

Second Edition

Political Public Relations

Concepts, Principles, and Applications

Edited by Jesper Strömbäck and Spiro Kioussis



Political Public Relations

The second edition of *Political Public Relations* offers an interdisciplinary overview of the latest theory and research in the still emerging field of political public relations.

The book continues its international orientation in order to fully contextualize the field amidst the various political and communication systems today. Existing chapters have been updated and new chapters added to reflect evolving trends such as the rise of digital and social media, increasing political polarization, and the growth of political populism. As a singular contribution to scholarship in public relations and political communication, this volume serves as an important catalyst for future theory and research.

This volume is ideal for researchers and courses at the intersection of public relations, political communication, and political science.

Jesper Strömbäck is professor in journalism and political communication at the Department of Journalism, Media and Communication at the University of Gothenburg, Sweden.

Spiro Kiouisis, Ph.D., APR, is professor of public relations and executive associate dean in the College of Journalism and Communications at the University of Florida, USA.

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Political Public Relations

Concepts, Principles, and Applications

2nd Edition

**Edited by Jesper Strömbäck and
Spiro Kiouis**

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Contributors

Kara Alaimo, Ph.D., is an assistant professor of public relations at Hofstra University. She researches international and political public relations. She was previously a communicator in the Obama administration and United Nations and is the author of *Pitch, Tweet, or Engage on the Street: How to Practice Global Public Relations and Strategic Communication* (2016), which explains how to adapt PR strategies for different cultures. She contributes to CNN Opinion and Bloomberg Opinion, and has published in journals including the *International Journal of Communication*, *Journal of Communication Management*, *Journal of Public Affairs*, *Social Media & Society*, and *Case Studies in Strategic Communication*.

Phillip Arceneaux, Ph.D., is a graduate of the University of Florida's College of Journalism and Communications. His research interests include public diplomacy, i.e. international political public relations, computational propaganda, technology policy, and international law. This interdisciplinary approach studies the growing political uses and impacts of social media and explores legal frameworks for telecommunication regulation to address such issues. His work has been published in *New Media and Society*, the *Journal of International Communication*, and the *Journal of Public Interest Communication*. He is an active member of the International Communication Association and the International Studies Association.

Sarah Bonewits Feldner, Ph.D., is a professor in the Diederich College of Communication at Marquette University. Her primary research focus is corporate communication with an emphasis on advocacy and organizational identity. Her work uses a rhetorical approach to analyze the ways in which organizations establish identities. Her work has been published in the *International Journal of Strategic Communication*, *Management Communication Quarterly*, and *Public Relations Journal*. She teaches courses in organizational communication, corporate advocacy, and communication consulting.

Jonathan Borden is a doctoral candidate at the S.I. Newhouse School of Public Communications at Syracuse University. His research focuses on public relations and how identities and ideology affect message

reception. Borden's past work has been published in *Telematics and Informatics*, *Journal of Contingencies and Crisis Management*, and the *International Journal of Communication*, as well as in several edited volumes. He is active in the Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication and the International Communications Association.

Shannon A. Bowen, Ph.D., is a professor at the University of South Carolina. She focuses on ethical decision-making within the highest levels of organizations. Her research includes issues management and public policy, public relations theory, leadership, mission and vision, organizational culture, values, decision-making, artificial intelligence, and the influence of change on organizational ethics. Bowen is a regular op-ed columnist for *PRWeek* and joint editor of *Ethical Space: The International Journal of Communication Ethics*. She sits on the Board of Trustees of the Arthur W. Page Society and the non-profit, International Public Relations Research Conference (IPRRC). Bowen has won many awards for her research, which includes over 100 publications. Her professional experience is on Capitol Hill and in political research.

W. Timothy Coombs, Ph.D., is the George T. and Gladys H. Abell Professor in Liberal Arts in the Department of Communication at Texas A&M University and an honorary professor in the Department of Business Communication at Aarhus University. His primary areas of research are crisis communication and corporate social responsibility. He is the current editor for *Corporation Communication: An International Journal*. His research has appeared in *Management Communication Quarterly*, *Public Relations Review*, *Corporate Reputation Review*, *Journal of Public Relations Research*, *Journal of Communication Management*, *Business Horizons*, and the *Journal of Business Communication*.

Viorela Dan, Ph.D., is a postdoctoral researcher at the Ludwig Maximilian University in Munich. She received her Ph.D. in communication studies from the Free University of Berlin in 2016. Her research focuses on the social construction of reality, and has been recognized with various honors, including the Highly Commended Award (2012) and the Promising Professor Award (2013). Her latest publication is *Integrative Framing Analysis: Framing Health Through Words and Visuals* (2018).

Matthew Eshbaugh-Soha, Ph.D., is department chair and professor of political science at the University of North Texas. His research focuses on American political institutions, specifically the presidency and mass media, and public policy. He is the author of nearly three dozen scholarly articles and two books, including *Breaking through the Noise: Presidential Leadership, Public Opinion, and the News Media* (2011). He is

currently finishing a co-authored book manuscript about the reasons presidents go public on Supreme Court cases.

Guy Golan, Ph.D., is a visiting associate professor at the Zimmerman School of Advertising and Mass Communications at the University of South Florida. His research focuses on media effects and public opinion with a special emphasis on international politics. Golan has published nearly 50 peer-reviewed journal articles in publications such as *Communication Research*, *Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly*, *Mass Communication and Society*, *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication*, *Information, Communication & Society*, *Journal of Public Relations Research*, and *The Journal of Interactive Advertising*. He has co-edited two books: *International Public Relations and Public Diplomacy* (2014) and *International Media Communication in a Global Age* (2009). Golan has been quoted in the *New York Times*, *USA Today*, *Bloomberg News*, *Slate Magazine*, *Huffington Post Live*, Spain's *El País* and Colombia's *El Espectador*.

Robert L. Heath, Ph.D., is professor emeritus at the University of Houston. He is author or editor of 23 books, including handbooks and master collections, and 266 articles in major journals, chapters in leading edited books, and encyclopedia entries. In addition to strategic issues management, he has written on rhetorical theory, social movements, communication theory, public relations, organizational communication, crisis communication, risk communication, terrorism, corporate social responsibility, investor relations, engagement, public interest, and reputation management. His most recent books are the *International Encyclopedia of Strategic Communication* (2018) and the *Handbook of Organizational Rhetoric and Communication* (2018).

Øyvind Ihlen, Ph.D., is a professor at the Department of Media and Communication, University of Oslo, and co-director of POLKOM – Centre for the Study of Political Communication. Among his publications are *Public Relations and Social Theory: Key Figures and Concepts* (2009, 2nd expanded edition 2018, with Magnus Fredriksson), the award-winning edited *Handbook of Communication and Corporate Social Responsibility* (2011, with Jennifer Bartlett and Steve May), and the *Handbook of Organizational Rhetoric* (2018, with Robert L. Heath). Ihlen was President of the European Public Relations Education and Research Association (EUPRERA) 2016–2017. His research focuses on strategic communication/public relations, using theories of rhetoric and sociology.

Spiro Kiouis, Ph.D., APR, is executive associate dean and a professor of public relations for the College of Journalism and Communications, University of Florida. His current research interests include political public relations, political communication, and digital communication. Specifically, this interdisciplinary research explores the interplay among

political public relations efforts, news media content, and public opinion in traditional and interactive mass mediated contexts. Kiouis has had articles published in several leading journals, including *Communication Research*, *Journal of Communication*, *Journalism Studies*, *Public Relations Review*, the *International Journal of Strategic Communication*, *Public Relations Journal*, and the *Journal of Public Relations Research*.

Darren Lilleker, Ph.D., is associate dean in the Faculty of Media and Communication at Bournemouth University. He is chair of the International Political Science Association Political Communication Research Cluster and editor of the Palgrave Political Communication and Campaigning book series. He is author, editor, and co-editor of numerous books including *Political Marketing in Comparative Perspective* (2003), *Key Concepts in Political Communication* (2006), *Political Communication and Cognition* (2014), and *Visual Political Communication* (2018).

