiffert-Brockmann**, Professor, Vienna University of Economics and Business, Austria

Local host / offsite conference

The pre-conference is generously *hosted and sponsored* by the **Cape Peninsula University of Technology (CPUT)**: **Prof. Nirvana Bechan**, Head of Department of Media / Communication, and **Deidre Porthen**, Senior Lecturer and Course Coordinator Public Relations.