**Special Topic Issue Theme:** Emerging Technologies: Development, Application, and Impacts in ANR Social Science Contexts

**Background**

Emerging technologies are rapidly transforming the landscape of social science in agriculture and natural resources (ANR). Innovations such as artificial intelligence, virtual and augmented reality, the Internet of Things, wearables, automation, and advanced data analytics are reshaping how communication, education, leadership, and extension activities are conceptualized and delivered within ANR contexts. These technological advancements present both unprecedented opportunities and complex challenges for researchers, practitioners, and educators.

Despite the growing presence of these tools, there remains a clear need for evidence-based insights into their development, application, and impact within ANR social science. This need has been reinforced by the USDA HATCH Multistate Project (S1095) and its Technology Adoption and Decision-Making working group, which proposed this special topic issue. The idea was further shaped during an Innovative Ideas session at the National Agricultural Communications Symposium, where participants emphasized the value of expanding the Journal of Applied Communications' reach and encouraging broader engagement from social science researchers. Although emerging technologies continue to advance rapidly, much of the existing literature focuses on technical implementation, leaving significant gaps in our understanding of how these tools shape communication strategies, research methodologies, ethical considerations, and broader social implications across ANR fields.

This special topic issue seeks to address these gaps by providing a dedicated platform for scholarship that explores the intersection of emerging technologies and ANR social science. By inviting research manuscripts, the Journal of Applied Communications aims to foster dialogue, share innovative approaches, advance theoretical and practical understanding, support responsible adoption, and inform best practices for technology-enabled communication, education, and leadership in agriculture and natural resources.

**Scope and Topics**

Submissions may address, but are not limited to, scholarship involving AI, VR/AR, IoT, wearables, automation, data analytics, biotechnology, communication, technology-enabled research methods, data ethics, immersive learning, and other emerging technologies and technological practices within ANR contexts.

**Concept Paper Requirements**

The concept paper (up to three single-spaced pages, Times New Roman 12-pt) should summarize the proposed research, including:
- Introduction and context for the emerging technology area of study and its relevance to and potential impact on ANR communications research or practice
- Purpose or focus, including a clear set of research questions or objectives.
- Theoretical or conceptual foundation.
- Proposed methods or approach.
- Anticipated findings or contributions.
- Implications for communications research or practice.

**Timeline**

December 2025 – Call released
March 31st, 2026 – Concept papers due via New Prairie Press
April 30th, 2026 – Invitations for full papers send to authors
August 31st, 2026 – Full papers due
Sept–Dec 2026 – Peer review and revision
Jan–Feb 2027 – Publication of Special Issue

**Review Process and Criteria**

Concept papers will undergo a single-blind review conducted by members of the JAC Editorial Committee and participants from the S1095 multi-state project. Full manuscripts will be evaluated through a single-blind peer-review process drawing from the author pool. All authors, once their concept paper is accepted, will agree to review assigned manuscripts from the accepted pool. Concept papers will be assessed using a modified version of the JAC *Research in Brief* rubric, while full manuscripts will be reviewed using the standard JAC *Research Manuscripts* rubric.

**Submission & Contact**

Concept papers and manuscripts will be submitted through JAC's New Prairie Press submission portal. For questions, contact the Guest Editorial Team.

Dr. Tracy Rutherford (Guest Editor) – trutherford@vt.edu
Dr. Jamie Greig (Guest Associate Editor) – jgreig@utk.edu


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