Diana Knott Martinelli, Ph.D., serves as associate dean and is the Widmeyer Professor in Public Relations at West Virginia University's Reed College of Media. Her research interests include intersections of public relations history, government communications, and advocacy. She serves on the editorial review boards for the *Journal of Public Relations Research*, *Mass Communication and Society*, and *Communication Research Reports*. She is a member of the Arthur W. Page Society, Public Relations Society of America, Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication, and Kappa Tau Alpha, and serves on the advisory board of the Plank Center for Leadership in Public Relations.

Pamala Proverbs, M.P.S., MBA, APR, is a Ph.D. student and instructor in public relations at the College of Journalism and Communications, University of Florida. A career public relations practitioner of over 20 years, she approaches scholarship pragmatically. Her research interests include women's studies, corporate social responsibility, crisis communications, and development. Her work has been presented at the International Public Relations Research Conference and International Communication Association conference. She is a member of the Public Relations Society of America, the International Association of Business Communications, and the International Communication Association.

Ketil Raknes is a Ph.D. candidate and lecturer at Oslo University College. He has previously been a political advisor in the Norwegian Ministry of Education and state secretary in the Norwegian Ministry of Environment. His research focuses on the communicative strategies lobbyists use to influence decision-makers. His latest publication is the co-authored article, "Framing 'the Public Interest': Comparing Public Lobbying Campaigns in Four European States in *Journal of Public Interest Communication*".

Karen Sanders, Ph.D., is professor of communication and politics and dean of research at St Mary's University, London. She lectures, writes, researches, and advises in the fields of public sector communication, populist communication, and communication ethics. Her books include *Ethics and Journalism* (2003), *Communicating Politics in the 21st Century* (2008), *Political Scandals in Britain and Spain* (2006) and the co-edited *Government Communication* (2013) as well as numerous articles and chapters. Sanders served as president of the Association of Political Communication (ACOP, Asociación de Comunicación Política) from 2012 to 2014 and has served on its board from its foundation in 2008 until 2016.

Trent Seltzer, Ph.D., is an associate professor in the Department of Public Relations at Texas Tech University's College of Media and Communication, where he also serves as the assistant dean for graduate studies. His research has focused on organization–public relationship management across a variety of applied contexts, including politics and health, and has appeared in *Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly*, *Public Relations Review*, *Journal of Public Relations Research*, *International Journal of Strategic Communication*, and PRSA's *Public Relations Journal*. Currently, he is studying the role of strategic communication in supporting efforts to improve adolescent mental health and resilience.

Erich J. Sommerfeldt, Ph.D., is an associate professor of public relations in the Department of Communication at the University of Maryland. He is a two-time winner of the PRIDE Best Article of the Year Award from the Public Relations Division of the National Communication Association. His research focuses on activist group communication, public diplomacy, and the role of public relations in building civil society and social capital. His published work has appeared in journals such as *Public Relations Review*, *Journal of Public Relations Research*, *International Journal of Strategic Communication*, and the *Journal of Applied Communication Research*, among others.

Jesper Strömbäck, Ph.D., is a professor of journalism and political communication in the Department of Journalism, Media and Communication at the University of Gothenburg. He is also associate editor of political communication. He has published widely on various aspects of political communication, including as co-editor of the books *Global Political Marketing* (2010), *Mediatization of Politics: Understanding the Transformation of Western Democracies* (2014), and *Populist Political Communication in Europe* (2016).

Kaye D. Sweetser, Ph.D., APR+M, Fellow PRSA, is a professor of public relations at San Diego State University. With more than 20 years spent as a PR practitioner, she brings the industry perspective into her scholarship. Her research on digital PR ranges in context across

military, political, and everyday practitioner use of technology in PR. She completed her graduate work at the University of Florida, and obtained her bachelor's degree from Old Dominion University.

Elizabeth L. Toth, Ph.D., is a professor of public relations in the Department of Communication at the University of Maryland, College Park. She is past president of the Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication. She has published widely on gender and public relations, including *Women in Public Relations: How Gender Influences Practice* (2013) and *The Gender Challenge to Media: Diverse Voices from the Field* (2000). She was editor of the *Journal of Public Relations Research*. She co-chairs the Commission on Public Relations Education and chairs the AEJMC Institute for Diverse Leadership committee.

Kati Tusinski Berg, Ph.D., is an associate professor in the Diederich College of Communication at Marquette University. Her research focuses on public relations ethics, lobbying as public relations advocacy, and corporate social responsibility. Her work has been published in the *Journal of Media Ethics, Case Studies in Strategic Communication, PRism*, and in edited books. She teaches courses in strategic communication including public relations, ethics, and corporate social responsibility.

Jian Wang, Ph.D., is director of the University of Southern California Center on Public Diplomacy and an associate professor at the Annenberg School for Communication and Journalism. He has published widely on the role of communication in the contemporary process of globalization. His most recent book is *Shaping China's Global Imagination: Nation Branding at the World Expo*. He serves on the editorial board of the *International Journal of Communication* and is a member of the advisory committee of the USA Pavilion at Expo 2020 Dubai. He previously worked for the international consulting firm McKinsey & Company.

Damion Waymer, Ph.D., is chair of the Department of Advertising and Public Relations at the University of Alabama. His research centers on organizational discourse, particularly regarding public relations, issues management, corporate social responsibility (CSR), branding, and strategic communication. Via his research, he addresses fundamental concerns about issues of power, race, class, and gender, specifically, how these social constructions shape and influence the ways that various stakeholders interpret and respond to messages.

Aimei Yang, Ph.D., is an assistant professor of public relations in the Annenberg School for Communication and Journalism at the University of Southern California. Yang's research is positioned at the intersection of strategic public relations, inter-organizational relationships,

and stakeholder relationship management. Yang studies civil actors' issue advocacy and the dynamic relationship networks among non-profit organizations, corporations, and governments. Yang's work has appeared in journals such as *Business & Society*, *Communication Theory*, *Management Communication Quarterly*, *Journal of Public Relations Research*, and *Public Relations Review*.

Yicheng Zhu, Ph.D., is an assistant professor in public relations at the School of Journalism and Communication at Beijing Normal University. He works mainly in the fields of public relations, public diplomacy, and international relations, and has published in *International Communication Gazette*, *Journal of Media and Religion*, etc. His current focus is on foreign publics segmentation and transnational persuasion. Before receiving his Ph.D. at the University of South Carolina, he studied in China, the UK, Cuba, and Spain, and worked as a cultural/educational diplomat at the Ministry of Education of China.

Preface

While political communication and public relations have always been closely intertwined, public relations strategies and tactics are probably more ubiquitous in political communication today than ever. Still, there is neither much theorizing nor empirical research that centers on *political public relations*. Most public relations theory and research centers on public relations strategies and tactics in relation to the corporate sector, while most political communication research bypasses or only briefly mentions public relations theory and research. The same holds true for most political science research that deals with relevant areas of inquiry. Furthermore, political communication and political science scholars are seldom well-versed in public relations theory, whereas public relations scholars too seldom display a deeper understanding of what makes politics different from other areas of inquiry.

In other words, despite the importance of political public relations, the general rule is that there is not much theorizing and research that manages to bridge the gap between public relations, political communication, and political science theory and research.

To remedy this and to encourage integrative theory and research that bridges the gap between public relations, political communication, political science, and other related fields, in 2011 we published the first edition of this book. Since then much has happened to political public relations as both theory and practice. We are thus happy that Routledge offered us the opportunity to publish a second, revised edition.

