Journal of Communication ISSN 0021-9916

EDITORIAL

Ferments in the Field: Introductory Reflections on the Past, Present and Future of Communication Studies

Christian Fuchs[1] & Jack Linchuan Qiu[2]

1 Communication and Media Research Institute/Westminster Institute for Advanced Studies, University of Westminster, London, UK
2 School of Journalism and Communication, The Chinese University of Hong Kong, Shatin, N.T., Hong Kong

Journal of Communication (JoC) *published its special issue "Ferment in the Field" in 1983 (vol. 33, no. 3). Thirty-five years later there still is a great interest in discussing the origins, current state, and prospects of our field. This special issue titled* Ferments in the Field: The Past, Present and Future of Communication Studies *presents 20 articles, plus this introduction, with the intention to assess the field and provoke discussions about the status of communication studies. This introductory article provides an overview of the contributions and discusses major trends in communication studies that have shaped the field since the original "ferment" issue. They include: (a) communication studies on a global scale, (b) researching communication in the fast-changing digital media environment, (c) the importance of critical communication studies, (d) the new critical and materialist turn, and (e) praxis communication and ways to address power imbalance in knowledge production.*

Keywords: Communication Studies, Academic Field, Discipline, "Ferments in the Field,", "Ferment in the Field" 1983, special issue.

doi:10.1093/joc/jqy008

Introduction

The *Journal of Communication*'s (*JoC*) original special issue "Ferment in the Field" was published in 1983 (vol. 33, no. 3). Comprising 368 pages, it presented 35 articles that asked "questions about the role of communications scholars and researchers, and of the discipline as a whole, in society" (Gerbner, 1983a, p. 4). Thirty-five years later, there still is great interest in discussing the origins, current state, and prospects of our field. By proposing a new "Ferments in the Field" issue to *JoC*, our goal was to renew and update the spirit and critical discourses of the 1983 special issue. We thank the *JoC* editor Silvio Waisbord for his kind support and advice throughout the process of reviewing, editing, and publishing "Ferments 2018."

Corresponding author: Jack Linchuan Qiu; e-mail: jacklqiu@gmail.com

In 2016, we issued an open call and received 154 submissions of abstracts, which were reviewed and assessed. We selected 20 abstracts and invited the authors to contribute full articles. These submissions again went through rigorous peer review. This special issue presents 20 papers, as well as this introduction, that aim to provoke discussions about the status of communication studies for scholars and students in our field, colleagues in other fields, and the world beyond.

The world today differs from the past with new problems and crises, be they environmental or technological, politico-economic or military, social or cultural. Communication studies is not happening in a vacuum. It responds to the vicissitudes in and outside academia. Pressed by swift transformations around the field, the pace of change has accelerated, often moving quickly in many directions. This is by no means the first time when "communication study has moved so fast that it has seldom stood still for its portrait" (Schramm, 1971, p. 4). As Schramm argued more than four decades ago, periodic reflections on our collective image are necessary for scholars studying communication, media, and culture. This "selfie" may or may not be appealing to the eye, but it allows us to take stock of the past, ferment questions about the present, and re-articulate future alternatives.

The 20 articles in this special issue represent a wide diversity of research traditions and scholarly aspirations from 12 countries that are located not only on both sides of the North Atlantic, but also in Africa, Asia, and Oceania. Admittedly, this collection does not fully capture the extraordinary pluralism of our field. Nor do we claim that our readings of the articles selected and our thinking about the field adequately represent the positions taken by the contributing authors, who indeed have very different and sometimes competing ideas. If there is one thread running through all of them and this introduction, then it is the "ferment" spirit—we encouraged the authors in their writing and revisions to be more daring, critical, and provocative. Hence, we do believe that the ideas presented here, albeit limited, are "central to and relevant for all parts of the discipline" (Gerbner, 1983a, p. 5). It is with this "ferment" spirit from Gerbner that we share our humble observations and partial opinions as editors of this new "ferments" issue that is designed to spur debate, reflection, and action.

