

## Comment

### JCOM — FIVE YEARS IN THE FUTURE

## Community and research

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*ABSTRACT: JCOM is eleven years old, and this is certainly a reason to celebrate. The journal has been a tribune where we could observe how geographical and institutional frontiers of science communication (SC) have been expanded. As open access publication, JCOM has played a key important role to diffuse and make visible the research results for all. This is relevant for many institutions and researchers in Latin America due to the difficulties for paying to access to the papers published by the international scientific journals. The journal has made a relevant contribution to consolidation of the field of SC. Thinking on the future, JCOM may stimulate a global debate on theoretical perspectives about SC, and devote special issues to describe different regional contexts (India and East Asia; Latin America; Africa; or East Europe. The journal also may promote papers, special issues or specific discussions on SC and social theory.*

Time goes by so fast that often we do not repair in some relevant events. JCOM is eleven years old, and this is certainly a reason to celebrate. The Journal has been observing and documenting tendencies that affect the field of contemporary science communication (SC). JCOM means a platform where we can observe how the field is expanding across institutional and geographical frontiers. The state of the art shows an academic field in progress of consolidation and, consequently, searching for its own identity. I think JCOM has strengthened the needed channels for the construction of such a “collective identity” (the recent released of the Journal of Scientific Temper should be read in the same sense). It has also allowed documenting a good amount of intellectual production on communication and public understanding of science (PUS) in many different parts of the world.

The Journal, and consequently at the same time the field of SC, should also be examined under the microscope of the reconfigurations of practices and institutional and epistemic values of science. SC co-evolves with science. So, the transformations in science also have meant reconfigurations of practices and values in science communication. However, the new patterns of public communication do not only affects science institutions but mass media, industries and private corporations, non-profit institutions or organized citizen groups. Our research field should focus more

intensively on mapping and building a theoretical framework to better interpret the new tendencies and explain science communication practices in different contexts. I mean, without denying the existence of a “global communication of science” based on shared values (academic values), science communication could also be interpreted as a dependent function of the socio-technical system. Therefore, there may be interesting differences among regions or countries. On one hand, think about science communication within the framework of a socio-technical system oriented to innovation and economy. On the other hand, think on the same practices in a more academic and traditional environment. SC could be expressed in certain circumstances in a quite different way in China, US, Germany and Colombia or Argentina and Brazil. Nonetheless, this is a hypothesis that requires to be contrasted by comparative empirical research or, at least, by meta-analysis on the available documentation. JCOM may stimulate a global debate on these theoretical and empirical challenges. Special issues might be devoted to SC around the world: what happens in India and East Asia; what occurs in Latin America or Africa; or the situation in East Europe.

But I think it is not only a matter of linking practice with theory. SC is a novel and heterogeneous field, and in many senses dependent on what happens in STS studies yet. These are very good conditions which make the field be really interesting and stimulating. They allowed an incredible proliferation of empirical research on communication and PUS. There are consolidated journals, a good amount of collective books published recently, and international congress and meeting are organized regularly. Nevertheless, I believe often the empirical evidences, or the theoretical assumptions, appear to be more normative than analytical. This is not a bad news in itself (despite that Bourdieu made us a clear warning about the consequences of this kind of procedure). But we should acknowledge that the autonomy of an academic field requires fortifying the theoretical perspective through models, concepts, empirical indicators or taxonomies that help research to understand the complex social reality. In that sense, I feel that SC field should be more closely connected with mass media theories, cultural studies and the sociology of communication. By doing this, we would meet with some old — but necessary — debates in social theory. Just to mention one of them: how to explain the articulation between agency and structure? In other terms, how to describe satisfactorily the individual practices? (for instance, why groups or individual scientists communicate to society?); and, at the same time, how structural conditions facilitate or hinder human agency (for instance, the effects of institutional programs or incentive for communicate practice). I think that JCOM may promote papers, special issues or specific discussions on the consequences of thinking about SC and social theory.

I would not like to end this comment without remarking the valuable effort made by the editors during these five years. An open access journal implies a collective task based on collaborative practices. In times where the debate on open access is at stake, I want to say JCOM has played a key role to diffuse and make visible the research results for all. This is not a trivial matter for the developing world. For many institutions and

researchers in the Latin American countries there is no way (or many difficulties) of paying to access to the papers published by the international scientific journals. This is particularly true in the case of an emergent field due to that many times researchers have no unambiguous or sufficient institutional supports.

Eleven years is just the beginning. But this has been a very promissory commencement. Researchers will continue sending papers to be reviewed because the journal has just become part of our shared tradition. Happy birthday to JCOM! Cheers!

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