

The Manifesto Series

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Silvio Waisbord, *The Communication Manifesto*

Silvio Waisbord

The Communication Manifesto

polity

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a better informed and more egalitarian and tolerant world.

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Introduction

Calls for public scholarship have been frequent in the social sciences and the humanities in recent years. Influential voices across the disciplines have urged colleagues to utilize their expertise for the betterment of society and warned about the problems of producing knowledge exclusively for fellow academics (Burawoy, 2005; Calhoun, 2004; Oakes, 2018). Communication scholars, too, have made similar appeals to contribute to society, social justice, and communication professions (Dempsey et al., 2011; Rosen, 1995). These appeals reflect two issues. One is the recognition that not enough is done to make academic knowledge socially significant and impactful: to help societies understand and address a host of problems by tapping into accumulated knowledge (Bastow, Dunleavy & Tinkler, 2014; Hanemayer & Schneider, 2015). The other

issue is growing concerns about the (ir)relevance of academic disciplines and knowledge (Flinders, 2013; Hoffman, 2016; Peters, Pierre & Stoker, 2014) in society at large. If scholars do not take the question of social relevance seriously, academic scholarship runs the risk of remaining important for scholars, but unrecognized or, worse, dismissed by society.

Calls for public scholarship have sparked much conversation and soul-searching, as reflected in the themes of scores of panels and publications. It seems that virtually everyone believes public scholarship matters. It is hard to imagine anyone would say otherwise. I haven't heard anyone proudly affirming in a big public forum: "Stick to conventional scholarship and forget society or contributing to the social good." There are no two neatly defined, warring camps about public scholarship: those in favor and their opponents entangled in a battle over the soul and the purpose of academe (see Mulholland, 2015). Public scholarship is generally praised without much vocal opposition. It is unclear, however, whether rousing calls for action have resulted in large-scale, concrete, and sustainable actions that have turned public scholarship into a central aspect of academia. The irony should not be overlooked: without effective action, calls for public scholarship

may generate additional scholarship, in the form of publications, courses, and symposia, but the actual impact on society may be negligible.

In this book, I make a call for public scholarship in communication studies with the hope of contributing ideas to conversations and actions. Academics should contribute to society in more ways than by producing knowledge and exchanging ideas with students and fellow scholars. *Contra* conservative thinkers, who have generally bemoaned the public role of intellectuals, I believe communication scholars make important, unique contributions to public life. By bringing a wide range of expertise and skills, they collaborate with actors and communities in efforts to improve public life and make societies more tolerant, informed, empathetic, egalitarian. Their actions reflect a concern with addressing real-world problems rather than only dealing with typical scholarly questions about theories, methodologies, arguments, and so on. They represent a gradual shift in the gravitational center of scholarship to highlight what Rasmus Nielsen (2018, p. 147) calls "context-driven, problem-focused, and interdisciplinary forms of knowledge production." So what is needed is to link knowledge production with practice by understanding the causes of communication and social problems in specific

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settings, identifying possible solutions, producing evidence-based analysis and recommendations, and supporting collective competencies and actions.

The vision of public scholarship presented here differs from conventional notions that believe interventions beyond academia are limited to the models of the public intellectual and the scholar-activist. These models, I argue, are two possibilities among a range of possible performative and normative positions scholars take. The model of the public intellectual is linked to the view that scholars are members of the "republic/men of letters" who impart wisdom and guidance to elites and the masses – those who, in the words of Mannheim (1936, pp. 142–143), "provide an interpretation of the world ... in what otherwise would be a pitch-black night." Even if some scholars fit this model, as they make forays into the news media, public scholarship is not synonymous with "public intellectualism." The latter has analytical and normative problems for comprehending the multiple connections between communication studies, public life, and social justice. The model of the scholar-activist is also only one option for public scholarship. Just as there is no single model of scholarship in communication studies, public scholarship also takes different shapes: community-embedded scholars,

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armchair activists, expert contributors, part-time advocates, long-distance sympathizers, prominent talking heads, pugnacious militants, experienced practitioners, committed scientists. Hopefully, this book will contribute to reshaping the way we view public scholarship.

I believe a communication approach sensitive to the plurality of spaces, publics, and positions linking academia and society is necessary to broaden understandings of public scholarship. We should not espouse a media-centric understanding of public scholarship. The critique of media-centric analysis reminds us that communication continues to take place in everyday spaces where social and political life and scholarship happen. In media-obsessed, celebrity-struck societies, oftentimes scholars are also similarly in awe of intellectual marquee names with a regular media presence. We should not equate public scholarship with media appearances. Nor should we think that it only takes place in the public spaces of street activism: rallies, marches, teach-ins, and barricades. We need to acknowledge that it happens in a range of arenas: schools, community centers, government offices, civic organizations, radio stations, zines, newsrooms, and workplaces.

