What can the history of communication studies tell us about its practical relevance in the future? The four "currencies" of academic success and an alternative chronology of the subject's development in Germany since 1945

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ABSTRACT: In German-language communication studies, the long-running debate about the increasingly important practical relevance of the subject is currently being picked up once again. In this article a reflection on the history of the subject since 1945 will be used to formulate a prediction for the possible development of the subject and the practice-related research being undertaken within it. Four basic "currencies" of academic success will be drawn upon to do this: reputation, public attention, funding, and evaluation results. These assist in constructing an alternative chronology of the subject, which also demonstrates the social forces which affect the "currencies." This leads to the conclusion that the current incentive structures for each individual scientist in communication studies could lead to a bisection of the subject. One group will orientate itself increasingly on the requirements of modern science-based society and predominantly solve practical problems, while the second group will remain more dedicated to the classic understanding of science.

KEYWORDS: sociology of science, history of communication studies, Germany, chronology, reputation, practical relevance

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INTRODUCTION

To celebrate the 56th anniversary of the German Association of Communication Studies, the organisers looked for presentations which demonstrated the practical benefits of the subject for journalists, PR managers and politicians (DGPuK, 2011). Some representatives of the subject claim that German-language communication studies has hardly any practical relevance (Peiser, 2008), while others are able to recognise this clearly (Kunczik & Zipfel, 2006; Donsbach & Brade, 2011), and a third group consider the discussion itself shallow (Wehmeier, 2011). With a view

to the individual researchers, the question therefore arises of the hypothetical consequences of predominantly practice-orientated research.

From observations of communication studies and other subjects from the point of view of the sociology and philosophy of science (Weingart, 2003; Hohlfeld, 2006; Peters et al., 2009), it is known that practice-orientated research would affect the four "currencies" of academic success described below in particular. A purely practice-orientated researcher would certainly be able to attract more external f u n d - i n g. Another advantage would be that, because his topics would be related to applications and problems, he would be seen significantly m o r e f r e q u e n t l y in p u b l i c, communicated via the mass media. He would also surely be p r e s e n t e d m o r e p o s i t i v e l y there. However, an increased public presence often leads to a l o s s o f r e p u t a t i o n within the scientific community, which can lead to p o o r - e r e v a l u a t i o n a n d r e v i e w r e s u l t s.

These four "currencies" — reputation, public attention, funding, and evaluation results — allow the effects of a changing scientific environment on individual academics to be depicted very well. They are therefore perhaps also suitable for representing the history of communication studies as a whole, as will now be attempted. The first aim is to create an alternative chronology of the subject's development in Germany[1] since 1945, while the second is to derive from this an evaluation of the current situation and possible future problems regarding the subject's practical relevance. After all, subject history should also offer benefits for current discussions (Bohrmann, 2005).

Firstly, the considerations and research results in the sociology and theory of science on the four "currencies" will be explained in more detail in Chapter 2, where reputation will be given a special role as the "reserve currency" of science. In Chapter 3, it will then be explained how the "conversion" of the three other currencies into reputation can be imagined. Once the differences between the four currencies are clear, Chapter 4 will present an alternative chronology of the subject, which will then be integrated into an existing, generally accepted and more comprehensive chronology in Chapter 5. At the end, based on the analysis made here, a full picture of the development of the subject will emerge, allowing a look into the ambivalent future of communication studies and research with regard to practice in Chapter 6.

THE FOUR "CURRENCIES" OF ACADEMIC SUCCESS

Reputation

Put simply, in an economic system, money acts as the central exchange medium and thus as currency. In the same way, the academic system has a pseudo-currency,

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[1] Communication Studies is here understood in accordance with the official self-conception paper of the German Association of Communication Studies (DGuK, 2008).

namely reputation. It is used to compare the academic performance of a researcher and is thus a measurement of his recognition, authority, acceptance and standing among his peers (Weingart, 2003).

Someone who moves academia forwards, such as by making a great discovery, solving a long-standing theoretical problem or simply carrying out research at a high level over many years, is taken seriously in the scientific community and his work will be met with comparably high levels of attention and perhaps acceptance.

In addition, reputation fulfils a purpose as a mechanism for quality assurance. For example, no-one can be familiar with all the literature in a broad field of research. He must therefore (be able to) rely on tips from respected colleagues, who tell him which are the most important studies (Ibid.). One famous example of this central controlling effect of authority in the scientific system is the annual awarding of the Nobel prize. At the beginning, the jury tended to award the prize to very famous researchers, in the hope that their reputation would rub off onto the prize (Krauter, 2001).