Similar to the first edition of the book, we have tried to cover the most important contexts of political public relations. An overview of the content is included in the first chapter, but briefly, the volume includes chapters on political public relations and news management, agenda building, corporate issues management, strategic framing, crisis management, relationship management, government information management and public diplomacy, as well as on presidential political public relations and digital public relations. We have also added several new chapters, including ones on ethics, underrepresented groups, and activism. Not least

important, we have also made sure that all chapters that remain from the first edition have been thoroughly revised to take account of changes that have taken place since the first edition was published. Taken together, we hope that both readers of the first edition and new readers will find the book appealing. We also hope it will be of interest to practitioners in political public relations.

An edited volume like this one only becomes as interesting and important as the contributors make it. As editors, we thus want to express our gratitude first and foremost to all contributors for their efforts and contributions to this book. It has been a great pleasure to get to know and to work together with the contributors, some of the best scholars in the intersection of public relations, political communication, and political science, and we are sincerely grateful for all the high-quality chapters with which they have provided us.

We would also like to thank Nicole Salazar and Christina Kowalski at Routledge. We are grateful that we were offered to publish a second revised edition, and for all the support we received during the process of conceiving, editing, and publishing this book.

In the editing process, we received some great help from doctoral students Colin Kearney and Pamala Proverbs from the College of Journalism and Communications at the University of Florida. We thus want to thank both for their assistance. Jesper Strömbäck would also like to thank the Department of Journalism, Media and Communication at the University of Gothenburg for great support during the production of this book.

Last but not least, we would also like to thank our families for all their unwavering support and patience when we have been working on this project instead of spending time with them. Jesper Strömbäck would therefore like to thank Berivan Mohammed and his son Loran, and Spiro Kiouisis would like to thank his children Anastassia and Konstantine for their continuing support of his research activities. Finally, we would both like to thank our parents and siblings for their support of our efforts over the years.

Gothenburg and Gainesville, January 2019
Jesper Strömbäck and Spiro Kiouisis



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1 Defining and Mapping the Field of Theory and Research on Political Public Relations

Jesper Strömbäck and Spiro Kioussis

Introduction

In 64 BC, it was time for a new election for consul in Rome, what was then the highest public office in the Republic. Standing against the two main candidates, Antonius and Catiline, was Marcus Tullius Cicero. In contrast to the other candidates, he was from a small town outside of Rome and not part of the nobility. For many of the blue-blooded families, who held most of the power in ancient Rome, voting for such a candidate was unlikely. As even many of the noble families and the powerful classes viewed his contenders with skepticism, Marcus was nevertheless a viable candidate. He was also known as a great orator, then as now a great asset for any political candidate (Freeman & Cicero, 2012).

In this context, the brother of Marcus, Quintus Tullius Cicero, wrote a pamphlet in the form of a letter to Marcus on how to wage a campaign and win an election. This pamphlet, in Latin called the *Commentariolum Petitionis*, is probably the first publication on electioneering and political public relations (Freeman & Cicero, 2012; Strömbäck & Kioussis, 2013).

In this pamphlet, Quintus emphasized that running for office “can be divided into two kinds of activity: securing the support of your friends and winning over the general public” (Freeman & Cicero, 2012, p. 27). A friend, in this context, is not just those who are friends in a traditional sense, but “anyone who shows you goodwill or seeks out your company” (p. 27). At the same time, he also emphasized the importance of knowing “your enemies” and offered advice on how to deal with them. Among the most important pieces of advice otherwise offered were “take stock of the many advantages you possess” (p. 5), “cultivate relationships” (p. 9) with important people, make sure “your family and those closely connected with you” are “all behind you and want you to succeed” (p. 29), “secure supporters from a wide variety of backgrounds” (p. 29), “seek out men everywhere who will represent you as if they themselves were running for office” (p. 47), and remember that there “are three things that will guarantee votes in an election: favors, hope, and personal attachment. You must work to give these incentives to the right people” (p. 33). Here, and in other parts of the pamphlet, we can find traces to some important

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contemporary public relations strategies and tactics such as, for example, relationship management (Ledingham, 2003), reputation management (van Riel & Fombrun, 2007), voter segmentation and targeting (Johnson, 2016), opposition research (Burton & Shea, 2010), rhetoric (Heath, 2006), and persuasion (Pfau & Wan, 2006).

Moving forward to the American Revolutionary War, the campaigns before and during this war revolutionized the tools and techniques of political public relations (Cutlip, 1995). Samuel Adams and his fellow revolutionaries not only pioneered the use of easy-to-remember slogans such as “No taxation without representation,” they also realized the importance of getting their side of the story to the public first and managing news media. They also organized one of the first pseudo events (Boorstin, 1962), the Boston Tea Party (Cutlip, 1995; McKinnon, Tedesco & Lauder, 2001). This event featured colonists dressed as Indians, dumping imported tea into the harbor, in order to catch public attention and crystallize public opinion. Samuel Adams was thus not only one of the fathers of the American Revolution; he was also one of the fathers of press agency and political public relations (Bernays, 1952).

What these examples suggest are two things. The first is that the practice of political public relations is probably as old as politics and society itself (Martinelli, 2011; Strömbäck & Kiouisis, 2011a). If politics is about “who gets what, when, how,” as suggested by Lasswell (1936), and this is decided through processes of communication, persuasion, and information dissemination and processing, then politics, political communication, and political public relations are inextricable linked together. As Bernays (1952), one of the fathers of public relations, wrote in 1952: “The three main elements of public relations are practically as old as society: informing people, persuading people, or integrating people with people” (p. 12). The second is that although the bulk of contemporary public relations theory and research focuses on corporate settings (Botan & Hazleton, 2006; Heath, 2001a), with textbooks often treating public relations in political contexts mostly in passing or as “special cases” (Baines, Egan & Jefkins, 2004; Cutlip, Center & Broom, 2000; L’Etang, 2008; Wilcox & Cameron, 2006), in practice, politics, political communication and public relations have always been closely intertwined. A strong case could even be made that public relations strategies and techniques in general were established by political actors and in political contexts, and used for political purposes (Cutlip, 1995; Lamme & Russell, 2010; Newsom, Turk & Kruckeberg, 2010). In fact, it was mainly during the last half of the 19th century, with the rise of the industrial society and modern mass media, that public relations became increasingly prominent within and mainly associated with the commercial sector.

Hence, the paradox appears to be that while political public relations has a long and prominent history, and continues to be highly important in contemporary political communication processes, there is neither much

theorizing nor empirical research on political public relations. This held true when we published the first edition of this book (Strömbäck & Kioussis, 2011a), and although progress has been made since, it still largely holds true. Most public relations theory and research still centers on public relations strategies and tactics in relation to the corporate sector, while most political communication research neglects or only briefly mentions public relations theory and research. The same is true of most political science research. Furthermore, political communication scholars are seldom well-versed in public relations theory, whereas public relations scholars too seldom display a deeper understanding of what makes political communication and politics different from other areas of inquiry. At the same time, the importance, scope and impact of political public relations has probably increased during the last ten years, given increasing levels of electoral volatility and populism, increasing complexity of media environments, increasing interdependency of nations, and increasing mobility of organizations and people around the globe.

Having said this, important progress has been made in the field of political public relations research during the last ten years. Examples include – but are not restricted to – research on political organization–public relationships (POPR) (Painter, 2015; Seltzer & Zhang, 2011; Seltzer, et al., 2013), government communication (Lee, Neeley & Stewart, 2012; Liu, Horsley & Levenshus, 2010; Sanders & Canél, 2013; Sanders, Canel Crespo & Holtz-Bacha, 2011), relationship cultivation and the use of digital and social media (Karlsson, Clerwall & Buskqvist, 2013; Levenshus, 2010; Svensson, Kioussis & Strömbäck, 2015), the linkage between public relations models and political parties’ communication managers roles (Xifra, 2010), the effects of presidential political public relations (Kioussis & Strömbäck, 2010), and third-level agenda-building (Kioussis, et al., 2015; Kioussis & Ragas, 2016). During the last years, there have also been special issues of both *Public Relations Journal* and *Journal of Public Relations Research* focused entirely on political public relations.