This introduction presents an overview of the special issue and reflects on a selection of trends in the field of communication studies that have taken shape since the original 1983 "ferment." They include: (a) communication studies on a global scale, (b) research in fast-changing digital media environments, (c) the importance of critical communication studies, (d) the new critical and materialist turn, and (e) praxis communication and ways to address power imbalances in knowledge production.

Communication studies on a global scale

Since the 1980s, societies have become economically, politically and culturally more global. In social theory, this resulted in a strong focus on the notion of globalization since the 1990s. Globalization is, to some degree, a positivist concept that ideologically

disguises the neo-imperialist nature of global capitalism (Harvey, 2003), a circumstance that has been addressed in critical globalization studies (Appelbaum & Robinson, 2005). In the field of communication studies, international and global studies became much more important as research topics have shifted more from the West to the rest; as non-Eurocentric approaches, methods, and theories have become more widely known; and as non-Western scholars have received more visibility (Curran & Park, 2000; Thussu, 2009; Shome, 2016; Waisbord & Mellado, 2014).

However, the global geography of communication studies remains highly uneven partly due to the limits of research funding. With some exceptions, funding is by and large nationally and regionally focused and does not provide enough support for truly international collaboration, in which all partners can obtain roughly equal and significant shares for conducting comparative research. One consequence of funders' lack of a global perspective and global reach is that international media and communication research is often a form of methodological nationalism, which understands being global as conducting case studies focusing on single phenomena in single countries. Hence, Waisbord and Mellado warn that "[r]eifying academic knowledge in dichotomous, geocultural spheres and championing closed and pure systems of knowledge based on particular constructions of nations and regions is problematic" (2014, p. 368).

Besides funding, further constraints are posed by the fact that academic freedom and intellectual autonomy are scarce resources for researchers, which threatens colleagues in the Global South and increasingly in the North as well. This is particularly important for critical scholarship located in authoritarian societies, where censorship in both pedagogy and publishing has been commonplace, and where the crackdown on independent voices, including those in the field of communication studies, has intensified over the last decade.

The way forward is to approach the global as a unity of diverse tendencies, which we can encounter in different parts of the world in different ways and different contexts—what Vivek Chibber terms the two universalisms, "the universal logic of capital (suitably defined) and social agents' universal interest in their well-being, which impels them to resist capital's expansionary drive" (2013, p. 291). While the first universalism foregrounds the accumulation of economic, political and cultural-ideological power and related inequalities, the second calls for empathy and solidarity among the oppressed in our field and beyond, in a common struggle for more plural and democratic societies and forms of communication.

Challenges of digital media

From the 1980s onward, digitalization and concomitant changes in the world's communication systems have shaped society and scholarship. The histories of the computer and the Internet certainly go further back than the 1980s and are entangled with the history of the military–industrial complex, although recent scholarship on Chilean and Soviet networking also demonstrates that the capitalist Internet was anything but historically inevitable (Medina, 2011; Peters, 2016). With the launch of the Apple

Macintosh in 1984, personal computing has grown and become prevalent. Further developments in the more recent history of digital media included the World Wide Web, e-commerce, mobile communication, geographical information systems, social media, cloud computing, big data, and so on. Networked computing is not simply a technological development, but shapes, and is shaped by, broader developments in society and informational capitalism. Digital media research has emerged across the field of communication studies. The study of computing has shifted from the focus on automation and databases, seen in the 1960s and 1970s, towards the analysis of networked communication power.

In line with general tendencies of communication studies, we need to acknowledge that digital media studies are fragmented. Ever-newer sub-domains have emerged that claim status as new interdisciplinary fields but behave like new disciplines that deepen the old disciplinary power structures: Internet research, information society studies, surveillance studies, digital humanities, social media studies, computational social science, big data research, mobile media studies, information and communication technologies for development (ICT4D), and so on. Reasons for such fragmentation include differences in intellectual lineage, as well as inter-academic power struggles exacerbated by the constant squeeze from neoliberal institutions, such as universities that behave increasingly like corporations.

