

ZeMKI-Forschungskolloquium

ZeMKI Research Seminar

Linzer Str. 4, Room 60.070, 28359 Bremen, DE

14.01.2026, 16.15 – 17.45 (CET)

Dr. Lucia Cores Sarria

(Universidad Carlos III de Madrid, Spain)

The Paradox of Negative News: Disentangling the Dual Role of Negativity Bias in News Selection and Avoidance

Abstract:

The role of negativity in the news remains a puzzle in communication research. One body of literature points to a negativity bias, showing that negative news attracts greater audience engagement, while another identifies excessive negativity as a primary reason people report for avoiding the news. We argue that this apparent paradox stems from methodological limitations: aggregate web data and cross-sectional surveys cannot capture the short-term psychological dynamics at play within a news-consumption session. To address this gap, we conducted a naturalistic online experiment simulating a social-media newsfeed and tracked user behavior across an entire browsing session. Our results reveal that the negativity bias is strikingly short-lived: early in the session participants were more likely to engage with negative news, but this advantage faded after the first few posts, and positive news proved more resilient to the natural decline in engagement that happens over the course of the session. These findings help reconcile seemingly contradictory findings in the literature and offer practical guidance for social media platforms seeking to balance audiences' interest in negative news with the risk of fostering news avoidance.

Bio:

Dr. Lucía Cores-Sarria is an MSCA YUFE postdoctoral researcher at Universidad Carlos III de Madrid, visiting ZeMKI as part of her secondment, where she collaborates with Prof. Cornelius Puschmann, her YUFE co-supervisor. She holds a joint Ph.D. in Media and Cognitive Science from Indiana University. She focuses on media psychology, employing methods that range from psychophysiological experiments to large-scale analyses of digital behavioral data. Her YUFE project investigates how the content and formal features of news drive engagement and avoidance in digital environments. Her work has been published in international journals such as the *Journal of Communication*, *Communication Research*, *Journalism Studies*, and *Ecological Psychology*.