Important exceptions notwithstanding, the general rule is, however, still that there is insufficient theorizing and research that manages to bridge the gap between theory and research in public relations, political communication, political science, and other related fields. This, we believe, is problematic for several reasons. First, bridging the gap between theory and research in public relations, political communication, political science, and other relevant fields is necessary to build theories that draw on each field’s cumulative knowledge, and that can help us understand the practice as well as develop theory in political public relations. Second, developing theory and research in political public relations can help establish a mutually fruitful relationship between theory and practice, where practice can inform theory and theory can inform practice. Third, applying general public relations theories in political contexts is a means not only to build theories on political public relations, but also to test the applicability

of public relations theories in settings beyond the corporate sphere, and hence to contribute to theory-building and development in public relations in general. This is particularly important as there are many things that set politics apart from the corporate sphere from which most present public relations theories have originated, been explored, and tested (Strömbäck & Kioussis, 2011b, 2013).

To remedy this and encourage integrative theory and research that bridges the gap among public relations, political communication, political science and other related fields, in 2011 we published the first edition of this book (Strömbäck & Kioussis, 2011a). Although research on political public relations has made important progress since, the main purpose of this second edition is still the same. Adding to that, we want to take account of and discuss how the many changes since 2011 have influenced the practice and theory of political public relations, and bring the analyses up-to-date. Among the most important changes are the fundamental transformation of media environments that have taken place worldwide, with the increasing importance of digital and social media. This transformation has fundamentally altered the preconditions for and processes of political public relations, political communication, and democracy at large, and will be discussed in each of the chapters to follow. Finally, based on feedback on the first edition of the book, we also wanted to add chapters on areas that were not covered in the first edition.

In this chapter, the purpose is to map and define the field of political public relations, and discuss its relationship with other fields of theory and research, before outlining the chapters included in this volume.

Towards a Definition of Political Public Relations

When Bernays published his classic *Crystallizing Public Opinion* in 1923, he also provided one of the first definitions of public relations – or the activities of the public relations counsel, as he labeled the position. According to Bernays (1923), the public relations counsel is the one

who directs and supervises the activities of his clients wherever they impinge upon the daily life of the public. He interprets the client to the public, which he is enabled to do in part because he interprets the public to the client.

(p. 14)

Already from the beginning, the boundary-spanning role of public relations was thus stressed (White & Dozier, 1992).

In contemporary theory and research, there are a variety of definitions of public relations offered by leading scholars or practitioner organizations. One of the more often quoted definitions is offered by Cutlip, Center and Broom (2000), who assert that “public relations is the management

function that establishes and maintains mutually beneficial relationships between an organization and the publics on whom its success or failure depends” (p. 6). Another widely quoted definition is offered by Grunig and Hunt (1984), who argue that public relations is about the “management of communication between an organization and its publics” (p. 6). A third well-known definition comes from Harlow (1976), who tried to synthesize more than 500 definitions found in the literature. According to him,

Public Relations is the distinctive management function which helps establish and maintain mutual lines of communication, understanding, acceptance and cooperation between an organization and its publics; involves the management of problems or issues; helps management to keep informed on and responsive to public opinion; defines and emphasizes the responsibility of management to serve the public interest; helps management keep abreast of and effectively utilize change, serving as an early warning system to help anticipate trends; and uses research and sound and ethical communication as its principal tools.

(p. 36)

A fourth definition, offered by Coombs and Holladay, adds to the other by highlighting the role of influence in public relations processes. According to them, public relations should be defined as “the management of mutually influential relationships within a web of stakeholder and organizational relationships” (Coombs & Holladay, 2007, p. 2). Finally, according to the Public Relations Society of America (PRSA), “public relations is a strategic communication process that builds mutually beneficial relationships between organizations and their publics” (PRSA, 2012).

These and many other definitions have several traits in common. First, that public relations should be understood as a management function; second, that public relations is about the management of communication between an organization and its publics; third, that relationships between an organization and its publics is at the heart of public relations; and fourth, that these relationships should be mutually beneficial (Cutlip, Center & Broom, 2000; Newsom, Turk & Kruckeberg, 2010; Wilcox & Cameron, 2006).

Having said this, many definitions tend to mix descriptive, prescriptive, and normative elements. This is most evident in definitions including notions that the relationships between an organization and its publics are mutually beneficial. While this might ideally be the case (Sha, 2017), the extent to which such relationships in fact are mutually beneficial is ultimately an empirical question. What public relations *is* and what it *should be* are separate matters. Normative elements should hence not be included in the core definition of public relations – or of political public relations.

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Perceiving public relations as a management function that seeks to establish and maintain relationships between an organization and the publics on whom it depends highlights that organizations and their publics are interdependent. The boundaries between an organization and its publics are porous; the publics can have major effects on the organization just as the organization can have major effects on its publics. Conceptually, this is similar to the relationship among political actors and institutions, media actors and institutions, and the public in political communication research. Hence, McLeod, Kosicki and McLeod (1994) define political communication as

the exchange of symbols and messages between political actors and institutions, the general public, and news media that are the products of or have consequences for the political system. The outcomes of these processes involve the stabilization or alteration of power.

(pp. 125–126)

Similarly, Blumler and Gurevitch (1995, p. 32) contend that

political communication originates in mutual dependence within a framework of divergent though overlapping purposes. Each side of the politician-media professional partnership is striving to realize certain goals vis-à-vis the audience; yet it cannot pursue them without securing in some form the co-operation of the other side.

(p. 32)

Hence, both political communication and public relations are about relationships formed through communication, and in both cases, the relationships between various actors are interdependent and shaped within the boundaries set by structural and semi-structural factors such as laws and constitutions, cultural norms and values, and the overall media and political systems (Blumler & Gurevitch, 1995; Esser & Strömbäck, 2012; Hallin & Mancini, 2004). Neither political communication nor public relations managers and practitioners can disregard the cultural, social, political, institutional, or systemic context in which they are located – or existing power relationships.

Related to the emphasis on relationships, both public relations and political communication are also concerned with the construct of reputation and its impact on stakeholder perceptions and actions (Carroll & McCombs, 2003; Meijer & Kleinnijenhuis, 2006). For example, public relations research on issues management and perspectives on issue ownership in political communication posit that strong reputations are closely related to organizational and institutional effectiveness (Kioussis, Popescu & Mitrook, 2007; Petrocik, Benoit & Hansen, 2003; Walgrave, Tresch & Lefevere, 2015). According to Gotsi and Wilson (2001),

a corporate reputation is a stakeholder's overall evaluation of a company over time. The evaluation is based on the stakeholder's direct experience with the company, any other form of communication and symbolism that provides information about the firm's actions and/or a comparison with the actions of other leading rivals.

(p. 25)

Elsewhere, Wartick (1992) defines reputation as "the aggregation of a single stakeholder's perception of how well organizational responses are meeting the demands and expectations of many corporate stakeholders" (p. 34; see also van Riel & Fombrun, 2007).

A useful framework for understanding the roles of the relational and reputational approaches in stakeholder engagement is offered by Hutton, et al. (2001), who suggest that the importance of each construct varies according to the level of involvement between organizations and their constituencies. Specifically, they suggest that relationship cultivation and management is more critical for groups that are substantially involved with an issue or organization, while perceptions of reputation are more important for more peripheral groups. Within political contexts, active volunteers and donors might be best understood from a relational perspective, while occasional voters might be best understood through a reputational point of view. Thus, the study and practice of political public relations is strongly concerned with both these constructs (Kiousis & Strömbäck, 2011, 2015).