As a result, the mainstream of digital media studies tends to be narrowly focused, either techno-optimist or techno-pessimist. The newest trend and dominant paradigm in digital media studies is the rise of big data analytics and computational social science, approaches that command vast amounts of research funding, interest and visibility. We do not deny the merit of methodological additions to the toolkit of communication research, so long as it enhances our capacity to make sense of the world. But the problem of this predominantly quantitative approach is that it usually leaves out important questions: How and why are things communicated online? What are the motivations, expectations, experiences, political interests, moral judgements, and structures of feeling underlying online communication? Into which power structures and societal contexts is online communication embedded? What qualitative, immeasurable contradictions are there in society and online communication?

The result is oftentimes digital positivism that depletes rather than enriches our toolkit due to its lack of theoretical foundations, critical inquiry, and engagement with social philosophy (Fuchs, 2017). Based on Habermas (1971), one can say big data analytics advances an "absolutism of pure [digital, quantitative] methodology" (p. 5), forgetting that academia has an educational role to play, failing to understand "the meaning of knowledge" (p. 69) in society, serving as an "immunization of the [Internet] sciences against philosophy" (p. 67).

As pointed out by several contributors to this special issue, big data analytics is not just a positivist paradigm. We would like to add that it threatens to colonize the social sciences and humanities by turning these fields into computer science. If computational methods enter the curriculum of communication studies degrees in a major way that requires students to learn advanced programming, then not

enough time will be left for practicing critical thinking, qualitative methods, social theory, critical theory, ethics, philosophy, history, and other crucial liberal arts skills because learning how to code properly is very time-intensive. This said, we welcome new methods if they are problem-oriented rather than atheoretical, if the means do not overwhelm the ends of meaningful research—meaningful not for the rich to get richer and for individuals to get tenure, but for societal, public interest and sustainable development on a planetary scale. Meanwhile, there are always alternatives such as critical digital media research that is qualitative, interpretative, critical theory-driven, problem-oriented, artistic, experimental, creative, and participatory (Fuchs, 2017).

Lazarsfeld and Adorno's distinction between administrative and critical research (Slack & Allor, 1983) is of particular relevance here because the capitalist and bureaucratic interest in using digital media networks, hardware, software, platforms, content and data as means of capital accumulation and political administration has driven administrative research agendas. According to the 2017 list of *Forbes Global 2000*, the communication corporations Apple, AT&T, Verizon, Microsoft, China Mobile, Google/Alphabet, Comcast, Nippon Telegraph and Telephone, Softbank, and IBM were among the world's 50 largest transnational corporations. We have seen the rise of digital empires (Aouragh & Chakravartty, 2016), attempts to imitate these empires throughout the world, and a possessive-individualist entrepreneurialism, in which only a few succeed and become rich and the reality of many is precarious digital labor (Fuchs, 2014; Qiu, 2016). Do we really want to make such a choice that sends future generations of communication scholars to the pigeon holes of myopic instrumentalism and precarity?

The importance of critical studies

Ten of the 35 articles in the 1983 special issue used the keyword "critical" in their titles. Most of the others discussed critical research. This circumstance not just signifies that George Gerbner, *JoC*'s longest-serving editor (1974–1991), took care that what became known as critical communication studies was adequately represented. One of the reasons was, as Gerbner declared in his epilogue, that the "critical backbone" was essential to the field's "professional integrity," meaning: "its members are not just hired hands, but women and men prepared and free to scrutinize the ends as well as the means of any project" (1983b, pp. 355–356).

Moreover, in the original "Ferment of the Field," there was a constructive, albeit contradictory, diversity of views and approaches. On the one side, for instance, Schramm discussed critical communication studies as working "inward from their beliefs toward the communication problems that particularly interest them" (1983, p. 12). On the other side, Smythe and Van Dinh (1983) were among those who criticized administrative communication research for its functionalist focus, ignorance of macro problems, neo-positivism, e.g., through surveys, audience studies, and marketing research. There were views in between the two positions. But notably most authors

Figure 1 A word cloud showing the most frequently used words in the 1983 *Journal of Communication* issue on "Ferment in the Field."

in 1983 felt compelled to comment on the critical-versus-administrative research debate.