I also hope the book informs debates about public scholarship in communication studies and

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developing concrete actions in support of public scholars. I feel that debates often take place among scholars who already believe public scholarship matters: communities of knowledge defined by long-standing collaborations with governments and civic organizations, activist stands, and/or particular ideological and theoretical convictions. As important as they are, we need to reach a wider public within and outside communication studies. We need to raise awareness, spark discussion, and promote changes among the unaware, the uninformed, the misinformed, and the skeptics. Otherwise, public scholarship may remain a thematic priority among only a slice of communication scholars. Many colleagues (especially junior scholars), with spirited conviction and supported by fellow travelers, realize that public scholarship is widely praised but not solidly supported by all universities. They quickly find out that it presents many challenges. Building relations with non-academic actors, going through many bureaucratic hoops to get approval by universities and partners, and juggling multiple demands are time-consuming activities. Moving to action is not so simple, given the tensions between high-minded praise for public scholarship and the customary pressures of scholarship, in-group support, and

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lack of attention (or, worse, punishment) from university administrations and colleagues.

Finally, I intend to offer ideas about possible types of scholarship that could be helpful for doctoral students and junior scholars. Every decision about scholarship is political. It signals our choices about how we want to intervene in public. Choices are explicit or implicit responses to the question "What can we do with communication studies?" To mention a few options: spread civic knowledge; help people cope with personal and social challenges; foster citizenship and democratic communication practices; empower people; offer tools to live healthier lives; help organizations make better decisions and be more inclusive; give visibility to silenced voices; stimulate critical consciousness; and tackle a host of social problems – from loneliness to inequality.

Positions and decisions about public scholarship are entangled with a host of critical issues: the purpose and the politics of scholarship; university expectations, opportunities, and rewards; academic careers; academic cultures; life trajectories and personal/professional identities; situational politics; and citizenship commitments and conditions. These issues inevitably shape our decisions about who we want to be as scholars and why we produce

knowledge. They underpin the way we resolve multiple considerations, including expectations, constraints, incentives, opportunities, risks, and perceptions. In the end, how we deftly navigate academic life shapes the kind of (public) scholar we want to be.

With this question in mind, I examine a range of public interventions by communication scholars in different settings and areas of expertise. I do not intend to offer a comprehensive survey of the global landscape of communication studies – a virtually impossible task. Instead, my goals are more modest: to rethink contemporary forms of public scholarship (Chapter 1); to examine the purpose (Chapter 2), positions (Chapter 3), and practices (Chapter 4) of public scholarship by considering selected examples; and to submit proposals for action (Chapter 5), with the hope that they could serve as a springboard for conversations, reflection, and interventions.

1

Public Scholarship

What is public scholarship?

When I mentioned I was writing a book about public scholarship in communication studies, colleagues responded with a volley of concepts: action-oriented, action research, activist, advocacy, applied, committed, community-based, engaged, political scholarship, and public intellectualism. They were not wrong. Those concepts indicate various forms of public interventions, actions, and principles. They make a conceptual alphabet soup that refers to public scholarship. Public scholarship, however, is broader than those concepts. It is an umbrella term that covers scholars' engagement with publics beyond academia. Cleaning up conceptual brushes will help to clarify the meaning of public scholarship.

Public scholarship may be activist (Frey & Palmer, 2017) or advocacy depending on the motivations and the positions chosen by individual scholars or demanded by non-academic actors and partners, a topic to which I return below. Both concepts refer to taking specific, normative positions vis-à-vis any possible public issue: from improving digital access to strengthening news literacy skills. Yet not all public scholarship necessarily takes open normative positions in favor of certain ideals. Scholars also participate in the public sphere as scientific experts and accomplished practitioners who do not take open political stands on public issues. They passionately stick to their calling and expertise: designing surveys, reporting stories, creating storyboards, teaching code, leaving personal politics out.

Public scholarship can be “committed” and “community-oriented,” but the meaning of these concepts is not immediately clear. Scholars can be “committed” to various causes and principles – from science to socialism – even within the confines of academic scholarship. Likewise, scholarship can be oriented to different types of communities defined by geography, race, belief, practice, and so on. Community, a perennially ambivalent concept and normative ideal, can be virtuous or toxic,

democratic or authoritarian. You may seek refuge in communities or run away from them.

Public scholarship can be “action research” and “applied” forms of knowledge, but it is not necessarily so. Communication scholars may intervene in other capacities that do not always involve research or applied competencies in the conventional senses. They also participate in various roles: trainers, advisors, strategists, community mobilizers, and so on.

Political scholarship is close to public scholarship, in the sense that the word “political,” as Roland Barthes (1972, pp. 172–173) put it, describes “the whole of human relations in their real, social structure, in their power of making the world.” Understood as denominating the realm of the public, “political” is another name for public scholarship, without necessarily being strictly partisan or allied with specific social forces. Also, one could reasonably argue that any type of scholarship is political because it implicitly or deliberately implies taking a position in the world about questions and problems, the purpose and the uses of knowledge, and the linkages between scholarly production and society.