Another similarity between political communication and public relations theory and research is the central role of media. This includes legacy news media – in their traditional or digital formats – as well as digital and social media. As already noted, here major changes have taken place during the last decade, with traditional news media – most notably, the press – losing ground and digital and social media becoming ever more important (Newman, et al., 2018; Pew Research Center, 2018), and with "older" and "newer" media becoming ever more intertwined (Benkler, Faris & Roberts, 2018; Chadwick, 2013). Although interpersonal and direct organizational communication are also important in public relations and political communication processes, various forms of media are beyond doubt the most important sources of information in all matters beyond people's own experiences. Politics and current affairs in post-industrial democracies can thus be described as mediated (Bennett & Entman, 2001; Nimmo & Combs, 1983; Shehata & Strömbäck, 2014). Important to note, not least considering how much is being written about the increasing importance of digital and social media, is, however, that the most important media usually are (still) traditional news media. Their news is increasingly disseminated and consumed via digital and social media, but compared to digital-only and different forms of "alternative" news

media, in most cases, traditional news media still largely rule in terms of importance as a source of information (Benkler, Faris & Roberts, 2018; European Commission, 2016; Gottfried & Shearer, 2017; Newman, et al., 2018). With respect to digital and social media, in many cases they are mainly amplifying information originating from traditional news media.

Hence, political actors, corporations, and other organizations cannot afford to disregard various forms of media, what issues they underscore, and how they frame various actors, issues, and processes. Not least the news media have a major influence on how the world is imagined (Iyengar, 1991; Lecheler & de Vreese, 2019; McCombs, 2014), and as noted by Lippman (1997), “The way in which the world is imagined determines at any particular moment what men will do ... their effort, their feelings, their hopes ...” As a consequence, communication through various media – traditional, digital, and social – has always been and continues to be highly important in political communication as well as in public relations processes. This holds particularly true as various media in established democracies exert a considerable independent influence over all political processes. Thus, modern politics can be described as not only mediated, but also as mediatized, influenced, and shaped by media (Esser & Strömbäck, 2014; Hjarvard, 2013; Strömbäck, 2008).

A key difference between political communication and public relations, however, is that political communication in general does not have to be purposeful. Neither is it a management function. Most theory and research on political communication rather stress how ubiquitously embedded communication is in politics, hence making it virtually impossible to separate “politics” from “communication” – regardless of whether the communication is purposeful or not. As noted by Blumer and Gurevitch (1975):

If politics is about power, the holder’s possession of and readiness to exercise it must in some manner be conveyed to those expected to respond to it. If politics is about participation, this consists in itself of ‘the means by which the interests, desires and demands of the ordinary citizen are communicated to rulers’ [...]. If politics is about the legitimation of supreme authority, then the values and procedural norms of regimes have to be symbolically expressed, and the acts of government have to be justified in broad popular terms. And if politics is about choice, then information flows clarifying alternative policy options must circulate to those concerned with decisions, whether as their shapers or as consumers of their consequences.

(pp. 167–168)

Another crucial difference between political communication and public relations is that political communication theory and research,

comparatively speaking, is more attuned to questions related to conflicts and power, which public relations theory and research sometimes tend to treat as matters that can be managed or resolved through communication. But some conflicts and questions of power are rooted in enduring and incompatible differences between positions or interests, and cannot be resolved through communication (Pfau & Wan, 2006). The ideal might be to create win–win situations (Sha, 2017), but in practice, this is often not achievable. On the other hand, both power and conflicts of power are at the heart of politics, and hence of political communication processes. Lasswell (1936, p. 3) thus defined the study of politics as “the study of influence and the influential,” whereas Key (1964, pp. 2–3) succinctly stated: “Politics as power consists fundamentally of relationships of superordination and subordination, of dominance and submission, of the governors and the governed. The study of politics is the study of these relationships.”

Again, the notion of relationships comes to the forefront, but in political science and political communication, these relationships are characterized by opposing interests, conflicts, and the use (or abuse) of power, whereas in public relations theory and research, there is at times an assumption that all conflicts can be solved and that the relationships between organizations and their publics not only *should be*, but also *are*, mutually beneficial. This is not to say that those studying politics are cynical whereas those studying public relations are naïve, but rather that there are both significant similarities and differences with respect to the focus on and perceptions of the nature of the relationships between different actors in society.

While public relations scholars rather seldom focus on political actors, issues or processes, in political communication research, the purposeful communication of politics is a rather prominent field of inquiry. This research is, however, often decoupled from public relations theories and research, and the term “political public relations” is only rarely used (Concalves, 2014; Jackson, 2012; Strömbäck & Kioussis, 2011a). More often, those who study the purposeful communication of politics refer to terms such as the communication of politics (Negrine, 2008), strategic political communication (Falasca & Grandien, 2017; Kioussis & Strömbäck, 2015), political campaigning or political campaign communication (Plasser & Plasser, 2002), political management (Johnson, 2009), political marketing or market-orientation (Lees-Marshment, 2001), or spinning (Farnsworth, 2009). Sometimes terms such as these are even used interchangeably, although there are some both theoretically and conceptually important differences between, for example, political market-orientation and political campaigning (Strömbäck, 2007).

When the term political public relations is used in political communication research, it is primarily used to refer to purposeful activities by

political actors to influence the media, their agendas and how they frame events, issues, and processes (Davis, 2002; Froehlich & Rüdiger, 2006; McNair, 2000, 2003; Moloney, 2006). Franklin (2004) refers to this as the packaging of politics, but the most common term is probably spinning, with political public relations professionals and consultants referred to as spin doctors (Esser, Reinemann & Fan, 2000; Farnsworth, 2009; McNair, 2003, 2004; Palmer, 2000). Oftentimes, those who write about political public relations using terms such as spinning and spin doctoring do it from a critical perspective, leading McNair (2000) to criticize the “demonization of political public relations.”

Needless to say, political public relations should, however, not be equaled with news management (Concalves, 2014; Jackson, 2012; Kiouisis & Strömbäck, 2014; Strömbäck & Kiouisis, 2011a). While news management and media relations are important parts of political public relations (Lieber & Golan, 2011; Tedesco, 2011; Zoch & Molleda, 2006), political public relations is much broader than the strategies and tactics for influencing the media. Similarly, public relations strategies and tactics are relevant in many other areas of political communication activities aside from those related to news management and media relations.

Thus, while political public relations as practice is widespread and important, and studied from many different perspectives and through different theoretical lenses, it is seldom properly defined, and there is still limited theory and research on political public relations that integrates theory and research from public relations, political communication, political science, and other relevant fields. There are important exceptions, but these do not change the overall picture.

To remedy this, one part is to define political public relations properly. If political public relations somehow is about the use of public relations strategies and tactics in political contexts or for political purposes, then a proper definition of political public relations should furthermore integrate public relations theory and research with theory and research on political communication and other related fields. In Figure 1.1, some of the most important research areas that are related to, and could inform theory and research on political public relations, are highlighted.

While many fields of research are related to and could inform theory and research on political public relations, ultimately, political public relations is about the use of public relations strategies and tactics in political contexts and for political purposes. Hence, a proper definition of political public relations should reflect common definitions of public relations, albeit adapted to the context of politics and political communication. It should emphasize the communication of politics, as communication is at the heart of public relations as well as politics and political communication. At the same time, it should recognize the importance of action, both as action communicates and as not everything is about communication. Furthermore, a proper definition should also emphasize

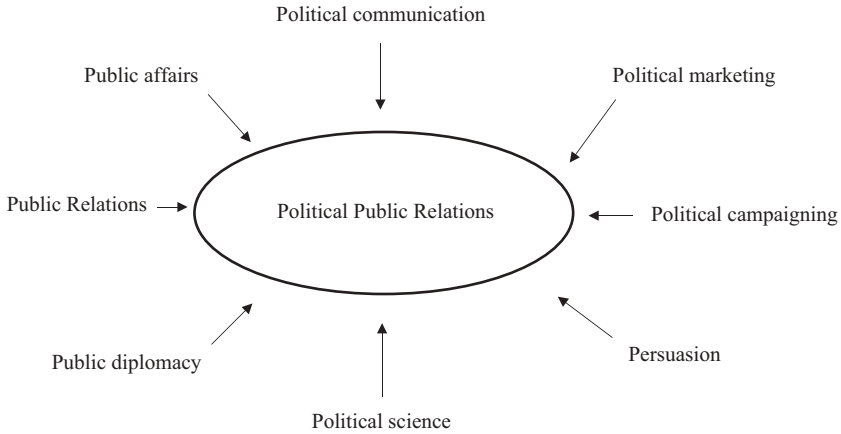


Figure 1.1 Political public relations and related fields of theory and research

the purposeful nature of political public relations, as attempts to influence others are an intrinsic part of both public relations and political communication. Finally, it should be integrative, as political public relations in both theory and practice can be approached from many perspectives.

