

Double special issue « l'emprise de la communication et ses équivoques ».

Dossier coordonné et présenté par BENJAMIN FERRON, JULIE SEDEL, JEREMIE NOLLET et CAMILLE NOÛS, *Politiques de communication* 2023/1–2 (N° 20–21, numéro double spécial 10 ans). Presses Universitaires de Grenoble, 362 pp.

This short presentation is aimed at celebrating the 10th anniversary of the French international scholarly journal *Politiques de communication*¹, with a focus on its last double special issue (no. 20 – 21/2024) dedicated to this event. As a member of the international editorial committee of the journal from the very beginning, I would like to address this presentation in order to underline once again the relevant and continuous contribution of this journal to academic literature in social sciences in general, with a focus on communication sciences, from a constructive critical perspective, that stands representative for the future developments of this journal.

Founded by reputed Professor Stéphane Olivesi at the University of Versailles Saint-Quentin-en-Yvelines (UVSQ) in 2013, who was seconded by a prestigious scholar team, the journal edited by the Presses Universitaires de Grenoble (PUG), has a bi-annual frequency, addressing over the last 10 years various thematical issues², focused among others on the sources of journalism (2013), democracy in organisations (2014), public(s) and reception (2015, 2016, 2018), online political expression and practices (2014, 2019) or even money in politics as a public matter (2020). In 2022, the editorial team has launched a call for papers³ (in French and English) preparing the international colloquium “The Grip of Communication”, and inviting at “collective critical enterprise” around this challenging concept. The conference⁴ was hold at Sciences Po Bordeaux, in December 2022.

¹ *Politiques de communication* | Le blog de la revue (hypotheses.org).

² General overview of the 22 issues of the journal: *Revue Politiques de communication* | Cairn.info.

³ (99+) International Colloquium: “The Grip of Communication” (December 15–16, 2022, Sciences Po Toulouse, France) | Benjamin Ferron - Academia.edu.

⁴ Conference presentation and program Calenda – L'emprise de la communication.

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As a result, the last double special issue under discussion is specifically dedicated to the “Grip of communication and its ambiguities” (“L’Emprise de la communication et ses équivoques”) with the main ambition to readdress an in-depth interrogation of such an explosive research object in Social Sciences and Humanities that is, the phenomenon of communication and its status, by exploring its “empirical manifestation in the social fields, institutions and organisations” (p. 10), as well as the social relationships and challenges here developed. It covers almost 50 years of French and international reflexion, critique and methodological debate around the concept and field of “political communication”, with a focus on the communication effects theories and empirical studies, from a historical perspective. One of the main results of this theoretical-methodological demarche, conveyed in the “Introduction”, is the one that clarifies the disciplinary “extensions” and expansions (in economy, marketing, public relations, cultural production in general and within its new work environments) of the political communication field over the time, so to metrologically explain and translate “the grip of communication” (“l’emprise de la communication”). As such, the editors, who are also signing the “Introduction”, invite us to deconstruct the still standing obstacles against the methodological interrogation of “the grip of communication” as a research object that is, the growth, the structuring and the illusion (“*illusio professionnelle*”) of a professional space (p. 10), explained via the *rupture* with the common sense (and with the scholar common sense, as well) discourses related to the place and role of communication in the social world” (p. 20). It further encompasses the professional meta-discourses highlighting the contribution of communicants to the “general interest”, to sectoral professional interest(s) or to citizens` interest (p. 27). Starting from the numerous obstacles and ambiguities here evoked, the editors advance a series of critical research hypotheses, in order to assume an operational definition of the concept for further research, where the research method observing the object is the “professional field”. More specifically, the field of communication professionals is, before all, defined by its lack of homogeneity and dispersion:

“...the grip of communication would be the structural constraint imposed by the field of the professionals of communication, itself subject to external determinants (political, economic, and intellectual) on other social fields. It would result in a transformation (of more or less ample scale) of internal power relations in the studied professional spaces, by taking into account an exogenous point of view, leading to a modification of practices and beliefs existing in a previous state of the field (for example, with the new importance attributed to the “public image” as a professional challenge). It would manifest itself above all by an extension of practices to spaces previously preserved, such as activist spaces, where advocacy techniques, digital communication and, conversely, astroturfing (consisting, for industrial companies, in building false citizen actions favourable to their interest).” (p. 29).

Furthermore, the anniversary *Dossier* proposes the first translation into French of the famous *Introduction* of Todd Gitlin (1943–2022) to “*The Whole World is Watching: Mass Media in the Making and Unmaking of the Left*” (1980), as a French disciplinary tribute to the American sociologist. The paper is introduced by an opening note, signed by Cyriac Gousset and Rodney Benson, on the global impact of this fundamental text for the sociology of mass media and the sociology of social movements. It opens the floor to eight empirical papers exploring different professional fields, agents and practices of the political communication. Herein it is as well included a comprehensive and illustrative paper, signed by J.-B. Legavre (pp. 299–320), on the unique contribution of the French sociologist of organizations Michel Crozier (1922–2013) to the “struggle” against the ideological “grip of communication”, via a new conceptual apparatus putting at its center the notion of *listening* (“*l’écoute*”), as another “category of understanding”, preferred above communication.

Overall, this anniversary double special issue is a valuable contribution reopening the debate at the highest scholar standards on the methodological limits and terminological ambiguities of communication. The *Dossier* is assumed by the new editorial team of the journal “*Politiques de communication*” under the coordination of Benjamin Ferron (University of Paris-East Créteil) and Julie Sedel (University of Strasbourg). I wish them a long and winning run in this tumultuous scholarly adventure.

VALENTINA PRICOPIE⁵

⁵ Senior researcher 1st degree, Social Europe Research Laboratory, Institute of Sociology, Romania, e-mail: valpricopie@gmail.com