Public intellectualism and its problems

"Public intellectualism," a concept with a rich tradition in the history of ideas and the sociology of intellectuals, deserves lengthier attention for it has been the most common name for "public scholarship." Public intellectuals are, in Russell Jacoby's (1987, p. 5) definition, "writers and thinkers who address a general and educated audience." On both sides of the North Atlantic, the Mount Rushmore of public intellectuals of the past half-century features a list of (mostly male and white) luminaries. An incomplete, arbitrary list includes Isaiah Berlin, Allan Bloom, Judith Butler, Manuel Castells, Noam Chomsky, Ta Nehisi Coates, Richard Dawkins, Michael Eric Dyson, Niall Ferguson, Henry Louis Gates, Jr., Anthony Giddens, Germaine Greer, Stuart Hall, Bernard Henri-Lévy, Naomi Klein, Paul Krugman, Marshall McLuhan, Steven Pinker, Bertrand Russell, Jeffrey Sachs, Edward Said, Jean-Paul Sartre, Susan Sontag, Cass Sunstein, Cornel West, Howard Zinn, and Slavoj Žižek.

Certainly, those in this motley crew of names have no obvious commonalities, other than being well-known people, with recognizable public presence as (mostly media) commentators on important

issues of the day, and identified with various political, social, and cultural causes. "Public intellectuals" are individuals with academic credentials and/or positions who have a regular presence in the public, primarily in the news media as interviewees, op-ed contributors, and sources of news quotes. Some occasionally make movie cameos and feature in documentaries, and most regularly give presentations on lecture circuits and at book fairs. Some rub elbows with political and economic elites, with whom they interact in different capacities, and join in high-profile panels and meetings. Others are stellar figures of ideological positions, contemporary science, public campaigns, government policies, and so on. Some are well-known dissidents or spokespersons identified with struggles against various forms of discrimination and oppression. They rub against the establishment: they are present-day incarnations of the intellectual *maudit* who exercises the right to use public reason against power. Many are known for speaking about their own particular academic expertise in a given field as well as a broad range of contemporary issues: nuclear politics, geopolitics, cultural crisis, development, globalization, war and conflict, nationalism.

Public intellectualism is different from public scholarship. It does not capture the multifaceted

forms in which academics engage with publics. It is embedded in outdated and limited notions of publicity that do not capture multiple actions and sites in the public sphere, and the places of ideas in contemporary societies. The notion of "public" in "public intellectual" is tied to the old media order: a hierarchical, pyramidal structure which a few intellectuals could access to share their expertise and views about the world. Public intellectualism is basically mediated presence. It is grounded in a time when mass publicity basically meant media presence. As the central gatekeeper of public life, "the media" determined which ideas and intellectuals were public. Because the public was assimilated to "media publics," public intellectuals were individuals who regularly appeared on the media (Posner, 2002). This order has collapsed largely owing to the unprecedented changes brought about by the digital revolution, namely the proliferation of public platforms and new forms of communication and information flows and action.

Another problem is that "public intellectual" is loaded with assumptions about a specific kind of publicity: media appearances. However, even if massive publicity in contemporary societies remains strongly tied to media presence, appearances in legacy news and digital platforms are only one

manifestation of public scholarship. We shouldn't make public intellectualism synonymous with media appearances. Even if "deep mediatization" (Couldry & Hepp, 2016) is a defining feature of contemporary societies, plenty of public scholarship takes place beyond the media. Communication scholars engage in public scholarship even if they do not have a prominent presence in the mainstream media, are go-to names for festival organizers, fill lecture halls, offer wisdom on public matters, or work with political actors: elites, think tanks, activists, or insurgents. Just as there is no media-centric public, publicity, and public sphere anymore (if there ever was), media-centric public intellectualism is inadequate to capture the multiple forms and spaces of public scholarship.

Another problem is that public intellectualism endorses a limited form of knowledge and competencies. It is attached to the value of the written word and the ability to articulate positions verbally in front of large audiences. Jean-Paul Sartre, an emblematic example of twentieth-century public intellectualism in the West, defined it as the politically committed writer turning words into actions. Public intellectuals possess admirable written and verbal skills (and charisma, in some cases) that make their media presence appealing, captivating, and/or

popular. Furthermore, they reflect the celebration of public knowledge, the star system of the public dissemination of ideas: a top-down system of idea production based on individual rather than collective forms of knowledge sharing.

In summary, the notion of public intellectualism is fraught with analytical and normative problems: it is outdated at a time of profound redefinition of the media and the public sphere; it is narrowly associated with skills dear to traditional scholarship; and it is premised on an individual-centered, hierarchical model of knowledge production and dissemination.

Public scholarship as public connections

So what is public scholarship? Aren't essential acts of scholarship, such as teaching, writing, and, obviously, publishing, ways to make knowledge public? Isn't all scholarship public insofar as it takes place in public arenas: classrooms, journals, conferences?

Understanding public scholarship requires clarifying the meaning of "public": a central yet perennially ambiguous concept for communication studies and other fields of inquiry in the social sciences and the humanities. No single definition

adequately captures the multiple approaches to the study of "public." Library shelves are packed with literature that discusses "public" and adjacent concepts: publicity, public sphere, the public, public space, public media.