But what can a scientist do if he or she — for whatever reason — wishes to get around this reputation mechanism? Max Weber (1968) identified political influence and its legitimation through public presence in the media as one possible way to bypass the scientific system.

Publicity

Attention generated among the general public or certain parts of the public by the mass media can be used for a range of purposes. To do so, the interest of the mass media must first be aroused. If, as a scientist, one publishes research results in the mass media which are of interest to the media or the public, such as by giving an expert interview or by publishing the latest survey results and one's own interpretation thereof in a newspaper article, one creates pressure for colleagues in terms of reception, reviews and evaluation. Journalists may then call them for an assessment and their opinion of the publication. In this way, the peer review process established in most scientific disciplines, including communication studies, can be bypassed (Weingart, 2003). The public route can also be used to decide (gridlocked) conflicts within the science (Peters et al., 2009).

Another key role of consciously implemented publicity work today is to influence academic policy in favour of one's own research and thus oneself: "Even in ancient times, the great minds knew that power is the source of truth, and therefore that truth is a function of power" (Samjatin, 1984, p. 109[2]; Feyerabend, 1976).

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[2] This and subsequent quotations from German-language sources have been translated. Thanks to Sophie Costella for the English translations of these and all the text.

As early as the 1970s, in their investigation into "invisible colleges" of academic groups in various research areas, Griffith and Mullins found that — where the revision of previously sacrosanct theories or methods was concerned — all groups "often ventured actively into the politics of science in order to obtain or protect appointments and research support" (Griffith & Mullins, 1972, p. 960; current: Petersen et al., 2010). Therefore, if a scientist is able to present himself according to media-relevant rules (e.g. with a certain skill for image cultivation), he can — led by a desire for political influence — attempt to convert public prominence into scientific reputation. However, one also runs the risk that "one's own colleagues in academia rightly turn up their noses" (Pörksen, 2011).

Funding

Academic policy decisions have always been mainly decisions about money. Those who are able to spend more on staff and equipment and perhaps gain the opportunity to head a research institution in an ambitious, growing, prosperous and thus expensive city have an advantage in the competition for reputation (Lepenies, 1981, p. Xf.; Pietilä, 2008). More funding can lead to better students and research fellows, who are important, because "a new scientific truth does not generally become established when its opponents are convinced of it and declare themselves informed, but rather when the opponents gradually die out and the next generation is familiarised with the truth from the start" (Planck, 1967, p. 22; Kuhn, 1964). In German-language communication studies, this became painfully clear to Gerhard Maletzke, for example (Meyen & Löblich, 2011).

Since the 1990s, the German scientific system has been reformed, mainly for cost-cutting reasons. Basic funding for university-based research is being reduced, while there is a shift towards more and more competition-orientated third-party funding. In this N e w P u b l i c M a n a g e m e n t model, the state is no longer merely the "producer" of research, but increasing demands it "on the market." It acts as a third-party funder alongside other sponsors from business or civil society. The proportion of third-party funded research and research organised in time-limited projects has increased since that time (Schubert & Schmoch, 2010), including in communication studies (Altmeppen et al., 2011). Those who can attract a lot of this can achieve greater standing.

As well as initially allowing limited money to be distributed more efficiently, increased competition for external funding also has negative consequences: Both research topics and the methods used can be more easily influenced, for instance (Neverla, 1990; Brosius & Esser, 1998). Although more competition leads to more co-authorship and faster publication cycles (Padian, 2008), too much competition combined with increased dependency on third-party funding holds the danger of "secret research," where results are only published if they are advantageous to the financer — a principle which is currently preventing the universal introduction of

open access publication (Dobusch & Quack, 2011) and even runs counter to scientific ethics, in accordance with which "property rights [should be] reduced to a bare minimum" (Merton, 1972, p. 51; Rühl, 1999).

Last but not least, more rivalry also leads to more waves of fashion (Simmel, 1919). If a breakthrough, or even the solution to a long-standing problem, is looming in a particular area, many academics neglect their previous fields of research and dedicate themselves to this area, since it is there that they can gain esteem very quickly if they manage to play a part in the breakthrough (Bernal, 1986). In a situation like this, objective reasons take second stage to prestige reasons when selecting objects, theories and methods for research. The result is "unstable collective behaviour resulting from social differentiation and imitation" (Hagstrom, 1972, p. 223).

