



Call for Papers and Special Sessions

emma 2026 Conference

LUT University, Lappeenranta, Finland, 27-29 May 2026

“Media Protecting Democracy and Building Trust in a Divided and Fragmented World”

Geopolitical divides, conflicts, economic strains, and rising political polarization are reshaping the conditions of media production and consumption. At the same time, audiences are fragmenting across platforms and channels, reflecting deeper social and political divisions. The arrival of generative AI has further intensified both hopes and fears, offering efficiency and innovation, but also accelerating the spread of misinformation, disinformation, and hybrid information warfare that erode trust and accountability. All in all, generative AI has become part of media work, increasingly embedded in newsroom routines and, at the same time, raising institutional questions about authorship, originality, and professional identity. Some studies document attempts to reassert professional boundaries against automated or AI-generated systems (van Dalen, 2024; Dodds et al., 2025). Others highlight a potential opportunity to strengthen knowledge practices and reinforce media’s role as a trusted source—if deployed in transparent, verifiable, and audience-centered ways (Perreault et al., 2025).

Across many countries, the space for free expression and press freedom is shrinking—not only through state pressure but also through financial decline and increasing hostility toward journalists (UNESCO, 2021; Nielsen & Ganter, 2022). Journalism’s traditional role as a trusted source of verified information and as a watchdog of power is under strain. Alternative media ecosystems, in which speed, virality, and identity often outrank verification and responsibility, further erode this role (Park et al., 2020). At the same time, AI is reshaping the economics of news and challenging the viability of established business models (Sjøvaag, 2024; Dodds et al., 2025). Trust in news is weakening: comparative studies document both overall declines and significant variation in confidence across audiences and media systems (Fletcher et al., 2025; Newman et al., 2025; WEF, 2025). Rebuilding trust in journalism therefore requires managerial strategies, transparent governance, and institutional resilience that ensure both long-term viability and democratic responsibility (Pickard, 2019; Jakobsson & Stiernstedt, 2023).

Despite these pressures, there is continued demand and concern for trustworthy, fact-based journalism. Surveys across Europe indicate that many citizens still value accuracy, transparency, and professional standards as key conditions for trust in news (Newman et al., 2025). In an age of

polarization and disinformation, journalism's role in safeguarding democratic life is more vital than ever (Humprecht, 2023). Societies continue to rely on professional media as guarantors of verification, accountability, and public-interest reporting. Emerging technologies, while disruptive, also offer opportunities for innovation that can reinforce journalism's democratic mission and sustain viable business models. When deployed responsibly, AI and digital tools can help news organizations engage audiences, improve efficiency, and create new forms of value while upholding editorial integrity. Building on this dual commitment to innovation and responsibility, media institutions can not only survive but also strengthen their legitimacy as pillars of democratic societies. The tension outlined above is not restricted to journalism. A parallel tension is, for example, visible in the film and streaming sector, where global platforms have disrupted traditional distribution windows and revenue models, while generative AI introduces new uncertainties around creativity, authorship, and employment protections (Appel et al., 2023; Chalaby, 2024; Bender, 2025; Harvard Law Review, 2025).

In this context, the task facing media managers is profoundly complex: **How can media organizations safeguard democracy, uphold integrity and independence, maintain trust, and stay economically sustainable in a divided and fragmented world?** Journalistic autonomy, alongside professional norms and a public-service ethos, forms the foundation of healthy media systems (Hallin & Mancini, 2004) and of democracy, enabling and fostering creativity and cultural vitality within the wider audiovisual sector.

#emmalappeenranta invites contributions that confront these realities. We seek submissions that explore how media systems and its actors (public or private, legacy or emergent) can be managed, structured, and governed to protect both economic sustainability and democratic integrity. We welcome conceptual frameworks, empirical studies, comparative system analyses, policy proposals, business model evaluations, experimental interventions, and practitioner reflections that illuminate pathways toward resilient and mission-driven media in an age of fragmentation and AI disruption.

