Editorial

Tom Häussler, University of Bern, Institute of Communication and Media Studies*

Sébastien Salerno, University of Geneva, Medi@LAB

*Corresponding author: thomas.haeussler@ikmb.unibe.ch

Dear Reader,

This is the second issue of *Studies in Communication Sciences* (SComS) as a full open access journal at our new home (www.scoms.ch). Open access in the “platinum” version endorsed by SComS is most readily associated with the benefits it has for authors in making their work accessible to a global audience without any delay and without incurring any costs. At the same time, open access allows journals such as SComS to operate more independently of commercial interests, to exert greater control over their content and the production process, and to realize their visions of an academic journal.

For us, this means that we aim to develop SComS into a platform that integrates all of the issues published since the journal's inception, and we are therefore constantly updating our archive by digitizing the back issues with the goal of making the articles accessible and searchable. For the future, the greater editorial flexibility means that we will try out new formats in some of the coming issues, for instance by pairing audio-visual content such as interviews with original research articles on a common theme. In this way, we take advantage of the possibilities offered to academic publishing in a digital age, and can add context and commentary to traditional communication scholarship.

Our publishing year ends with this second issue, and we would like to take the opportunity to thank all those who have contributed to SComS over the past twelve months: the authors and reviewers for their creativity and rigor, the Università della Svizzera Italiana and the Swiss Academy of Humanities and Social Sciences for their financial and institutional support, the Hauptbibliothek Open Publishing Environment (HOPE) and Seismo for their

management of the review and production process, and in particular Philipp Bachmann for an outstanding effort in getting SComS started as an open access journal.

True to its spirit and to the nature of communication research, this issue of SComS offers a wide variety of topics, theoretical perspectives and methodological approaches that characterize our discipline.

A question of never-failing interest to scientists is the gap between considerations based on robust scientific studies and opinions based on anecdotal facts. Auste Valinciute explores this gap by examining the state of science communication in Lithuania. The author feels that Lithuania's suitability as a case study lies in, among other elements, the fact that science communication is an emerging discipline there and that it offers a non-Western perspective. Drawing on a scoping study of Lithuanian scientific literature, the author reports that 88 articles were published between 2000 and 2010, mostly on audiences and theoretical research. The quantity of articles on science communication rose over the following decade. These studies opted for a qualitative approach in 40% of cases, with 80% written in Lithuanian.

Lijiang Shen, Suyeon Seung, Kristin K. Andersen, and Demetria McNeal investigate the psychological mechanisms behind the persuasive effects of narrative communication. They integrate different perspectives and thereby arrive at a model that includes two main antecedent dimensions – the perceived realism of a narrative and the similarity individuals perceive between themselves and the characters depicted – and several mediating factors, which so far have been treated separately. Integrating these factors in a structural equation model allows the authors to gauge their individual contributions

vis-à-vis each other. Using entertainment formats that focus on sexual health, the authors are able to show that both realism and similarity increase narrative engagement, while the results for the mediating factors do not uniformly point in the same direction and some yield no significant effects at all.

In their article, Mariska Kleemans, Paul G. J. Hendriks Vettehen, Johannes W. J. Beentjes and Rob Eisinga raise the question of the quality of television news programmes and its influence on audiences. The researchers have developed a methodological protocol consisting of getting television viewers to watch four sensationalist and non-sensationalist stories and gathering their perceptions immediately afterwards. A total of 288 individuals (51.4% women) with a high level of education took part in the study, which produced some interesting results on the effects of sensationalist stories on respondents' perceptions of news performance. The results relating to the age variable are particularly interesting. In summary, this Dutch study suggests that sensationalist stories covered on television news programmes provide an additional explanation of television viewers' lowered perceptions of news performance.

Andrea Mangani and Elisa Tizzoni examine the media's "inertial bias", that is, their tendency to persist with certain patterns in their coverage in terms of news selection and tonality, despite changing circumstances. Taking the Expo in Milan in 2015 as the empirical backdrop for their analysis, they show that the two most important Italian newspapers, *la Repubblica* and *Corriere della Sera*, clearly allotted more space to larger countries in their coverage than to smaller ones, although the media's inertial bias was not significantly at work in how it covered rich and poor countries. At the same time, both large and rich countries had an edge over small and poor countries as they profited from a positive slant in the media's reports.