The 1983 "ferment" issue also reflected the zeitgeist of the time: The MacBride report *Many Voices, One World* calling for a New World Information and Communication Order (NWICO) had been published in 1980. NWICO "was designed to widen and deepen the freedom of information by increasing its balance and diversity on a global scale" (Nordenstreng, 2013, p. 350). It seemed that democratic alternatives to capitalism and capitalist communications were not just feasible, but also topical and needed. Socialism was a political paradigm that just like capitalism shaped communication studies and created the dialectical tension of the field that makes the 1983 special issue so interesting. There is evidence that critical studies, approaches and theories have since 1983 been sidelined in *JoC* and across the field of communication studies. The analysis of eight communication journals by Slavko Splichal and Boris Mance in this issue demonstrates that, for long, the critique of capitalism and antidemocratic processes has been less visible than administrative and positivist research. A similar pattern is identified in the meta-analysis by Nathan Walter, Michael Cody and Sandra Ball-Rokeach, whose article in this special issue shows that critical approaches increased their presence in *JoC* in the 1970s and 1980s, but have declined since the 1990s. Critical scholars publish in other venues such as *Critical Studies in Media Communication* (launched in 1984), while also starting new journals such as *Communication, Culture & Critique* (launched in 2008). Figure 1 shows a data visualization analyzing the frequency of all words used in the 1983 "ferment." Apart from the obvious fact that the issue focused on the analysis of mass media, communication, and social research, the analysis confirms our observation: Being "critical" was one of the most frequently mentioned keywords. It was used 456 times in the overall issue.

JoC published two sequels to "Ferment in the Field": "The Disciplinary Status of Communication Research" (1993, vol. 43, no. 3) and "Epistemological and Disciplinary Intersections" (2008, vol. 58, no. 4). The issues showed that the relevance of communication studies in society and the amount of scholarship had grown over the years. A significant change was, however, that in the 1993 and 2008 issues the question of critical research was much more peripheral, whereas the focus was more on the discipline itself and the status of its sub-fields, with less attention given to its larger social role. The expansion of communication studies came along with specialization and fragmentation. In 1993, Rosengren observed: "Negative bickering has replaced productive confrontation" (p. 9). In 2008, Pfau argued many scholars were "not familiar with relevant knowledge that is located beyond their particular niche" (2008, p. 599).

Revisiting the critical/administrative research distinction, several articles in our 2018 "ferments" issue demonstrate that this debate still matters today and that the two camps are internally diverse. They have shown in their own ways that critical communication studies has become more scholarly mature and more relevant in the real world. We would like to take this opportunity to call for more engagements across the field among different types of scholarship because only when engaged dialogue between colleagues takes place "can critical communication research exercise power to transform the terms in which communication processes are understood" (Slack & Allor, 1983, p. 217).

A new critical and materialist turn

Since the 1983 "ferment," Reagonomics and Thatcherism have constituted a widely accepted political doctrine that focuses on the commodification of almost everything. Today, neoliberalism has partly turned into authoritarian capitalism, which has also transformed academia including communication studies, as evidenced by the increasing focus on entrepreneurship, the commercialization of research, rising tuition fees, managerialism, and the quantification and evaluation of scholarly activities. Although social inequalities constantly rose, alternatives to capitalism seemed discredited to many, and social class lost ground as topic in public discussion and academic studies. It seemed like the "end of history" (Fukuyama, 1992) had come and capitalism would prevail forever. But stopping to talk about and analyze capitalism did not make class and domination disappear. They kept haunting humanity and made a comeback when the new crisis started in 2008, transforming politics and societies throughout the world. The result was the trend we observe in our field towards more self-reflection on the role of critique and a significant change that constitutes a critical and materialist turn. By a critical and materialist turn, we mean an increased visibility of analyses that critically scrutinize power, inequalities, and destructive forces in ways that are no longer confined to the symbolic and representational. This is a current trend in the social sciences and humanities overall, and in media and communication studies in particular. Several articles in this new "ferments" issue represent such an epistemological turn that re-invigorates the spirit of diversity, critique, and vividness of the 1983 "ferment."