Exemplary topics include (but are not limited to):

- Sustainable business models and revenue diversification that protect editorial independence
- AI integration, productivity, and governance in news and creative industries
- Trust repair, credibility metrics, and audience engagement
- Organizational resilience under political, economic, or technological pressure
- Platform power, media ownership, consolidation, and pluralism
- Audience analytics and personalization: balancing data-driven strategies with editorial integrity
- Entrepreneurial and independent journalism in democratic ecosystems
- Public service media in digital transformation
- Crisis management and sustainability metrics for media institutions
- Comparative regulatory approaches to platforms, AI, and media sustainability
- Cross-industry lessons from cultural and creative sectors (e.g. film and streaming) facing disruption through platforms and generative AI

NOTE! We want to highlight that, in addition to the conference theme, we encourage contributions **from all aspects** of media management for an inclusive and open conference.

Guidelines for submissions: Abstracts and Special Sessions

Abstract submission

Submissions for the emma conference are invited as paper proposals in the form of abstracts (500-750 words excluding references) followed by a full paper (8000 words maximum) if the abstract is accepted.

The abstract should address the following evaluation criteria:

- Introduction: problematization, research purpose, context, and empirical phenomenon (practical and social relevance, connections), and relevance to media management scholarship (theoretical relevance)
- Methodology: overview of key scientific methods employed, analytical steps, and reflections of data
- Tentative results: summary of (expected) results, findings, outcomes
- Tentative contributions: Theoretical contribution, practical implications

All submissions will go through the process of double-blind peer review by experts nominated to the conference's Scientific Committee.

Full papers are considered for the emma2026 Best Paper Award only if they are submitted by the deadline for full papers.

Further information

- Submissions must be in the format of the *Journal of Media Business Studies*. That is English, size 12 font, Times New Roman and double-line spacing.
- emma 2026 will not incorporate a hybrid option for online paper presentations

Full papers are considered for the #emmalappeenranta Best paper Awards only if they are submitted by 30 April 2026 (the deadline for full papers),

Special session submission

The emma conference welcomes submissions for special thematic sessions. We encourage the exploration of interactive and inventive session formats. Such sessions could for example touch upon (i) methodological innovations or the plethora of media management methodology in general, (ii) topics, methods, formats, and didactical issues in media management education, (iii) preparing for international collaboration in research (edited volumes, joint projects), (iv) strategies and measures for the further development of emma as an organization (geographical growth and alongside with it new themes e.g. at the frontiers of Europe), (v) launching systematic foresight activities together with European media industry possibly in the context of emma. These sessions will be slotted as concurrent offerings within the conference schedule.

To guide your special session proposals, please adhere to the following set of guidelines:

- The session's duration should span 90 minutes.
- A minimum of four participants, originating from a minimum of two distinct universities and/or institutions, must be included in the application. It is essential that all participants commit to being available throughout the entire conference program.

- The proposal should be submitted by a designated session chair, who will assume responsibility for all facets of the sub-session, including coordination during the conference and acting as the corresponding author.
- Proposals for special thematic sessions should not exceed a word limit of 1250 (excluding references) and should include a narrative supporting the relevance and novelty of the topic and the relation to the conference theme.
- When the submission system asks for author information, please enter only the name and affiliations of the session chairs, not the names of the other authors or contributors, these should be added to the proposal text.
- Special session proposals will undergo a peer review process. Please note that this review will not be conducted blindly. Instead, it will focus on evaluating the session's alignment with the conference theme, the relevance of the proposed topic, as well as the quality and novelty of the session's concept.

Overview of Important Dates of #emmalappeenranta

14 November 2025	Online submission opens
18 January 2026	Deadline for submissions (abstract and special sessions)
27 February 2026	Notification of acceptance; opening of conference registration; opening of full paper submissions
30 April 2026	Deadline for both full paper submissions to be considered for Best Paper Award and submissions for the Paper Development Workshop
30 April 2026	Closing of Conference Registration
27 May 2026	PhD Workshop, Paper Development Workshop, and evening reception
28-29 May 2026	emma 2026 Annual Conference
30 May 2026	Social post-conference activities

The date for submissions for the PhD Workshop will be announced later.

Reference list:

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- van Dalen, A. (2024). Revisiting the algorithms behind the headlines: Boundary work and journalistic authority in the age of AI. *Journalism Practice*, 18(7), 1050–1066. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17512786.2024.2389209>
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