7
De Gaulle’s Communications Strategy

This chapter analyses de Gaulle’s communications strategy. Sections 7.1 and 7.2 examine de Gaulle’s broadcast addresses, interviews and press conferences. Section 7.3 studies de Gaulle’s strategy during the 1965 presidential campaign.

Section 7.4 seeks to comprehend the origins of de Gaulle’s communications strategy: Section 7.4.1 argues that de Gaulle’s wartime experience accounts for his understanding of the importance of broadcasting media for political leadership. Section 7.4.2 claims that Gaulle’s inter-war writings on military strategy prefigure his broadcast communication style and handling of television. Section 7.4.3 contends that de Gaulle used the broadcasting media in order to perform ‘charismatic actions’. This notion refers to the public and broadcast acts that de Gaulle performed either to reinforce his charisma (charisma-reinforcing actions) or to make demands on people by relying on his charisma (charisma-spending actions). Section 7.4.4 reflects on the impact of the creation of the presidency on the French public communications system. Section 7.4.5 establishes that among the authors who made an impression on de Gaulle, it is social scientist Gustave Le Bon who most influenced his communications strategy.

7.1 Broadcast addresses and interviews

De Gaulle addressed the nation 79 times during his presidency, including 52 television addresses broadcast on radio and television, four radio addresses, five interviews and 18 press conferences (see Figure 7.1).
Figure 7.1  De Gaulle’s broadcast interventions from 1958 to 1969