

Call for Papers:

Epistemic Staging on Video Platforms: How Aestheticization Shapes Valid Knowledge in Digital Media

At STS Conference Graz 2026, 4-6th May 2026

Abstract Submission until: **27th of January 2026**

Notification of accepted abstracts: **Mid-February 2026**

Session Organizer:

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The digital transformation has not only changed who can produce knowledge, but also fundamentally how knowledge is staged as valid. While classical STS and sociology of knowledge research examine knowledge production usually in institutionalized settings like laboratories, universities, archives and expert networks, a new type of epistemic culture is emerging on video platforms: Organized and unorganized creators compete for attention, with algorithmic selection mechanisms and aesthetic forms of staging becoming decisive for what circulates as meaningful, valid knowledge.

This session asks: How is content on video platforms staged as valid knowledge? What role does aestheticization and the attention economy play in contrast to traditional epistemic authorities (like review procedures in academic journals)?

We draw on sociological concepts of knowledge that understand knowledge as communicatively objectified, socialized meaning. The media shift from mass media to interactive media changes—according to our thesis—selection criteria from content to form.

In computerized societies, “informed knowledge” emerges, in which it is no longer primarily the propositional content but the mode of presentation that determines significance. Video platforms hybridize interpersonal and mass media communication and create specific “Erfolgsmedien” („success media“) such as money, attention, and aesthetics, under which epistemic claims are processed. This transforms which forms of

knowledge can be formalized in the media at all: while recipe knowledge, for example, appears easy to communicate in cooking videos, habitualized knowledge remains difficult to access—an asymmetry with epistemic consequences.

This perspective offers several key connections: it extends classic questions of epistemic authority to digital infrastructures and focuses on the materiality of knowledge practices – from technical equipment to platform algorithms to visual affordances.

It is particularly relevant here that “success media” on video platforms establish new regimes of epistemic validity beyond scientific validation procedures. The inherent logic of these platforms favors communicative forms of attention-grabbing that affect viewers on various levels, whereby primarily aesthetically presented content is received and circulated as meaningful, valid knowledge. It is crucial that not only explicitly didactic content, but every form of video stages connectable knowledge—be it in terms of production techniques, the reach achieved, or the lifestyles and practices conveyed.

The distinction between organized, institutional creators and non-organized actors reveals different logics of legitimization: while the latter operate in economic contexts, the former operate under different rationalities – but both under the conditions of platform-specific algorithms. This leads to an epistemic regime in which the boundary between knowledge and entertainment, between information and performance, is increasingly blurred.

We invite contributions that examine processes of digital knowledge staging at the intersection of media sociology, sociology of knowledge, and STS, combining theoretical reflection with empirical case studies.

Abstracts (400-600 words) in English can be submitted via conference website:

<https://stsconf.tugraz.at/calls/call-for-abstracts/>

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