Although I cannot do justice to this rich and open debate within the space of this book, here I identify "public" with connecting individuals, institutions, and ideas. To make public is to connect with others, as Hannah Arendt (1958) argued. Public is the essence of the social, a way to foster social bonds and recognition with and by others; it is the construction of different communities. To make public means to make visible: to enlarge the sphere of action, to make issues common, to expose ideas to others. In contrast, privacy is about disconnection: being left alone, withdrawing into personal spaces, shutting others off, limiting the possibilities for external view and scrutiny. Being private means to be protected from intrusive, external gaze: to reduce, curb, and shut off engagement with the public.

From this perspective, I define public scholarship as the engagement of scholars with non-academic publics. It entails the diversification of knowledge and the amplification of the reach of intellectual production. It raises the visibility of ideas and produces different forms of knowledge that do not always

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fit conventional academic requirements: scientific rigor, theoretical grounding, data-driven, original contributions to the state of the art. It results in increased exposure of various forms of expression among various publics. Whereas scholarship is primarily concerned with making knowledge public among scholars, public scholarship is making ideas public among myriad publics.

Just like public life, public scholarship builds connections with and through institutions: the spaces where ideas become public. Theorists of public life (Habermas, 1989) and public communication (Garnham, 1990) have underscored the significance of the institutional architecture that sustains "the public." The abstract idea of the public comes into existence in specific spaces: eighteenth-century coffeehouses and salons, nineteenth-century newspapers and union halls, twentieth-century public squares and broadcasts, and twenty-first-century social media. Just as publics congregate in physical and virtual spaces, spaces bring publics into existence. They are sites for establishing and cultivating connections. They build publics defined by legal status, nationality, market position, social markers, collective identities.

Scholarship and public scholarship operate in different institutional spheres. Scholarship primarily

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takes place in academic institutions: universities, professional associations, journals, books. Although it also takes places in virtual networks set up for research and teaching collaboration and exchange, belonging to universities and counting on a functional institutional infrastructure are fundamental aspects of academic life. Scholarship suffers when external forces, such as commercial imperatives, legal restrictions, and political pressures, unduly influence academic institutions.

In contrast, public scholarship requires expanding the institutional scope and the publics of academic work. It demands establishing connections with myriad institutions: the media, political parties, government agencies, international bodies, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), activists' groups. "Going public" refers to taking one's work beyond academic spaces by making ideas, findings, and expertise visible among various publics in different sites. Doing public scholarship entails different ways of engaging with publics. It demands going beyond the traditional publics of academic work: colleagues, students, manuscript and proposal reviewers, editors (as well as dear loved ones who listen to us with unpredictable, uneven levels of interest). It also includes bringing publics into academic spaces to discuss common interests

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and produce relevant knowledge with practical implications.*

Public scholarship is as multifaceted as the public and public spaces. It takes place in many spaces in the institutional infrastructure of the public sphere: community associations, unions, media collectives, media, NGOs, government agencies, research institutions, foundations, schools. It is generally a collective enterprise that involves working with other actors and institutions to pursue common goals. It comprises disaggregated forms and spaces in the public sphere. Scholars build different kinds of connections with publics depending on personal skills and competencies as well as institutional opportunities. There is no single path to go public given multiple options: actors, spaces, and goals.

Public scholarship demands skills beyond writing and speaking, which are central to academic scholarship. Communication researchers who work with various publics have many abilities: writing scripts; shooting, producing, and editing video; providing counsel; moderating conversations; collecting and analyzing data; developing curricula and teaching;

* I am indebted to Patricia Román-Velázquez for raising this issue during our conversations.

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fund-raising; offering recommendations. They inform, advocate, educate, discuss ideas, learn, lend expertise, agitate, criticize, and share their research and views. They participate in several roles: researchers, expert witnesses, translators, trainers, facilitators.

Public scholarship foregrounds collective, participatory forms of knowledge production and sharing. It is not narrowly identified with scholars who impart knowledge. Instead, scholars collaborate with multiple actors around specific problems and solutions. There is no single blueprint, set of competencies, and set of expectations in the way one thinks about specific forms of public scholarship, such as "action research" and "committed."

Public scholarship is inspired by myriad political, ideological, and ethical premises and objectives. It should not be narrowly identified with particular goals or ideological positions. Public scholarship may foster democracy by building communities of practice and knowledge, bring out voices, and activate citizenship. It is linked to a range of political and civic organizations: unions, churches, communities, political parties, social movements. It works to support the goals of government agencies to pursue the public good or particular interests. It partners with international agencies in support of

human rights: legal, social, civic. It is driven to gain public recognition and bolster individual presence.

In sum, public scholarship takes different forms. It makes connections with publics in society. It seeks publicity for different reasons: to bring issues to public attention, to persuade policy-makers and citizens, to conduct situation diagnosis, to identify solutions to social problems, to promote social change, and to spread ideas.

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The purpose of academic scholarship is seemingly clear, at least for scholars. We produce knowledge to test theories and arguments, to add novel insights to a body of intellectual work, to educate students, to inform teaching with fresh studies, to upend conventional wisdom, to understand real-world problems better.

In contrast, the goal of public scholarship is less obvious. There are many reasons why scholars choose to be active outside academe.

