

Call for papers – *Comunicazione Politica* n. 3/2021 – Covid crisis and political communication

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Since the first months of 2020, the COVID-19 crisis has developed globally, generating consequences and reactions in various aspects of social life. One of the most specific and characterizing features of this crisis lies in the coexistence and interconnection of multiple elements of change in (so far) seemingly distant fields. The crisis immediately turned out to be “hyper-connected”, due to its genesis, geography, dynamics, institutions, impact, perspectives, communication, information, protagonists, as well as the centrality of the digital infrastructure that innervates communication and activities in the contemporary world.

In its most directly political aspects, the crisis has acquired great media visibility and has brought to the fore the issue of the connection between scientific and political communication. The stress to which healthcare institutions have been subjected has led to unprecedented responses from government institutions at different levels, in an attempt to reconcile the tackling of pandemic emergencies, the subsequent economic crisis and the reactions of public opinion. The emergency has also highlighted the role of “fake news” in shaping the public opinion and in affecting individual behavior and the progressive choices of decision makers. As scholars of political communication well know, the crowding of information and narratives in a hybrid and high-choice communicative environment constitutes a challenge for the functioning of democracies. This generates research questions about topics such as information disorders, the possible segmentation of the public into “echo chambers”, and the ways in which they impact the quality and formation of public opinion. These dynamics further intersect with the unprecedented visibility of science and the urgency of policy making in light of the political and economic repercussions of the pandemic on individual well-being, sociality, and values.

This monographic issue of *ComPol* intends to highlight the political communication mechanisms that have been contributing to shaping the development and outcomes of this crisis. We therefore encourage the submission of contributions that effectively combine a solid theoretical approach to research questions, an appropriate methodological approach to the collection of empirical materials, and an accurate data analysis. In order to try to overcome the idiosyncratic explanations of intrinsically complex phenomena, articles of a comparative nature and more broadly a comparative perspective are also strongly encouraged.

We have identified four thematic areas of particular interest: due to their interconnected nature, they could give rise to proposals that span across multiple areas.

The first is the area of **decision-making**, primarily involving the governments and institutions that have had to face the challenges of the pandemic. This area may explore the role of political communication by national governments, and the way in which they have interacted more or less closely - and more or less controversially - with local governments and supranational institutions.

Further points of interest are the different geographies and timing of the contagion, as well as government responses and their consequences intersected with the characteristics of their political systems. Consider for example the nature of the regime (for instance, the Chinese dictatorship); the presence of populist governments (such as, among the others, in Brazil, USA, Hungary); political culture in terms of a country's readiness to track and control citizens' behavior (e.g., in Asia, South Korea and Japan, or, in Europe, Great Britain and Sweden); and the peculiar dynamics in the interactions of majorities and oppositions. In short, a composite framework and a field of comparative research on how various government institutions have communicated the - and during the - crisis: states, regions, executives, oppositions, parliaments, healthcare institutions, parties.

A second thematic area is related to **science** and its relationship with debate and political decisions. The COVID-19 crisis highlighted several science-related issues worth investigating: first, a crisis in the credibility of science and the questioning of the role of expert mediators, as already observed in the debates on climate change and vaccines. Second, the emergence of old and new conspiracy theories and the spread of fake news and disinformation concerning the origins and management of the pandemic. Third, partially as a consequence of the first two phenomena, the problematic dynamics of science communication and its translation into more widespread communication models.

A third thematic area concerns **media** and their crucial role as mediators between political decisions and the formation of public opinion. Some of the most interesting aspects of this area (and in clear relation to the previous points as well as to the next one) are the question of competition vs. consensus in the formation of dominant frames (e.g. in connection with political competition) and the politicization and popularization of influential scientist figures.

A fourth area of research concerns **citizens** and their relationship with the aspects listed above. In order to understand the development of their attitudes and behaviors, we can turn to the interaction between citizens' characteristics and the three elements mentioned above: from trust in political actors and science, to the use of and trust in the media, to the modality of formation and expression of opinions and the consequent behavioral choices. It is also important to consider that these dynamics unfolded in a somewhat new context of technological "hyper-connection".

This issue is therefore open to contributions that address one or more (as is more likely, given the "hyper-connected" nature of the crisis and its implications) of these topics with a theoretically well-grounded analysis which ideally should be as comparative and documented as possible.

Proposals (maximum 1,000 words excluding bibliography) are required to illustrate the objectives of the paper, the research question and the methodology adopted. They have to be sent to rivista@compol.it, to guido.legnante@unipv.it and to sergio.splendore@unimi.it by March 25th, 2021. The selection of proposals will take place by April 10th. The deadline for submitting manuscripts is June 15th. Manuscripts will undergo a double blind review system.