In the 1980s and 1990s, there was a controversy within the broader "critical" camp between political economy and cultural studies about how to do critical communication studies. The discussion centered around distinctions such as production/consumption, labor/audience, economy/culture, class/domination, repression/resistance, and structure/agency. Today, it has become more commonly accepted that we need to think of these distinctions as dialectics of unity and difference. The examples of Facebook and online crowdsourcing show that active audiences and consumers can be value-generating workers and that in contemporary capitalism old boundaries within media industry and beyond have become transient (Fuchs, 2014, 2017; Qiu, 2016).

Since 2008 the contradictions of neoliberalism have exploded into a full crisis. This has led to an increasing interest in Marxism and in discussing capitalism and class, a notable trend across the academia and our field (Fuchs & Mosco, 2017). The resurgence of the critical is a topic taken up by several contributors in this special issue, whose collective endeavor constitutes what we see as indicator for a new materialist turn. When critical theory is renewed, it does not simply repeat itself, reproducing its old tenets and deficiencies. The reincarnation responds to new conditions of the media industry and pressing problems facing the contemporary world.

Praxis communication and communication futures

Given the ongoing crises around the globe and the fact that the world's future is uncertain, we need to ask: What is the purpose and goal of doing communication studies? Whom does it address? Why and for whom do we conduct research? How should knowledge be communicated in public?

The more we consider the uprisings and crises that have accompanied and followed in the context of the new Great Recession, the more we feel the urgency for praxis intervention by the communication field as a whole. Despite various Occupy movements and the emergence of progressive political parties, thus far the stronger political tendency has been the rise of new nationalisms and forms of authoritarian capitalism, as well as the strengthening of xenophobia and far-right populism as manifested through the rise of the likes of Modi and Trump. Movements of both the progressive and regressive types communicate via co channels old and new media. Understanding both types of movements and their communication is a key task for communication studies. Doing so requires the combination of empirical ideology critique, political economy, critical theory, political psychology, and social movement research. Given that the world is facing existential political, economic, cultural-ideological and environmental crises, it is fatal for communication scholars to just carry on doing business as usual. Communication studies must be praxis-based and praxis-oriented. Or, as Robert Craig puts it in his article for our special issue, we should reconsider our field as a "practical discipline" (p. 289). Otherwise, we neglect reflexive action in politics and in scholarship at our peril. It is a dead end for media and communication research—regardless of its critical or administrative nature—if we

fail to make sense of common sense and if we keep talking to ourselves, forgetting social, institutional, and media industry players outside the ivory tower.

A good example of praxis communication scholarship is the growth in recent years of non-profit open access journals and publishers, e.g., *International Journal of Communication*, *TripleC: Communication, Capitalism & Critique*, *Global Media Journal*, and *Nordicom Review*. It is interesting that such journals have within communication studies especially flourished in Latin America: e.g., *MATRIZes, Revista Eletrônica Internacional de Economia Política da Informação e da Cultura, Parágrafo: Revista Científica de Comunicação Social, Revista Contracampo*. Another notable trend is the emergence of fully open access university presses.

However, we are aware that calling for a "practical" turn toward *praxis* can be mistaken as doing old-style consultancy work for businesses so that they are better able to sell commodities, control audiences and consumers, and exploit workers; or as attempts to seize every opportunity for policy consultancy no matter how problematic the underlying policies actually are, just in order to be able to prove that one's research is "relevant" and has "impact." Rather, we should consider the future of our "practical discipline" in ways paralleled to what Burawoy calls "public sociology" (2007). We should understand practice as transformative *praxis* that aims at social change towards a better world that defends and extends democracy and participation, and that works towards a good life for everyone. Communication practice should ferment to become *praxis communication*. For this purpose, communication scholars and social scientists in general should act as critical, public, organic intellectuals.

The contributions in this issue

Finally, we provide, in alphabetic order, a brief summary of the articles in this special issue.

Osei Appiah argues that "cultural voyeurism" is a new framework for understanding race, ethnicity, and mediated intergroup interaction. He argues that positive intercultural relations are not only possible, but have already taken place through mediated contact. For Appiah, the ferment of being critical means avoiding reifying the problems of racial prejudice by unveiling positive developments.