Public scholarship can be inspired by the desire to do good with and for others – to make personal contributions to society. It is driven by the will to champion issues that are personally relevant, to leave public testimony of ideas and sentiments unconstrained by the conventions of academic publishing, to spread the reach of one's

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work, and to maximize opportunities for public expression.

Moreover, partnerships with governments and the private sector may bring research funding opportunities to scholars and universities.

In many countries, public scholarship is a common strategy out of necessity to bring in supplemental income. Labor precarity and meager pay push scholars to seek additional sources of income from consulting, teaching, and advising governments, unions, media companies, NGOs, and the private sector, while they hold university positions.

Public scholarship is also driven by self-promotion: personal interest in boosting one's reputation. It is a narcissistic act to build and maintain public recognition, a rather popular and sought-after commodity at this time of the "promotional intellectual" (Williams, 2018). Building a personal, public brand is common and even encouraged by universities, publishers, friends, and peer pressure. Academics are certainly not immune to the politics of branding in the promotional society (Marwick, 2013).

Rarely does a single reason drive public scholarship. Just as pure egoism and the hope of improving society inspire writing, as George Orwell (1968) dryly observed in his classic essay "Why I Write," the motivation to engage with non-academic

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publics may be either prosaic or altruistic. Public scholarship might be inspired by myriad reasons: curiosity about knotty communication and social problems; identification with the plight of one's in-group; empathy and solidarity with out-groups; self-advancement; self-admiration; cosmopolitan consciousness; broad ethical, religious, and/or political commitments.

Regardless of the driving factor – from healthy narcissism to indefatigable commitment to citizens in need – public scholarship should contribute to making societies more humane, egalitarian, democratic, tolerant, rational, other-oriented, and emphatic.

Public scholarship in communication studies needs to help address two sets of challenges in contemporary societies: communication problems such as misinformation, prejudice, hatred, and exclusivist identities that undermine democratic societies grounded in tolerance, solidarity, and social justice; and the communication dimensions of a host of social problems that result from the politics of exploitation, greed, violence, and exclusion. Confronting both communication and social problems is particularly urgent amid troubling conditions in contemporary societies.

What communication problems? Here I understand communication broadly, as a post-discipline

that comprises various areas of expertise in the areas of information, persuasion, dialogue, and sense-making at multiple levels: from the individual to the system (Waisbord, 2019). A comprehensive, catholic notion of communication is grounded in the ubiquity of communication processes and the impossibility of understanding social life without communication. To paraphrase Ludwig Wittgenstein's idea of culture: communication is just there; it's what we do.

We are currently experiencing a multifaceted backlash against decades-long advances in the global expansion of the human rights of groups identified by gender, sexuality, race, ethnicity, political views, religion, and legal condition. It is undeniable that important, uneven advances were made in the past half-century, particularly in the legal recognition of human rights, even if concrete actions fell short and structural inequalities widened. Yet peddlers of fear, hate, and ignorance have shrewdly exploited social divides, anxieties, and narrow-mindedness to mobilize against rights-based policies and movements pushing for social equality and legal recognition. They have injected new energies into the multiple facets of political reaction: nationalism, xenophobia, racism, homophobia, misogyny.

Public scholarship connects communication

scholars with publics in their efforts to understand and resolve communication and social problems.

The challenges of public communication

Public communication in contemporary societies suffers from numerous problems.

When multiple interests and identities are broken up, scattered, pushed away from each other, societies exhibit troubling communication fractures in expressions of incivility, intolerance, prejudice, and misplaced fears. Communication rifts breed the politics of exclusion, hatred, and distrust, which are contrary to democratic, collective understanding and reasoning.

Public communication is endangered when censorship, in its multiple forms, suppresses dissident voices – when powerful actors and ordinary citizens team up to harass, persecute, stigmatize, and silence others. Suppressing the expression of others contradicts fundamental rights and deprives everyone of the opportunity to listen to different, inconvenient opinions.

Public communication is threatened when propaganda and dis/misinformation are pervasive – when governments allied with corporations deliberately

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misinform citizens to perpetuate elites in power, to disguise the real motivations of rulers, and to trick citizens into believing fictions. Propaganda has taken a different shape lately as ordinary citizens willingly participate in daily, elaborate disinformation campaigns or unwillingly reproduce absolute falsehoods.

Public communication suffers when demagogues continually spread a toxic rhetoric of lies, exaggerations, and falsehood, repeated by media acolytes who march in lockstep with actual and potential dictators. Public communication suffers when crowds believe demagogues who use self-serving lies and platitudes to weaponize the crooked timber of humanity, and who are vehemently hostile to citizens and institutions driven to check, criticize, and hold power accountable.

Public communication is limited when media and industrial corporations wield uncontrolled power over offline and online environments. They make decisions that affect the opportunities for citizens to express their ideas, have access to information, protect their privacy, engage with others at the expense of basic human rights: knowledge, privacy, transparency. Furthermore, digital life has deepened past communication problems as anti-democratic actors find new ways to perpetuate intolerance, misinfor-

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mation, falsehoods, and power abuses. Moreover, as well as providing plentiful opportunities for bullying, harassment, surveillance, and invasion of privacy, it has generated novel forms of anti-social behavior such as trolling and doxing.