At a time marked by an increasing number of studies on audience reception of violent images, Melanie Verhovnik chose to research how journalists react

to traumatic experiences, such as traffic accidents, serious crime and war scenes. Based on 30 interviews with German journalists between 2013 and 2014, the author highlights the legal (what are journalists allowed to do?) and practical (will my camera operator get through this?) difficulties journalists face. She then identifies the strategies they adopt to withstand the psychological and physical damage caused by these traumatic experiences. The author also explores journalists' perceptions in terms of their journalistic handling of crisis situations and how such situations have transformed the way they work. The author argues for increased efforts to raise the awareness of journalists likely to experience traumatic situations when reporting.

Steffen Kolb and Mathias Oertel complete the general section with their study on press subsidies. Comparing the different systems employed in Switzerland, Belgium, Austria, the Republic of Ireland, and Germany, they investigate whether the current practices of these countries to counteract the existing concentration trends in the press market actually yield the desired effects. The authors find that there is no simple correlation between the amount of press subsidy and the diversity of the press market: it is neither the case that an increase in subsidies is automatically accompanied by a growing diversity, nor that cuts invariably lead to greater concentration. We can read their results also as an implicit call to policy makers to rethink their approaches to supporting a diverse press market – the indispensable prerequisite of any vibrant democracy.

The issue concludes with two book reviews and two conference reports.

In his review of Matthias Zehnder's book, *Die Aufmerksamkeitsfalle. Wie Medien zu Populismus führen* [*The Attention Trap. How the Media Lead to Populism*] (2017, Zytglogge, 120 pages), Philipp Bachmann draws attention to the transformation in news media content as well as its effect on political life and, by extension, democracy in Switzerland. A former editor of *Coopération* then *bz Basel / bz Basellandschaftliche Zeitung*, Zehnder describes the

slippery slope taken by our democratic system. Bachmann suggests that the essay is particularly commendable in reminding us of the ties that exist between the media and populism, and of the need to “acquire new instincts and new behaviors” in order to survive in the information society.

Mark Epstein, Fulvio Orsitto and Andrea Righi's book, *TOTALitarian ARTs: The Visual Arts, Fascism(s) and Mass-society* (2017, Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 470 pages) explores the relationship between totalitarianism and art. This relationship is observed over several periods (different phases of the 20th century and the 2000s) and geographical areas (Europe, USA and Latin America). In his review, Stefano Bragato stresses the fluidity of totalitarianism and its capacity to adapt. Totalitarianism entails domination of the masses by an elite by means of physical coercion, but also by imposing a specific system of values as well as abolishing all public conscience, as is the case in modern Western mass society. In addition to providing a general and specific overview of totalitarianism, the work has the great merit of constructing a theoretical framework for understanding – and reflecting on – the crypto-totalitarian nature of contemporary Western society.

Gian Hernandez reports on the conference organised by Anita Auer and Jennifer Thorburn, which took place 4-6 May 2017 at the University of Lausanne: *Approaches to Migration, Language, and Identity*. The conference began by looking at how identities are formed, especially in relation to media representations. A whole range of presentations examined how texts, particularly literary texts, explain social phenomena in the context of migration. The concept of “translanguaging” underpinned many of the thematic foci. Gian Hernandez concludes his report with a reference to migration specialist Janine Dahinden, who believes that contemporary scholars must move away from problematizing the migrant population by de facto assigning it within the unit of analysis.

Finally, Letizia Volpin, Klara Skogmyr Marian, Fabienne Gfeller, Sylvia Gonzalez, and Adrian Bangerter report extensively

on the “Young Researchers Conference of the Center for Research on Social Interactions”, which took place 16-17 February 2017 at the University of Neuchâtel. Given that social interaction is a central concept in different academic disciplines such as linguistics, biology, and psychology, the conference gave PhD students the opportunity to present and discuss their work in an interdisciplinary environment. The participants' work touched on such diverse aspects as the affective dimensions of social interaction, its role in learning processes, or how it is embedded in multilingual contexts, and the conference helped to further cross-disciplinary dialogue and collaborations.

We hope you will enjoy reading the contributions of this issue.