Based on this, we propose the following definition of political public relations: *Political public relations is the management process by which an actor for political purposes, through communication and action, seeks to influence and to establish, build, and maintain beneficial relationships and reputations with key publics and stakeholders to help support its mission and achieve its goals.* It could be noted that this definition is slightly changed compared to how we have earlier defined political public relations, but that the substance is the same. More specifically, we have shortened it somewhat, but also added stakeholders to the definition. While the notion of publics in public relations revolves around the notion of problems and conflict (e.g., Grunig & Repper, 1992), the literature on stakeholders from other fields such as business suggests that groups can be impacted or have an impact on organizations, issues, or actors regardless of whether a conflict exists (Rawlins, 2006). Thus, we include both terms to be as inclusive as possible in our conceptualization.

This definition can be compared to the few definitions of political public relations offered by others. According to Zipfel (2008, p. 677), “Political public relations refers to the strategic communication activities of actors participating in the political process that aim at informative and persuasive goals in order to realize single interests” (p. 677). This definition perceives political public relations communication as unidirectional, and expresses a functional perspective on political public relations. Hence,

it does not incorporate the transition towards a co-creational perspective on public relations that has been manifest in public relations research over recent decades (Botan & Taylor, 2004). In contrast, we believe the relational perspective is essential for an understanding of all processes that involve politics, communication, and public relations. Hence, we find Zipfel's (2008) definition biased towards a functional perspective that has become increasingly outdated.

McNair has offered another definition. According to him, political public relations is about "media and information management tactics designed to ensure that a party receives maximum favorable publicity, and the minimum of negative" (McNair, 2003, p. 7). This definition does not have much in common with contemporary understandings of public relations within the field of public relations research, but is typical for how political communication scholars often perceive public relations. In this understanding, public relations is mainly about media management, image management, and information management (Moloney, 2006). This is, however, a narrow understanding of public relations. More in line with our understanding of political public relations is the definition offered by Jackson (2012), according to whom political public relations "presents the views of political actors to other political publics in a positive light. It does so by raising awareness, engaging in dialogue and building relationships" (p. 272).

In essence, the definition proposed here reflects contemporary understandings of public relations; it is adapted to the context of politics and political communication; it emphasizes the communication of politics and the purposeful nature of communication for political purposes; and it has the potential to integrate theory and research from different fields of research. It also subsumes the different public relations functions usually highlighted in the literature, such as managing publicity, reputation management, public affairs, issues management, and relationship cultivation.

To further map the field of political public relations, and its association to other fields of research, we will next turn to the issue of organizations relevant in the context of political public relations.

Organizations Relevant in the Context of Political Public Relations

In political science and political communication, the most important political organizations are political parties. In electoral democracies, they perform a number of functions that no other political organization does. Among other things, they simplify choices for voters, mobilize people to participate, recruit and train political candidates and leaders, articulate and aggregate political interests, organize the government as well as the opposition, and ensure responsibility for government actions (Dalton &

Wattenberg, 2000; Montero & Gunther, 2002; Webb, 2002). Thus, it has been said that a “representative system of parties operating within free and fair electoral procedures performs duties that make democratic government possible; without such parties, a democracy can hardly be said to exist” (Katz & Crotty, 2006, p. 1).

Most democracies around the world are party-based, in the sense that political parties are the main actors in political communication and policymaking processes (Newton & van Deth, 2005; Ware, 1996). The United States is partly an exception, as parties there traditionally have been weaker while individual candidates have been stronger than in most other democracies. As noted by Rozell, Wilcox and Madland (2006, p. 18), “In most democracies, parties run against each other with the help of their candidates; in the United States, candidates run against each other with the support of their parties.” The partisan realignment of the South and increasing partisan polarization have, however, made the parties significantly more important also in the United States (Sides & Hopkins, 2015), although the electoral system and political culture continues to be candidate- rather than party-centered. This is true also of a number of other countries, including for example Brazil, France and Hungary, and in many countries, the rise of political populism has been accompanied by an increasing importance of populist leaders (Aalberg, et al., 2017; Moffitt, 2016).

Political parties are not the only organizations relevant in the contexts of political communication and political public relations, however. Other important organizations are so-called “collateral organizations,” which refers to organizations that are linked to parties while simultaneously having their own agendas and interests. Typical examples include think tanks, political action committees (PACs), and a diverse set of non-governmental organizations such as unions, churches, environmental organizations, human rights organizations, and different interest groups (Poguntke, 2006). The nature of the relationships between parties and collateral organizations, and the formation of networks of collateral organizations, varies across countries, but in all countries, parties “use other relevant organizations that constitute their environment to create linkages to diverse groups of potential voters” (Poguntke, 2006, p. 396). These organizations, in turn, use the parties for advancing the interests of their constituencies, in competition with other organizations and interests (Rozell, Wilcox & Madland, 2006). The same holds true for private businesses, whenever they pursue political issues or have political agendas (Heath & Waymer, 2011). When doing so, they involve themselves in political public relations, either in their interrelationships, in their relationships with political parties, or in their relationships with their publics.

Thus, the concept of political actors is much broader than the concept of political parties. All non-profit or for-profit organizations that operate

in political contexts, are involved in lobbying and attempts to shape political opinions, or have political agendas or linkages with political parties or governments are, at least partially, political actors. The defining characteristic of political actors is not their inherent nature, but rather whether they have political agendas and are trying to influence political processes. Thus, they can be as small as individuals or as large as multiple nations.

Hence, not only political parties are involved in political public relations. To the extent that organizations such as unions, interest groups, or commercial businesses have political agendas and try to influence political opinion formation or policy-making processes, they are also involved in political public relations. The same is of course true of governments and public sector agencies (Lee, 2008; Liu & Horsley, 2007; Sanders & Canél, 2013). To some extent, this brings political public relations as theory and practice close to the field of public affairs.

Political Public Relations and Related Fields

Following Harris and Fleisher (2005, pp. xxxi–xxxii), there are three broad definitions of public affairs. According to the first, public affairs refers to the “policy formulation process of public and corporate stakeholder programmes.” According to the second, public affairs refer to “the corporate consideration of the impact of environmental (in its broadest sense), political, and social developments on a company and the opinion-leader contact programs which follows.” The third definition refers to “the totality of government affairs or relations.” In all these cases, it is about a management process by which primarily corporate organizations for political purposes and through communication and action seeks to influence and to establish, build and maintain beneficial relationships and reputations with its key publics, primarily within governments. Public affairs scholars and practitioners may prefer the term “stakeholder” to “publics” (de Bussy, 2008), but apart from that, the definitions of public affairs and political public relations are strikingly similar. Lobbying is also part of both public relations and public affairs.

Still, public relations and public affairs theory and research appear to live largely separate lives (Davidson, 2015), and when public relations scholars do discuss public affairs, the latter is usually perceived of as one specialization of public relations (Grunig & Hunt, 1984; Toth, 2006). Whether reasonable or not, the mutual insularity is to the detriment of both fields of theory and research (McKie, 2001), making it all the more important that theory and research in political public relations is integrative.

