N ° 20 | Scientific research and the media: challenges and tensions

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The idea of making science public and sharing scientific knowledge is not new. According to the work of Baudouin Jurdant, this idea, in Europe at least, dates from the Enlightenment. The question of the necessary popularization of science is also found in the European charter of the researcher (2005) which encourages: “social dialogue between researchers and stakeholders in society as a whole”. Today, different types of technical devices such as “open access/open science” encourage dialogue between knowledge and society, however, the simple fact that many scientific publications benefit from free and open access does not always allow researchers to take a real active place in the social and political scene. All the more so, as scientists, in general, do very little in the popularization of their work. It is true that this is relatively little recognized by the bodies that manage their careers (Boure, 2016). Popularization and in particular the intervention of researchers within informal non-scientific spaces such as public debates for example, or even publications outside places reserved and recognized by the scientific community can be perceived as suggested by Elsa Poupardin and Mélodie Faury (2018/2015) as a form of symbolic capital, but this capital is “worthless”, from an academic point of view if the authors do not play“ the game of the field “and do not acquire in at the same time, and within their discipline of belonging a certain legitimacy”.

Popularization of science also largely goes through the media and in particular the mass media such as television and even digital media, however, according to Dominique Wolton’s analysis “Media coverage is not the equivalent of popularization despite the place of the media in society and the simple and false idea that the more the media talks about science, the more popularization will be” (1997, 11) ; in other words, access to knowledge alone would not allow the development of a knowledge society”. If such reservations seem legitimate, in view of the various current issues related, among other things, to the material and societal impacts of hypermodernity, or post modernity, but also to the development of fake news which calls into question the
status of the information including that of scientific information, it is relevant, on the one hand, to understand science from the point of view of its communication and its transmission in the broad sense and, on the other hand, to question on the role of the mediatization of academic research in the relationship between science and society. Communication practices around scientific work seem to have become concomitant with research activity as such, and academic and scientific institutions (Maisons des Sciences de l'Homme, for example) themselves are widely involved in this direction when they do not directly create their own media (the CNRS newspaper).

This call for papers focuses more specifically on the media coverage of the researcher. It is not so much the place of researchers in the media that is questioning, nor the relationships, often complex, between journalists and scientists but rather the interest (or not) in a global way, of the latter, to intervene within media systems. It is not a question here of wondering only on the way in which these two categories of actors who are journalists and scientists compete for the field of expertise through their different professional postures, but of study the challenges of media coverage for academics in the light of current contexts. The effects of this scientific mediatization of researchers, rich in complex interpretations, are to be questioned. Indeed, on the one hand, the media offer is more and more overwhelming. Media uses and practices are diversifying in particular through technology, digital media of all types. Continuous information and social networks are steadily increasing while offering content and interfaces with variable information, (Pascal C., Vieira L., Akam N., 2019). The media are evolving in a hyper competitive system with publication and content updating timelines that are accelerating constantly and at the same time, the diversity of speaking in the media becomes an important concern. On the other hand, scientific activity too is undergoing major changes: various organizational, structural and economic constraints are imposed on institutions and their stakeholders. At the same time, new generations of researchers are emerging. They are better trained, better prepared for technologies, they have more mastery of media codes and often invest in other less traditional and expected devices for making their work visible, such as web TV, YouTube channels, videos, blogs...

We cannot reduce the work of scientists to their media interventions, it is understood and the place and intervention of researchers. In the media is not a new phenomenon within the humanities and social sciences, they have already prompted various works. However, these, now, given the transformations and evolutions of the media, scientific institutions and communication practices around research deserve to be renewed. Ultimately, this dossier proposes to revisit the place and the role of researchers in society based on their intervention in the media, which leads more broadly to questioning, through the prism media coverage, the question of the researcher’s commitment and the way in which the latter is involved in public debate. Several axes are emerging in priority but these are by no means exhaustive and closed and other approaches to the theme, other cross-disciplinary and multidisciplinary perspectives can be envisaged.
The media coverage of the researcher: challenges, effects and strategies

Different questions call out to us: Are people interested in intervening in the media, responding to journalists’ requests, are they prepared for this practice? How to prepare for it? Can media coverage participate in the construction of a scientific posture and how to respond to communications orders around research activities? What are the logics that guide and organize the mediatization of scientists? What does the researcher expect from his media coverage? Is the intervention in the media likely to modify the relationship with the object of study, is it likely to create a critical reflection on the way of apprehending a subject? Does media coverage modify research practices? Does it give legitimacy and of what type? What place does media expertise occupy in a scientific career? How does the media coverage of scientific studies and the results obtained question the responsibility of the researcher. and its function?...

Media expression and societal engagement of researchers

In this context of questioning political, institutional and media discourse, are researchers more and more encouraged to occupy the media space, to take risks through media formats that are not well suited to publicizing works to take sides...? How is the societal commitment of researchers characterized today (Pascal, 2019)? Have the media become privileged spaces where this commitment manifests itself. What are the risks inherent in taking a position? What is the status of the researcher’s speech? When he/she speaks in the media, does he/she speak on his/her behalf, or the name of his/her institution, of his/her discipline ...? How do scientists understand their position between injunctions linked to their status such as publications in journals dedicated to research and interventions in the media? Do they wonder about their ethical behavior in mediation and mediatization?

The media coverage of science and innovative devices

The construction of a better mediatization of research, as soon as we consider that science allows the construction of a more enlightened world and that it produces knowledge useful for living together, does it not present itself as such major challenge and a societal challenge anticipating new forms of collaboration, or even possible rapprochements between the academic world and that of the media? Here it is a question of wondering, on the one hand, on the capacity of the media to mobilize scientific knowledge, and, on the other hand, on media devices like the site The Conversation (Lipani, 2019) and other initiatives and methods promoting the social dimension of research and allowing researchers to intervene in public debate.

Calendar

• File published in issue 20, publication: October 2020.
• Articles are expected by: May 15
Proposals for articles (between 30,000 and 40,000 characters including spaces, bibliography and footnotes included) should be sent to:

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Pascal C., (2019), « Les enjeux de la recherche-action, participative, collaborative, créative entre normes à la fois techniques et politiques de modernisation d’une recherche et défis économiques et sociaux » dans Lipani M.-C., Pascal C., *journée d’étude, Sciences et société : Quelle place et quelle représentation de la recherche dans les médias ?*, 11 avril 2019, Bordeaux, MSHA.


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