Evaluation results

The fourth "currency of success" in the scientific system is evaluation results. These too can be converted into reputation — as long as they are positive. The term "evaluation" here refers both to the efficiency measurement, functionality analysis and success monitoring for optimisation and rationalisation and to its primary meaning as a judgement or assessment (Kromrey, 2001). While the first definition is predominantly applied when observing the research process itself (such as in project applications and evaluations), the latter is used in evaluating publications (peer review) and in teaching (Lepori et al., 2012).

The fact that reputation and evaluation results are interlinked can be most clearly seen in the long-known M a t t h e w   e f f e c t: Researchers with a good reputation receive more attention for the same achievement in research than younger academics. The publications of this research are then quoted more frequently,[3] which further improves the reputation of the researcher (Merton, 1968; current also Ginther et al., 2011). Quotations can be understood as a form of evaluation here.

CONVERTING THE "CURRENCIES"

All four "currencies" have always been converted back and forth — not only in academia. As early as 1646, Richelieu (1968, p. 119) saw a connection[4] between four very similar "currencies" and the power of the king:

> There are several kinds of power which can make princes respected and feared — it is a tree with various branches… The prince ought to be powerful because of his good *reputation*, […] a reasonable number of *soldiers* kept continuously under arms, […] a sufficient *revenue* to meet his

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[3] As well as reputation, there are of course other reasons why a text, idea or theory is quoted (Schäfer, 2011).

[4] Thanks to my colleague Erich Lamp who drew my attention to this text passage.

ordinary expenses, […] a special sum of *money* in his treasury to cover frequent but unexpected contingencies, […] *the possession of the hearts* of his subjects…

In academia, however, the key is reputation which is materialised: A good reputation leads sooner or later to a professorship.

The exact amount of public attention, funding or good evaluation results needed to gain a particular amount of reputation depends on the "conversion rates." These are not fixed, however, but depend on a range of factors on multiple levels of influence which can be separated analytically.[5] Löblich and Scheu (2011) showed this in their heuristic model for the analysis of a subject's history (Figure 1). The arrows represent interrelationships and do not initially represent a direction of effect. Application of the model requires a specific question on the history of the subject and reference to theories (Ibid.).

If one thinks about the considerations in the sociology and theory of science which describe bypassing the principle of reputation, the question arises of what influences the transformation from reputation into other currencies of success and back again in the subject. One quickly notices that an answer cannot be found without considering the wider social framework (non-scientific fields) and the academic system (constellation of disciplines), which also includes other subjects.

An example will make this clearer. According to the model offered by Löblich and Scheu, reputation can come about as follows: Scientists in communication studies (Biographies) develop theories and bring about advances in knowledge through research (Ideas). Institutions made up of groups of individual scientists show their appreciation for the advances by attributing reputation. This is therefore the result of the combination of three interrelationships, symbolised by the three double-headed arrows on the level of the subject itself (Discipline of communication studies) in the centre. However, this level is also influenced by the society level. If the decision is made there to phase out certain subjects, for example, such as during the reorganisation of the university system in East Germany following the end of the GDR (Frühwald, 1994), the reputation of those researching in that area sinks alongside public perception and funding.

ALTERNATIVE HISTORICAL REPRESENTATION OF THE SUBJECT'S DEVELOPMENT

At what times in the history of communication studies in Germany since 1945 have which influencing factors led to a change in how the four "currencies" interact and thus influenced their "conversion"? The answer to this leads to an alternative or supplementary chronology of the subject, which does not contradict the many other representations of the subject's history (most recently Wilke, 2010; Löblich,

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[5] Bourdieus' (1983) theory of different types of capital also recognises the conversion of these into one another. The transformation costs he identifies are omitted in the following and the assessment of their role is left to future empirical investigations into the scientific system.
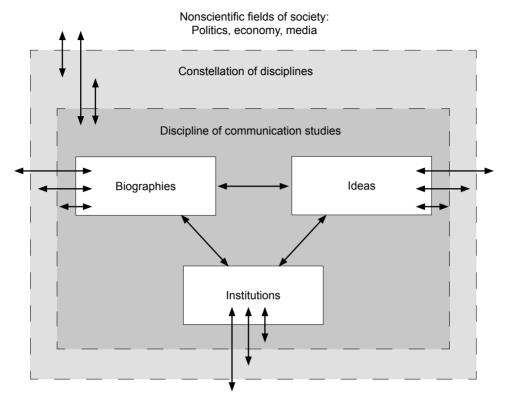
Figure 1. Model for the analysis of the history of communication studies

Source: Löblich & Scheu 2011, p. 7.