Lance Bennett and Barbara Pfetsch reflect on the dismal state of contemporary public spheres that are dispersed by social media, replaced with echo chambers full of cacophony. Is political communication research still possible under such fragmented conditions? Bennett and Pfetsch offer a set of "ferments" to re-evaluate approaches used in political communication research. Their conclusion is that given the dominance of polarization, post-democracy, inequalities and fragmentation, it is time to bring politics back in.

Paula Chakravartty and colleagues examine article authorship and citation practices in 12 communication studies journals. Their findings boil down to one hashtag: #CommunicationSoWhite. This quantitative study uses computer-aided content analysis, but is critically informed: long-standing patterns of racialized

socialization lead to segregation in citations, an issue deserving special attention from journal editors, reviewers, teachers preparing syllabi, and students making the next citation.

Miyase Christensen and Annika Nilsson propose to rethink the media "as infrastructural and natural, as well as representational" (p. 274). They criticize the dominant systems of environmental knowledge production and dissemination from conventional scientific communication to "post-truth" politics and offer a seminal perusal of e-waste in the Global South. There, the ecological, social, and labor costs are so pressing that they form the new ground of materialist analysis beyond the Anthropocene.

François Cooren starts from questioning the dualism between matter and meaning. He then explicates "a relational ontology" in which "communication corresponds to the materialization of relations" (p. 279). Moving away from the Anthropocene, Cooren stresses the polyphony of both human and non-human communication, whose dynamism through space and time requires a radical rethinking of our field. He argues for an approach that views the world of communication as diverse, dynamic and complex.

Robert Craig makes a plea that we should conceive our field as a "practical discipline," while "contributing to the metadiscourse on normative and technical aspects of communicative praxis" (p. 289). The birth of communication studies was historically an intellectual response to challenges of societal communication problems. Craig ascertains that rethinking our field as a practical discipline can produce more theoretical coherence and more real-world relevance.

Robert Entman and Nikki Usher revisit the concept of framing by updating the cascading network activation model designed to account for the activation and distribution of news frames. They construct the metaphor of five "pump-valves" in digital media systems, which are connected by six pathways. They urge researchers not to forget legacy media audiences: "What factors might motivate them to abandon institutional journalism in favor of ideological media or rogue communication?" (p. 307).

Cindy Gallois, Bernadette Watson and Howard Giles offer an overview of the linkages between interpersonal and intergroup relations. A better understanding of intergroup communication has broad significance to daily encounters in intercultural, organizational, and health communication. To do so, the research process must be "firmly grounded […] in real-life contexts" (p. 313). Thus intergroup scholars should venture beyond their comfort zones to fully consider real-world complexities, e.g., in Indigenous contexts.

Rosalind Gill and Akane Kanai concentrate on the making of neoliberal subjectivities among women and girls. They contend that a system of regulation and discipline underpins paternalistic reality TV shows, humorous self-deprecating blogs, and digital wearable devices. Neoliberalism targets the body as well as the inner self. Despite their appearances of defiance and empowerment, the narratives of neoliberal subjectivities "remain locked into the individual—indeed the psychological" (p. 324).

Natascha Just and Manuel Puppis point out that the state of communication policy research is unacceptable. Examining this subfield, they see a fertile ground for knowledge production, research innovation, and meaningful action. "Let's reinvigorate communication policy research now!" They call on colleagues to take a more theory-driven approach with increased methodological rigor, to keep track of and be involved in ongoing policy debates that affect media industries, citizens, and public interests.

Drawing on Appadurai and García Canclini, Marwan Kraidy advocates a new research imagination marked by "inclusive comprehensiveness" (p. 344) in order to de-parochialize global communication research. This is essential because ongoing global crises "present[s] a great challenge and a momentous opportunity" (p. 338). Communication scholars must therefore expand their interdisciplinary purview in order to "relearn how to ask big questions" (p. 342).

Sangeet Kumar and Radhika Parameswaran advance a postcolonial critique that problematizes cultural power and call for curricular interventions in communication courses. They wrote this article during the *Third World Quarterly* controversy when a political scientist published an article calling for European colonialism to be re-established (Patel, 2017). The authors highlight that communication studies contributes only to "egalitarian future worlds" by overcoming "debilitating historical amnesia" (p. 356).