Another field related to public relations, and hence political public relations, is that of marketing. Similar to the relationship between public relations and public affairs, public relations and marketing theory and research tend to live largely separate lives with different bodies of

knowledge, scholarly networks, professional associations, and journals. According to both public relations and marketing scholars, the main reason is that they are conceptually distinct. According to Cutlip, Center and Broom (2000, p. 8),

marketing focuses on exchange relationships with customers. The result of the marketing effort is quid pro quo transactions that meet customer demands and achieve organizational economic objectives. In contrast, public relations covers a broad range of relationships and goals with many publics – employees, investors, neighbors, special-interest groups, governments, and many more.

Similarly, Ehling, White and Grunig conclude (Ehling, White & Grunig, 1992) that

marketing management presupposes a business organization with a single economic purpose, that of producing goods or services for a single constituency (consumers). Public relations management, on the other hand, presupposes an organization (not always a business enterprise) that is multipurpose in its commitment and serves a number of different constituencies.

(p. 363)

From the perspective of public relations scholars, there is in addition a rejection of what is perceived of as “the diminution and finally absorption of the public relations function by marketing” (Ehling, White & Grunig, 1992, p. 378).

Turning to marketing, theory and practice has changed during the last few decades. In short, there has been a transition from transaction marketing to relationship marketing, and from consumer marketing to non-profit, social, and services marketing (Christopher, Payne & Ballantyne, 2002; Grönroos, 2000; Gummesson, 1999; Lees-Marshment, 2004). Hence, marketing is no longer focused only on “giving customers what they want” and singular exchanges. Instead, there is an increasing focus on the need for long-term relationships with different stakeholders. Gummesson hence defines relationship marketing as “marketing based on interaction within networks of relationships” (Gummesson, 1999, p. 3). Grönroos similarly writes that the purpose of relationship marketing

is to identify and establish, maintain and enhance, and when necessary terminate relationships with customers (and other parties) so that the objectives regarding economic and other variables of all parties are met. This is achieved through a mutual exchange and fulfillment of promises.

(Grönroos, 2000, p. 243)

Hence, neither public relations nor marketing theory, research, and practice is the same today as it was some decades ago, and the changes that have taken place have actually brought the two fields closer. There are still important differences, but the relational perspective is now highly prominent in both fields, and there are other overlaps as well.

Related to this is the development of political marketing theory and research during the last couple of decades (Lees-Marshment, 2001, 2012; Newman, 1994, 1999; O’Cass, 1996; Ormrod, Henneberg & O’Shaughnessy, 2013; Scammell, 1995). Although the parent disciplines of political marketing is marketing and political science rather than communication and political science, there are some clear linkages between political marketing on the one hand, and public relations and political public relations on the other (Newman & Vercic, 2002; Strömbäck, Mitrook & Kiouisis, 2010).

Broadly speaking, political marketing can be defined as:

the application of marketing principles and procedures in political campaigns by various individuals and organizations. The procedures involved include the analysis, development, execution, and management of strategic campaigns by candidates, political parties, governments, lobbyists and interest groups that seek to drive public opinion, advance their own ideologies, win elections, and pass legislation and referenda in response to the needs and wants of selected people and groups in society.
(Newman, 1999, p. xiii)

Although this definition is not explicitly relational and most political marketing literature tends to focus on voters rather than other publics or stakeholders, in both political marketing and political public relations, there is a focus on the management of purposeful communication and action that is intended to help organizations achieve their goals. In both fields, there is furthermore an acknowledgement that political parties or other organizations have multiple publics or stakeholder groups that they have to attend to (Kotler & Kotler, 1999; Ormrod, Henneberg & O’Shaughnessy, 2013).

In essence, the management of relationships and reputations is crucial in both fields. Again, there is, however, a disconnection between theory and research on political marketing and public relations, and too little cross-fertilization (Newman & Vercic, 2002; Strömbäck, Mitrook & Kiouisis, 2010).

To us, this is another argument for why it is important that theory and research in political public relations is integrative. What matters is not whether theories and research originated within public relations, public affairs, political marketing or any other field, but whether there is theory and research that seeks to understand and investigate the management process by which actors, for political purposes and through

communication and action, seek to influence and to establish, build and maintain beneficial relationships and reputations with key publics and stakeholders to help support its mission and achieve its goals.

Political Public Relations as a Management Process

According to almost all contemporary definitions, public relations is or should be perceived as a management function. While many practitioners are technicians rather than managers or specialists (Dozier & Broom, 2006), for public relations to be effective, it is claimed that top public relations managers should participate in management decision-making and form part of the dominant coalition in their organizations (Dozier & Grunig, 1992; Dozier & Ehling, 1992; Grunig, Grunig & Ehling, 1992).

While it could be argued that the thesis of public relations as a management function is prescriptive as much as descriptive, the literature lists many reasons for this. One is that public relations practitioners are supposed to function as boundary spanners and perform the dual function of representing the organization to its publics and the publics to the organization (White & Dozier, 1992). To represent an organization to its environment, the public relations manager has to have access to the top executives, know the rationale for the organization's behavior, and be able to communicate effectively what the organization stands for and why it behaves in a certain way. To represent an organization's publics to the organization, the public relations manager must similarly have access to the top management, and have influence to make sure that the publics' interests are taken into account in the organization's decision-making. Everything an organization does has (or might have) implications for its relationships with different publics and stakeholders; if public relations is not a management function, it will hence not be possible for public relations practitioners to help establish, build, and maintain beneficial and mutually influential relationships with the organization's publics and stakeholders.

Related to this is another reason for why it may be important that public relations is a management function: How an organization presents itself, which publics it chooses to target, which relationships it prioritizes, and the reputation it wants to achieve, are matters of strategic importance. These are also matters of doing as well as communicating, as noted by Aula and Mantere (2008, p. 211) in their analysis of reputation management: "Reputation management is doing good, communicating good, and 'treating well' or good relations." Hence, the actions cannot be decoupled from the communication, and public relations must be involved in the decision-making related to both the doing and the communication.

The options open for an organization partly depends, however, on the organization's environment, including its history, existing relationships, publics and stakeholders, and competitors. Hence, all strategic decisions

should be preceded by environmental scanning, broadly defined as the – preferably systematic – gathering of information about an organization’s publics and external environment in order to identify potential problems and opportunities (Dozier & Repper, 1992; Witmer, 2006). For the information gained through environmental scanning to be incorporated in strategic decision-making, public relations professionals need to be involved in the development of organizations’ strategies. As stated by J. Grunig and Repper:

The emphasis that theories of strategic management place on monitoring the external environment and adjusting the organization’s mission to it suggests a crucial role for public relations in the process. And the emphasis on organizational mission provides the connection to organizational goals that public relations must have to contribute to organizational effectiveness.

(Grunig & Repper, 1992, p. 120)

Hence, public relations “must be part of the strategic management of the total organization – in surveying the environment and in helping to define the mission, goals, and objectives of the organization.”

The key word here is strategic. According to Botan, this term subsumes the two overlapping concepts of *grand strategy* and *strategy*. *Grand strategy* refers to “the policy-level decisions an organization makes about goals, alignments, ethics, and relationship with publics and other forces in its environment,” *strategy* to “the campaign-level decision making involving maneuvering and arranging resources and arguments to carry out organizational grand strategies,” and *tactics* to “the specific activities and outputs through which strategies are implemented – the doing or technical aspect of public relations” (Botan, 2006, pp. 225–226). For public relations and strategic communication to be effective, their practitioners must be involved when making decisions on both grand strategy and strategy, and not confined to the role of technicians carrying out the tactics (Grunig & Repper, 1992; Hallahan, et al., 2007).