2007; Meyen & Löblich, 2006; Meyen, 2004) on which it is based in terms of facts, but instead uses a focus based on the sociology and theory of science, which also offers new insights into current problems and challenges in the subject.

Influences on reputation

With regard to the "currency" of reputation, at least four phases can be identified in which there were larger devaluations of the reputation of scientists in communication studies. The first phase stretches from 1945 to approx. 1960. During this time, the subject was under reconstruction, and much of the personnel was discredited. Newspaper studies (Zeitungswissenschaft) "had offered itself to National Socialism and had been corrupted by it […]. Most scientists in newspaper studies who survived the war did not return to the universities. Eighty per cent of the institutes were closed down" (Bohrmann, 2005, p. 164; Meyen, 2007).

The second phase is the time of the shift from a humanistic to an empirical social scientific disciple in the 1960s, which was triggered by, among other factors,

changing media structures and the thus induced demand for reliable data from publishers, broadcasters and the sectors of politics concerned with the media:

> In the "no holds barred" fight for the selection of the prevailing understanding of the subject, social sciences […] research standards had established themselves by the end of the 1960s. Those within the subject who were not prepared to respond to the changed ambient conditions lost influence. (Löblich, 2010, p. 553; Hardt, 1976)

After the gradual expansion of the subject which followed, the third phase of reputation devaluation came with German reunification in 1990. Communication studies was established in the new states in the East, which required staff (professors), who were imported from the West (Schulz, 2006; Fig. 2). As always when demand for specialist staff increases quickly — compared to periods of lower demand — the reputation which the individual must bring with him to achieve the same position decreases (Pareto, 1962; Meyen, 2007).

Figure 2. The expansion of communication studies in former East (and West) Germany from 1987 (left) to 1997 (right)

Source: Ruhrmann et al. 2000, p. 286f.

The subject is currently in the fourth phase. Despite initial countermeasures, as a result of both consistently high demand among students and the increasing mediatisation of society (Kepplinger, 2002) the subject is growing faster than it can produce new scientists:

In some areas of the field, in part due to the great allure of the media market, too little of the next generation of scientists are qualified, so that sooner or later there will be significant problems in filling in particular relevant professorships with social science orientations. This tense situation means that it is almost impossible to further expand social science-based communication studies in the medium term. (Wissenschaftsrat, 2007, p. 13f.)[6]

Influences on public perception

Communication studies has never enjoyed much public attention (Ibid.), although there are at least three exceptions. Elisabeth Noelle-Neumann twice played a crucial role in this: Firstly, in the late 1950s and early 1960s, she was by far the best known German academic in the field of empirical communication research, which was establishing itself at the time. This is shown, for example, by her two appearances on the cover of the renowned German news magazine *DER SPIEGEL* (No. 44/1953 and 34/1957). No other German colleague in the subject has ever enjoyed this honour. As a "media star" (Kepplinger, 2010, p. 585), she began teaching at Johannes Gutenberg University, Mainz, in 1964. Furthermore, her book *The Spiral of Silence* (1980) caused a sensation and achieved a comparably large media echo, in part because it was viewed as "provocation for television journalists" (Alt, 1980, p. 203). *The Spiral of Silence* became a bestseller (Langenbucher, 2010).

The subject achieved its third escape from its shadowy existence involuntarily. In the debate about Alphons Silbermann's "feeling for the snow of yesteryear" (Rühl, 1997, p. 157), Silbermann started an attack on the subject — also his "swansong in German media and communication studies" — in the largest German weekly newspaper, *Die Zeit* (51/1996). In response, Irene Neverla (5/1997) and Günter Bentele and Stephan Ruß-Mohl (both 6/1997) defended the subject with their own articles in *Die Zeit* and thus brought themselves and the subject to the attention of a wider public. Ernst Elitz, however, criticised the subject in the debate (7/1997), before *Die Zeit* allowed Silbermann to have the last word (8/1997).