Communication scholarship has focused so much on the symbolic domain that Graham Murdock argues that materiality remains a "blindspot of communications research" (p. 359). For him, a new materialist approach under the rubric of "a moral economy of machines" directs our attention to "the raw materials and resources employed in the systems, and the devices that support everyday communicative activity, and the chains of labor entailed in constructing and maintaining these infrastructures" (p. 359).

Reflecting on post-truth, cognitive twists, and selective perception, Russell Neuman contends that the label of "effect studies" is no longer appropriate. Instead, we should consider "a model of variable resonance" (p. 370) that links up transmission chain research, textual analysis, in-depth interviewing, and big data analytics. "When a burst of attention […] in the traditional media has no corresponding response among the general public in social media […], that is not a failure of theory […], but a finding of potential significance" (p. 376).

Mary Beth Oliver and colleagues argue for "self-transcendent media experiences" and "meaningful media" that "heighten compassion and connectedness with other humans and the planet as a whole" (p. 381). This is a unique approach. Instead of diving into the dark chaos of online cacophony, they argue that problems in digital media shall not limit our scholarly imagination and prevent us from observing the beautiful, the virtuous, and the altruistic, existing side-by-side with Facebook trolls.

Colin Sparks problematizes "the dominant conceptual apparatus" of Eurocentrism in communication research (p. 390). Focusing on the spread of such normative notions as journalistic professionalism and capitalist democracy, he points

out that the solution is "more than a purely intellectual task" (p. 397) and that we need to consider ways to reform the corporate university, in Western and non-Western societies. He argues for the development of genuinely universal categories and approaches that can be localized.

Applying network analysis to eight leading journals of the field, including *JoC*, Slavko Splichal and Boris Mance demonstrate that the main critical focus of E.U.-based journals is political economy (e.g., capitalism, labor, resistance), whereas U.S.-based journals tend to stress the critique of racism and discrimination. Splichal and Mance provide a more accurate picture for critical and administrative research published during the past seven decades, a picture of interconnected "islands" surrounded by an ocean of diverse topics.

Examining how digital tools bolster the advertising industry, Joseph Turow and Nick Couldry critically map out aspects of the digital for communication studies. They argue that constant surveillance has become so omnipresent that it is now an infrastructural regime for everyday life and that we need a fundamental reconceptualization of media as data extraction. The result is the emergence of programmatic marketplaces where we have to confront clickbaits, frauds, and discriminatory algorithms.

Nathan Walter, Michael Cody and Sandra Ball-Rokeach analyze 336 issues of *JoC* since its inaugural volume in 1951. The general patterns are: Published articles tend to be dominated by U.S. scholars using (post)positivistic approaches. There is a lack of interdisciplinary work. New theory development has slowed down. While critical scholarship increased to about one third of all *JoC* publications during the 1980s and 1990s, the proportion has since declined.

Herman Wasserman uses communication ethics as entry point to destabilize dominant communication studies at three levels: issues of power, meaning-making, and geopolitics. Building on (Afri)Ethics, postcolonial critique, and observations of recent developments such as the growth of Chinese media in Africa, Wasserman raises far-ranging questions about historical legacies and contextual specificities that are at the roots of communication scholarship globally, especially the "long, persistent effects" of colonialism (p. 442).

Overall, this new "ferments" issue consists of 20 articles that are provocative and articulate, reflect the diversity of communication studies, and provide insights into recent changes and challenges that lie ahead in the world of communication. The authors share the aspiration to enhance the field's practical and theoretical relevance while increasing its empirical rigor, not merely for the field itself but in the larger interdisciplinary dialogue concerning politics and economy, culture and nature, human and technology, society and world.

What the articles collectively demonstrate, and this introduction hopes to highlight, are four basic features of communication research that are of central importance as we look across the field in this second decade of the twenty-first century: (a) the intellectual landscape has become globalized and multicultural, (b) the rapidly-changing digital environments bring opportunities as well as constraints to media, communication and cultural studies, (c) a new critical and materialist turn is

underway that lays bare the political-economic, labor, and environmental underpinnings of communication, and (d) the critical/administrative research distinction and the dialogue in between remain essential to communication scholarship, especially if we hope to increase the capacity of the field to respond to society's crises. In our view, it is important for the field of communication studies to envision its future as being theoretically innovative and politically engaged, holistic instead of fragmented, truly global and interdisciplinary, reflexive and praxis-oriented.