These problems of public communication have become defining features of contemporary digital societies. Some problems involve large, powerful actors engaging in anti-democratic behavior. The consequences of the unbounded power of states and corporations are apparent. Governments have colluded with corporations to monitor citizens and to violate individual privacy. Internet giants such as Facebook and Google exercise arbitrary, unaccountable censorship of content and cozy up to authoritarian governments to further corporate goals devoid of any relevance to democracy or respect for fundamental human rights.

Thus, three decades into the revolution brought about by the World Wide Web, it is undeniable that the digital society has not magically solved longstanding communication problems, as many boldly predicted. In fact, it has brought in new challenges to public life and exacerbated old ones. Rosy social forecasts concocted by Silicon Valley and its allies during the early days of the Internet now sound hollow and self-serving. Their enthusiastic visions

of a global Shangri-La made possible by digitalization have fallen flat in the face of the dark corners of digital life. Communication technology is not necessarily the solution to communication problems. Try reading Mark Zuckerberg's 2017 "Bringing the World Closer Together" post without laughing aloud, frowning, or spitting out your coffee.

The corporate rhetorical sleight-of-hand of appropriating the mantle of freedom, creativity, and global community is apparent. Governments have been accessories to the phenomenal expansion of digital giants at the expense of the defense of democratic values: transparency, privacy, public inquiry. Sure, astute observers already knew that ahistorical and self-interested interpretations of the liberating powers of information technology were just corporate pap, thinly disguised as self-assured forecasts of a better future, and massively supported by deep advertising pockets. As the true workings of Internet giants have been exposed by a series of scandals, the mendacity of corporate techno-optimism is now, however, plainly evident. Business models organized around routine, systematic violations of privacy and fostering traffic are not quite the messianic harbingers of radiant news that we were promised.

Altogether, these communication problems amount to a formidable list of challenges for public

life. Given the complexity and the magnitude of the communication problems for public life, communication studies has much to contribute to help the public understand and act, individually and collectively. Regardless of the specific issue under scrutiny, communication scholarship should document problems, explain why they are important, and sketch out and test alternatives. The guiding principle needs to be the promotion of democratic communication grounded in public ethics. It needs to foreground dialogue across difference, fact-based collective reasoning, empathy, tolerance, repressed voices, and inclusivity. Finding ways to make accumulated knowledge and interests relevant to society at large is imperative.

How have communication scholars contributed to addressing the current challenges of public communication?

Scholars have joined activists and policy-makers in support of reforms of media and cultural environments to overturn policies that favor narrow government and corporate interests. They have collaborated to bolster media pluralism in the form of alternative, community, non-profit, and public media (Segura & Waisbord, 2016). They have advocated for policy reforms aimed at strengthening public issues and ethics: supporting Internet

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neutrality; sponsoring free software; bringing quality Internet access to specific communities; limiting media property and diversifying funding to bolster media diversity; strengthening labor laws protecting media workers; supporting adequate funding for public broadcasting (Canella, 2016; J. A. Smith, Lloyd & Pickard, 2015). To support these goals, scholars have lent their expertise in multiple ways. They have provided expert testimony in legislative bodies, produced policy briefs, conducted research, presented findings, made recommendations, participated in advocacy activities, and developed ideas for media policy literacy (Ali & Herzog, 2018; Lentz, 2014a, 2014b).

Communication scholars have also partnered with communities in the development of initiatives to support local media and local storytelling (Wright 2018), to stimulate civic engagement (Son & Ball-Rokeach, 2016), and to improve health conditions (Wilkin, 2013). Scholars have also collaborated with media producers and policy-makers to promote socially oriented content in the media. They have studied social inequalities in media representation and pushed to increase the presence of under-represented groups (S. I. Smith, Choueiti & Pieper, 2016). They have collaborated in the development and the production of news content, film

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and television scripts, documentaries, video games, and radio programs.

A growing area of public scholarship are initiatives that bring together scholars with journalists and news organizations. They have collaborated on several activities, such as documenting the state of the news industry, fostering innovative forms of reporting, conducting research of funding models and news use, and supporting the development of specific reporting competencies (Napoli, Stonbely, McCollough & Renninger, 2017). Scholars have also worked with news organizations to develop content that promotes civic behaviors and attitudes (Stroud, 2017). In the United States, several programs have been established in recent years, such as the Center for Media Engagement at the University of Texas, the Center for Cooperative Media at Montclair State University, and the News Co/Lab at Arizona State University. These initiatives generally take place in research-practice laboratories that tackle specific, concrete problems affecting journalism and the news industry. These initiatives aim to bridge gaps between academia and newsrooms by providing spaces for study and reflection on common subjects of interest. These initiatives take partnerships beyond the traditional forms of participation by individual

scholars as trainers and lecturers in journalism workshops.

Media literacy has been another important, fruitful area of intervention to address many of the challenges previously mentioned, especially with young citizens. Scholars have collaborated with governments, foundations, and NGOs in the development and implementation of programs by conducting research, developing curricula in schools, providing recommendations for implementation, and conducting program assessments (Eckert, Metzger-Rifftkin & Nurnis, 2018; Livingstone et al., 2017).