Influences on funding

Communication studies receives relatively little funding compared to other scientific disciplines (Wissenschaftsrat, 2007), but can also look back on a long history of constant financing for research from third parties. However, at least three phases can be identified in which there was unusually high funding from non-university sponsors. In the first phase, from 1971 to 1994, around DM 2.2 million was poured

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[6] The latest survey of subject members was, however, unable to establish a lack of young research fellows (Altmeppen et al., 2011).

into 186 research projects in communication studies. The client was the German federal government, predominantly via the Federal Press Office. This form of research financing even allowed the foundation of non-university research institutions such as the Working Group for Communication Research [Arbeitsgruppe für Kommunikationsforschung] and its successor, the Munich Working Group for Communication Research [Arbeitsgruppe Kommunikationsforschung München] (Wilke, 2010).

In the second phase, as part of the DFG's (German Research Foundation) research focus programme "Media Effects," twelve projects were financed with a total of DM 6 million between 1981 and 1992. In the closing research report, Winfried Schulz drew attention to the reputation-generating effect of the programme:

> Even more important than the amount of money is […] its use. By far the largest proportion was used for staffing, mainly for research fellows. To its credit, it should therefore be noted that many younger colleagues had the opportunity to gain experience in empirical research, further qualifications and academic reputation. (Schulz, 1992, p. 6)

The third phase began with the German Universities Excellence Initiative in 2005, which represents a "change of paradigm in […] university policy" (Hartmann, 2006, p. 447): "Entire universities and their faculties compete for privileges using their future concepts with great media effectiveness" (Förster, 2009, p. 442). So far, a media studies joint project has emerged from the Excellence Initiative, namely the International Graduate Centre for the Study of Culture at Giessen University (Wissenschaftsrat, 2007). It can be assumed that further projects will follow. Between 2005 and 2009, research projects in German-language communication studies received a total of at least EUR 17 million in third-party funding (not only from the Excellence Initiative). Fortunately, the funders did not directly influence the selection of theories (Altmeppen et al., 2011). Furthermore, many affiliated institutes have been founded in order to make it easier to raise third-party funding and initiate cooperation with companies (Spiller & Weinacht, 2012).

Influences on evaluations

Since the beginning of the 1990s, the number of evaluations in communication studies — as in academia in Germany in general — has increased significantly (Lepori et al., 2012). A differentiation can be made between evaluations at an institutional and a personal level. The former are based on scientific policy decisions and are the result of reforms within the discipline. The latter are the result of these decisions and reforms, but also underline the increased significance of positive evaluation results for the career of a researcher in communication studies (Table 1).

Table 1. Growth in evaluations in communication studies since the early 1990s

Institutional	Personal
Publications	
• Introduction of a peer review process to the selection of articles for the journals *Publizistik* (gradually since the second half of the 1990s) and *Medien & Kommunikationswissenschaft* (1996, then called *Rundfunk und Fernsehen*) and at DGPuK annual conferences (2002)	• Articles in peer-reviewed journals are becoming more important: Increase in cumulative doctorates and post-doctorates • Tenure track evaluations for newly-created junior professorships (since 2002), in future: fixed-term professorships • Newly-created excellence classification of individual scientists, e.g. at the Gutenberg Research College at Mainz University
Research process	
• Excellence initiative from 2005 • (Associated with mediatisation: competition for public attention as an argument for future funding)	• Increase in third-party funding and project funding since the early 1990s (see chapter on funding) leads to constant "casting" for research ideas and effort required to write project applications • (Associated with mediatisation: Prominence provides an improved negotiating position when applying for funding both from within and outside the university)
Teaching	
• Evaluation boost due to Bologna reforms from 1999: accreditation of degree courses, measurement of student workload, prizes for outstanding student performance • Assessment through rankings of the Centre for Higher Education Development (from 1998) • Pressure to differentiate degree courses due to reintroduction of tuition fees (from 2005)	• Qualification of education managers necessary • Teaching evaluations becoming more important in applications (including for professorships); in future: teaching professorships and payment according to teaching performance • Now: fixed-term teaching positions for research fellows as part of the Higher Education Pact

Sources: Hömberg, 2002; Lauf, 2002; Neubert & Scherer, 2004; Rössler, 2004; Wilke, 2007; Zierer, 2011; Gross, 2012; Lepori et al., 2012.