The first goal of the International Communication Association (ICA), according to its mission statement, is "to provide an international forum to enable the development, conduct, and critical evaluation of communication research" (http://www.icahdq.org/page/MissionStatement). This new "ferments" issue is an attempt to further this goal and to ascertain that communication scholarship can and should contribute to the creation of a sustainable information society.

References

Aouragh, M., & Chakravartty, P. (2016). Infrastructures of empire: Towards a critical geopolitics of media and information studies. *Media, Culture & Society*, **38**(4), 559–575.

Appelbaum, R. P., & Robinson, W. I. (Eds.). (2005). *Critical globalization studies*. New York: Routledge.

Burawoy, M. (2007). For public sociology. In C. Clawson, R. Zussman, J. Misra, N. Gerstel, R. Stokes, D. L. Anderton & M. Burawoy (Eds.), *Public sociology* (pp. 23–64). Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.

Chibber, V. (2013). *Postcolonial theory and the specter of capital*. London: Verso.

Curran, J., & Park, M.-J. (Eds.) (2000). *De-Westernizing media studies*. Abingdon: Routledge.

Fuchs, C. (2014). *Digital labor and Karl Marx*. New York: Routledge.

Fuchs, C. (2017). From digital positivism and administrative big data analytics towards critical digital and social media research? *European Journal of Communication*, **32**(1), 37–49.

Fuchs, C., & Mosco, V. (Eds.). (2017). *Marx in the age of digital capitalism. Studies in critical social sciences* (**Vol. 80**). Chicago, IL: Haymarket.

Fukuyama, F. (1992). *The end of history and the last man*. New York: Free Press.

Gerbner, G. (1983a). Introduction. *Journal of Communication*, **33**(3), 4–5.

Gerbner, G. (1983b). Epilogue. *Journal of Communication*, **33**(3), 355–362.

Habermas, J. (1971) *Knowledge and human interest*. Boston, MA: Beacon.

Harvey, D. (2003). *The new imperialism*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

MacBride, S. (1980). *Many voices, one world*. New York: UNESCO.

Medina, E. (2011). *Cybernetic revolutionaries*. Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press.

Nordenstreng, K. (2013). How the new world order and imperialism challenge media studies. *tripleC: Communication, Capitalism & Critique*, **11**(2), 348–358.

Patel, V. (2017, September 25). A revolt at a journal puts peer review under the microscope. *Chronical of Higher Education*. Retrieved from https://www.chronicle.com/article/A-Revolt-at-a-Journal-Puts/241289

Peters, B. (2016). *How not to network a nation*. Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press.

Pfau, M. (2008). Epistemological and disciplinary intersections. *Journal of Communication*, **58**(4), 597–602.

Qiu, J. (2016). *Goodbye iSlave: A manifesto for digital abolition*. Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press.

Rosengren, K. E. (1993). From field to frog ponds. *Journal of Communication*, **43**(3), 6–17.

Schramm, W. (1971). The nature of communication between humans. In W. Schramm & D. F. Roberts (Eds.), *The process and effects of mass communication* (pp. 3–53). Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press.

Schramm, W. (1983). The unique perspective of communication: A retrospective view. *Journal of Communication*, **33**(3), 6–17.

Shome, R. (2016). When postcolonial studies meets media studies. *Critical Studies in Media Communication*, **33**(3), 245–263.

Slack, J. D., & Allor, M. (1983). The political and epistemological constitutes of critical communication research. *Journal of Communication*, **33**(3), 208–218.

Smythe, D. W., & Van Dinh, T. (1983). On critical and administrative research: A New critical analysis. *Journal of Communication*, **33**(3), 117–127.

Thussu, D. (Ed.). (2009). *Internationalizing media studies*. London: Routledge.

Waisbord, S., & Mellado, C. (2014). De-Westernizing communication studies: A reassessment. *Communication Theory*, **24**(4), 361–372.