Global social problems and communication

Public scholarship in communication studies is also central for addressing myriad global social problems: social inequality, wealth concentration, war and conflict, disease, climate change, pollution, racism, misogyny, xenophobia, political persecution, sexual discrimination, forced migration, homophobia, labor exploitation, and slavery.

Undoubtedly, these problems are not simply caused by multiple social forces: turbo-charged capitalism, social hatred, nationalism, corporate greed, exploitation, and political power. However,

they are also perpetuated by communication processes. Propaganda keeps problems invisible and/or misunderstood, contributes to deflecting responsibilities and blaming the wrong factors and actors, and leads to misguided decisions and solutions. Misinformation among elites and ordinary citizens causes anti-social actions and ill-judged policies. The lack of public awareness accounts for the invisibility of social problems in the public sphere, social ignorance, and forgetfulness.

Just as they are part of the problem, communication actions are central to redressing social inequality, improving social conditions, and promoting more humane social relationships. Information helps to increase awareness about social problems through news coverage, media storytelling, and advocacy. Participation and deliberation are critical to assess causes and debate positive actions, especially in communities confronting poverty and social exclusion (Collier & Lawless, 2016). Videos and documentaries have been extensively used to spark critical reflexivity and activism (Robé, Wolfson & Funke, 2016). Media messaging and interpersonal communication in small groups, families, and communities foster social behaviors as well as empathy and solidarity. Communication actions have a vital role to play in breaking the silence and ending the

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invisibility, expressing views and demands, discussing causes, figuring out solutions, and moving to action.

Communication scholars have utilized their expertise in their work with various non-academic institutions and publics to collaborate in a range of interventions to address these problems.

Health communication scholars often collaborate with governments, NGOs, international agencies, donors, and public-private partnerships to achieve several goals: inform citizens about healthy choices; foster community participation to address social inequities; raise awareness about health problems and inequalities; destigmatize diseases and affected people; advocate for better health services and health policy reforms that result in more equitable allocation of funding and other resources. Areas of interventions include prominent issues in global public health such as tobacco control, infectious diseases, maternal and child health, eating disorders, cardiovascular diseases, cancer, and many others.

Likewise, scholars interested in communication for development and social change have long collaborated with international organizations, including technical agencies, donors, NGOs, and activists' associations. Their work covers a wide range of issues: rural development, poverty reduction, chil-

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dren's education and empowerment, women's rights, health and wellbeing, environmental sustainability, economic development, gender roles, and employment. Specific contributions show the enormous variety of communication actions used to promote social justice: communication technologies and interpersonal skills to document local problems and views; awareness-raising actions among policymakers, opinion leaders, and citizens; community journalism and storytelling to raise consciousness; community mobilization to develop critical thinking and action (Kolucki & Lennish, 2011); improving digital access to build life skills among young citizens (Livingstone et al., 2017); collaborating with media organizations to strengthen the quality of news coverage of social problems; advocating for environment rights in ecologies damaged by extractivist industries (Palma, 2015); promoting social behaviors through positive messages embedded in entertainment content; and promoting debates in post-conflict settings to spur dialogue, peace, and integration.

Communication scholars have also worked on actions to improve opportunities for and conditions of socially marginalized populations. Scholars have developed partnerships with immigrant communities to bolster urban regeneration by using a

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panoply of research and practical methodologies to stimulate participation, seek partnerships, influence policies, and assess impact (Román-Velázquez, 2014; Villanueva et al., 2017). Others have collaborated with donors and communities to reduce digital inequality among low-income families by developing grounded views of media policies informed by surveys and engaging with policy-makers (Katz & Gonzalez, 2016).

Shifting perspectives

In summary, a wealth of experiences suggest that public scholarship contributes to addressing current communication problems at the core of contemporary societies. Communication interventions help to connect groups across differences; promote dialogue in interpersonal and group settings; bolster the expression of a range of views in society in large- and small-scale environments; address the information needs of communities; denounce insidious forms of misinformation; persuade various publics to attend to social problems and to embrace pro-social attitudes and behaviors; and educate and empower publics in media engagement.

To turn the social potential of communication

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studies into concrete actions, we need to reorient the gravitational center of intellectual work: shift the perspective from producing knowledge for fellow scholars to also developing competencies and expertise to engage with multiple publics.

Certainly, we make our work public when we publish, present ideas in professional meetings, and lead classroom discussions. As members of academic communities, we constantly engage with many publics. However, we primarily write, teach, and speak for other academics, students, friends, colleagues. This is what the institutional design of academe is structured to promote – academic scholarship according to specific standards of excellence: rigorously researched, theoretically learned and sophisticated, methodologically sound, intellectually creative.

Communication scholarship, like any form of professionalization, entails separation from the language, thinking, and perspective of ordinary life. No wonder we tend to live in rarefied environments. The way we write and talk leads to insularity. We (proudly) use inscrutable prose. One must be esoteric to get respect and recognition from fellow jargon-speakers, a characteristic that many observers bemoan for it distances scholars from society (Kristof, 2014).