INTEGRATION INTO THE SUBJECT'S EXISTING CHRONOLOGY

Now that it has been explained at which time which currencies of success were particularly significant in communication studies and thus when publicity, funding and evaluation results could be converted into reputation particularly effectively,

the (fragmented) subject chronology presented here will be integrated into Jürgen Wilke's more comprehensive and widely accepted version (2010, Table 2). Using the "currencies" from the previous chapter, analytical presentation can thus be transformed into a clearer chronological presentation, which allows development over time to be viewed as a whole.

Table 2. Integration of the four "currencies" into the subject's chronology, according to Wilke, 2010

Wilke, 2010 — (according to Clark, 1972)	Four "currencies"			
	Reputation	Publicity	Funding	Evaluations
Solitary scientists (since Karl Bücher 1916)	(Not taken into account in this study)[7]			
Amateur science (1920s)				
Emerging science (1945–1960s)	⇩	⬀	⇨	⇨
Established science (1960s–1990s)	⇩	⬀	⇧	⇧
Big science (since the late 1990s)	⇩	⇨	⇧	⇧

Source: Wilke, 2010.

It can be seen that personal reputation was devalued (downwards arrow) in all three phases after 1945. The triggers were always factors on the society level, i.e. in the outer area of the analytical model of Löblich & Scheu (2011, see chapter on converting).

During the phases of emerging and established science, only individual representatives of the subject achieved public attention (which is why the arrow points diagonally upwards). In the "big science" phase, however, they gained an ambivalent character (horizontal arrow). The triggers for public attention in each case were factors within communication studies, i.e. in the inner field of the analytical model.

There was no change in funding or evaluation results in the first phase after 1945 (horizontal arrow), while the last two phases displayed clear swings in the importance of these two "currencies," triggered by developments on the societal and internal scientific level. This means that these two currencies in particular can be well used in communication studies today for transformation into reputation.

It should therefore not be inferred from the table that the reputation of the subject sank ever further with time and that it gained ever more funding despite this,

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[7] Observation of this period — with different research questions — can be found in Averbeck (2001).

for example. Instead, phases occurred time and again in which large groups of scientists underwent a devaluation of their reputation. In between, normal scientific operations gave them the chance to build up their reputation again. Independently of this, individual scientists or entire groups were able to use the relevant "substitute currency" to bypass the reputation mechanism within science at various times.

CONCLUSION AND OUTLOOK

What does this development mean for the question posed at the start, regarding the practical use of communication studies research on an individual and subject level? Two parallel developments can be predicted for the future.

If one understands today's constantly increasing pressure to attract third-party funding and the constant evaluation cycles for the researcher personally[8] as incentive structures for targeted actions, a bisection of the subject becomes clear, as sociologists of science have described similarly for other subjects (Kliche, 2011): Some of the scientists will turn their back on problems in practice, since the circumstances given do not allow them enough time. They are both unwilling and unable to constantly work themselves into the ground as service providers for practical application and to publish for it (Fröhlich, 2002). They may also believe that they contribute enough to solving practical problems indirectly (Marcinkowski, 2012). This does not mean that they do not solve practical problems at all, but it is not their primary objective. Other scientists will orientate themselves more towards the stipulations of knowledge-based society, which means not presenting analyses in the media only once developments are complete, but using the knowledge and explanatory models of communication studies to intervene in ongoing processes of change — in conjunction with acceptance of previous results with lower validity (Münkler, 2011). This allows faster reactions to practical problems. The increase in project and third-party funding and evaluations wanted by science policymakers, combined with the chance of a greater public presence, drives this second group of subject representatives in exactly this direction, dealing comparatively more often with current, fashionable topics (Peters et al., 2009) — with all the dangers of possible infringement of science ethics which this may bring (Merton, 1972; Wagner, 1993; Brosius, 2003). The idea that each researcher should publish funding declarations for projects funded by third parties has been considered to counteract this (Fischer-Lescano, 2012).

As a result of the same incentives structure, researchers from both groups in communication studies will increase their number of research topics to an ever greater extent and divide them between the two areas. Thus they can, on the one hand, optimise their reputation and perhaps the total of the other three currencies

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[8] The fact that the pressure is rising can also be seen in the growing number of co-authorships in journals, which are so important for career progression (Brosius & Haas, 2009).

of success for themselves personally and perhaps enjoy success in the long term. On the other hand, this dual strain leads to faster specialisation and differentiation (Rosa, 2003).

Further empirical research will be required to determine which of the two developments will take place in which form and the extent to which the functionality of the science system in Germany, to which communication studies belongs, increases or decreases for society.

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