ChatGPT as Communication Partner

Research Project:

The project is focused on a sociological investigation of the use of Large Language Models (LLMs) in communication, especially on their use in search engines. Our approach is based on the notion of "artificial communication" (Esposito 2022) and intends to assess the results of the interaction with algorithms not in terms of machine intelligence or "human parity" (Turing test) but in terms of their communicative competence. In this view, the discussed pitfalls of chatbots are not errors but the unintended result (and demonstration) of the machine's competence in perceiving and evaluating the attitude of its interlocutor. And indeed, the measures that have been proposed to counteract these unintended outcomes are communicative and not structural: they do not intervene in the way the machine works but, for example, in the allowed duration of communication. The project will deliver concrete guidelines for the use of generative AI for different tasks and for communicatively effective regulatory intervention in the use of LLMs.

Plan of Activities:

1. Literature review and cognitive analysis of the international debate and research on LLMs and their applications - in specialized journals but also in a sample of generalist media;

2. Ethnomethodological investigations analyzing interactional structure and troubles in human-machine interactions;

3. Qualitative and quantitative analysis of the relationship between the contextual information that the models gather during the interaction with its interlocutor and the reference dataset, comparing and assessing different LLMs.