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What's wrong with only working in the rarefied environments of universities? Being removed from society is a logical outgrowth of the process of academic professionalization, but the consequence is that publics rarely learn or benefit from the accumulation of knowledge – the rich trove of ideas we produce. At a time of widespread questions about the contributions of scholarly expertise, negative views about universities, and doubts about the scientific enterprise, this should not be simply seen as a failure to “communicate” with others, or just as a curious feature of academic scholarship – so relevant to a few, so unknown to many.

Making public scholarship is one way of asserting the social relevance of communication studies in the face of the furious anti-science, anti-rights crusade that right-wing populism launched just as postmodernism was about to hammer the last nail in the coffin of the scientific paradigm. Over time, these reactionary fanatics have eroded the credibility of science, hollowed out universities and scientific agencies, and rebutted fact-based policy recommendations.

The popularity and political might of counter-scientific, anti-human rights positions is reflected in rising skepticism about climate change, immunization, and medical treatments, and growing

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denialism of genocide. Such views are now common in the mainstream. They are not marginal, wild, flat-earth views orbiting in a different social sphere. Rather, they are easily available on social media. They are regularly expressed by prominent public officials and powerful institutions who endorse ideas that defy basic scientific conclusions as well as values that contradict fundamental international human rights legislation.

These are not simply dangerous alternatives that reasonably challenge the universalist premises of the scientific paradigm. Nor do they defend alternative forms of knowledge in the name of pluralism and democracy, listening and understanding. Nor do they champion relativism as a healthy, necessary corrective to scientific objectivity. Rather, they question the entire academic enterprise, regardless of its multiple paradigms: positivist, critical, structural. In return they offer knowledge grounded in convictions and dogma rather than facticity and rigor.

The ignorance about the accumulated knowledge in communication studies among the public is also troubling. Even people who should be our natural interlocutors (e.g. media practitioners, community organizers, policy-makers, technical/policy experts) find us too abstract, too theoretical, too removed from everyday concerns. This is especially

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worrisome for many of us who tackle real-world problems in our research and hope to produce socially relevant knowledge. If we were just dedicated to esoteric pursuits, detached from concrete matters that preoccupy citizens, then it wouldn't be so surprising or alarming that neither "the public" nor "experts" understand us. Yet many of us study actual social problems that impact people's lives, such as misinformation, anti-social uses of digital technology, the risks of media use, negative media representations, information inequality, and so on.

Undoubtedly, engaging with non-academic publics is a risky proposition. It threatens perceptions of the value of our work, reputation, credibility – what we tirelessly, patiently, and passionately build over years. We may command strong respect from other scholars, but be completely unknown or misunderstood by non-academic publics because we don't talk their language or are concerned with purely academic pursuits.

In search of mutual understanding, we should be translators and brokers, positioned between academic and non-academic worlds. We should be cognizant of priorities and needs among various publics. We should hope to be accessible: to develop a clear prose (or speak the local language), simplify complex ideas, condense labyrinthine

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literatures into a few sentences in the vernacular, provide straightforward suggestions and answers, make ideas relevant to public concerns. Public engagement demands finding common ground with others – most notably, in the language we use, the ideas we discuss, and the purpose of knowledge. We also need to understand why specific publics want to collaborate with us: what they want to achieve, how they perceive us, what they think we can help with. In turn we may bring specific skills, contacts, legitimacy, opportunities, experience.

We need to capitalize on the reservoir of a wealth of knowledge, evidence, and arguments in communication studies to make contributions to public life. As communication scholars, we have much to contribute if we reorient our work from writing for academics to engaging with various publics. This shift demands stepping outside our comfort zones, the wonderful cocoon of academic life, in order to figure out how to make ideas practical and relevant. By shifting the perspective, we also benefit from the reciprocal nature of public scholarship.* Just as publics benefit from our contributions, we also learn from publics. It is not only about what scholars can give the public; it is also about what we

* I thank Dafna Lemish for bringing up this point in our conversation.

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learn from publics in ways that make our scholarship and interventions more attuned to public needs and demands, rather than being oriented exclusively around academic priorities and research directions.

We owe this shift in the purpose of scholarship to the public that supports academic work through taxes and tuition fees, backs funding and policies for higher education, and trusts us with educating students. We owe to the publics we study – it is a way of giving back to the people who give us their insights, trust, knowledge. We owe it to ourselves – to be reminded why our work should matter beyond academic knowledge, and why our expertise and insights can make a difference in the lives of others. We are uniquely positioned to help societies understand and act upon social problems that are either communicative in nature or grounded in communication processes.

3

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Motivations

Why practice public scholarship? What motivates scholars to do so? Isn't scholarship a sufficient contribution to the public good? Isn't the production of knowledge about important communication issues enough contribution to society?

Undoubtedly, research, teaching, and service are public-oriented actions. They connect scholars with others: students, colleagues, funders, and occasionally the reading public. Yet public scholarship is inspired by the belief that academic scholarship is limited. As fulfilling and important as it is, academic life does not fully capture the production and sharing of knowledge. Nor does it exhaust the ways scholars may contribute to society.