This is equally true in the context of political public relations. In his classic *Professional Public Relations and Political Power*, Kelley (1956, pp. 211–212) approvingly quoted some political public relations practitioners, saying “to be of any value, the public relations man must sit in on all planning sessions and do his part in the selecting of issues,” and “public relations in a campaign is worthless unless the public relations man has at least a voice in selecting, determining, and projecting issues” (pp. 211–212). To this Kelley (1956) added, “To put the public relations man in a policy-making position is to put him where he can affect some of the basic relationships between the public and its government” (p. 213).

Following the literature, for political public relations to be effective, the top practitioners hence have to be part of the strategic decision-making in their organizations. Considering the contentious and competitive nature of politics, and the complexity of political environments, environmental scanning, boundary spanning, and the strategic choice of publics and relationships to prioritize may even be more important in the context of political public relations than of corporate public relations. This is particularly true with respect to organizations that are involved in political public relations on a continuous basis. The more visible and deep their involvement in political processes, the greater is the need for organizations to make political public relations a part of the management and strategic decision-making.

Due to the public and contentious nature of politics, political organizations are also more likely to find themselves involved in scandals – either real, grounded in ethically questionable behavior, or manufactured by competitors or the media – than many other organizations (Castells, 2009; Strömbäck & Kioussis, 2013; Thompson, 2000). And as always, to be effective in monitoring the environment, assessing risks, detecting possible crises, and managing crisis and crisis communication, a precondition is that political public relations is part of the management structure (Coombs, 1999, 2011; Stacks, 2004; Ulmer, Sellnow & Seeger, 2007).

An example might further illustrate the importance of perceiving political public relations as a management function. As suggested by theory in the field of political marketing, conceptually a distinction can be made between product-, sales- and market-oriented parties (Lees-Marshment, 2001, 2009; Lees-Marshment, Strömbäck & Rudd, 2010; Lilleker & Lees-Marshment, 2005; see also Newman, 1994). Briefly, a product-oriented party argues for what it stands for and believes in, and most efforts are oriented towards a development of the political product – the policy commitments, the party image, and the party's candidates and leaders. The members and activists are crucial in the development of the political product, which thus is developed internally based on ideology as interpreted by members and activists. A product-oriented party tends to assume that voters will realize that its ideas and policies are the best and therefore vote for it (Lees-Marshment, 2001).

A sales-oriented party is similar to a product-oriented party in the sense that the political product is developed internally and based on the members' and activists' interpretation of the party's core values and ideology, but dissimilar in the sense that it realizes that the party and its product has to be sold and communicated effectively. Thus, a sales-oriented party tries to make people want what the party offers through the effective use of marketing and campaign techniques.

A market-oriented party is fundamentally different from both the product- and sales-oriented party. Instead of developing the political

product mainly through internal processes, a market-oriented party uses market intelligence to identify expressed and latent voter needs and demands, and attempts to design a political product to meet voters' wants and needs and hence provide voter satisfaction. In contrast to sales-oriented parties that try to change what people want, market-oriented parties try to provide a product that people already want.

Of course, these party types are ideal types, and in reality, no party is fully product-, sales- or market-oriented (Strömbäck, Lees-Marshment & Rudd, 2012). Rather, they tend towards either type of party. The same is true of the distinction in political science between vote seeking, office seeking, and policy seeking parties (Harmel & Janda, 1994; Strom, 1990). What is important in this context, however, is that the role of political public relations will differ significantly between party types. The relationships with different publics or stakeholders, and what is considered as key publics or stakeholders, will also differ significantly. Hence, for political public relations, not to be involved in the process of deciding which orientation or party type – a matter of grand strategy – the party should tend towards, would render political public relations less effective. Hence, political public relations managers need to be involved in the decision-making with respect to both grand strategy and strategy to be able to function effectively. For these reasons, we think it makes sense to conceive political public relations also as a management function.

Political Public Relations and Publics

One of the core concepts in political science, political communication, and public relations is that of *public* or *publics*. It is also one of the fuzziest concepts in these fields of research, which is true also of related concepts such as public opinion (Donsbach & Traugott, 2008; Price, 1992; Splichal, 2001). As Key (1964) once wrote, “To speak with precision of public opinion is a task not unlike coming to grips with the Holy Ghost” (p. 8). Something similar could be said with respect to public and publics.

Still, most conceptualizations of the public or publics range from mass to situational perspectives on who belongs to or what constitutes a public (Vasquez & Taylor, 2001). Thus, in some cases “public” refers to virtually everyone, or everyone entitled to vote, in a polity, for example in discussions about mass opinion. In other cases, public refers to a much narrower group, for example in the situational theory of publics.

In the context of political public relations, both the mass public and situational publics are relevant. Most theory and research have, however, been devoted to the mass public, not least as measured in opinion polls. From the perspective of both the media and political actors themselves, public opinion as measured by opinion polls is highly important in virtually all political communication and political campaign processes (Braun, 2012; Burton, 2012; Geer, 1996; Holtz-Bacha & Strömbäck,

2012; Lavrakas & Traugott, 2000). Due to the rise of “permanent campaigning” (Blumenthal, 1980), polling has become more prominent also in policymaking and governing processes.

What has largely been neglected in political communication research, however, is the situational theory of publics. According to Dewey (1927), for a group to be considered a public, it should (a) face a similar problem, (b), recognize that the problem exists, and (c), organize to do something about it. Based on this, J. Grunig and colleagues have developed the situational theory of publics (STP), according to which four types of publics can be distinguished. The first is the *nonpublic*. People in this group do not face a similar problem, do not recognize that a problem exists, and do not organize to do something about it. The second is the *latent public*. While people in this group face a similar problem, they do not recognize that it exists or organize to do anything about it. Only when groups of people both face a similar problem and recognize that the problem exists does it become an *aware public*. If they in addition organize to do something about it, it becomes an *active public* (Grunig & Hunt, 1984, pp. 145–160; see also Grunig & Repper, 1992; Vasquez & Taylor, 2001). The three independent variables are *problem recognition*, *constraint recognition*, and *involvement recognition*.

This theory has more recently been expanded into the more general situational theory of problem-solving (STOPS) (Kim & Gruning, 2011; Kim, Kim & Kim, 2012; Kim & Krishna, 2014). According to this theory, there are three domains of communicative action, namely information acquisition, selection, and transmission, and these subsume six communication behaviors: *information seeking* and *information attending* in the *information acquisition domain*, *information forefending* and *information permitting* in the *selection domain*, and *information forwarding* and *information sharing* in the *transmission domain* (Kim & Gruning, 2011). As in the original theory, problem recognition, constraint recognition and involvement recognition are three key independent variables, with the addition of referent criterion, i.e., “any knowledge or subjective judgmental system that influences the way in which one approaches problem solving” (Kim & Gruning, 2011, p. 131).

It should be noted though that the expanded situational theory of problem-solving (STOPS) does not replace the original situational theory of publics (STP). At any moment in time, aside from the mass public, there are thus nonpublics, latent publics, aware publics, and active publics. These can be found within and outside of organizations, and within other organizations as well as within the unorganized parts of the population. Depending on which group a certain individual belongs to, their need for orientation (Weaver, 1980), awareness (Zaller, 1992), and motivation (Prior, 2007) will vary, as will the exposure and attention to and processing of information.

For all organizations, it is therefore crucial to monitor the environment and identify the different types of publics, and shape their communications accordingly. What might make political organizations different from corporate and other organizations is that the number of latent as well as aware and active publics is likely to be much higher (Strömbäck & Kioussis, 2013). This is particularly true of political parties, as they are continuously involved in political communication and policymaking processes. The sheer visibility of political parties and their representatives, and their responsibility for solving public issues and problems, increases the likelihood that groups of people will face a similar problem, recognize that it exists, and organize to do something about it. In addition, all kinds of collateral and interest organizations will always try to mobilize people to make them recognize the problem that these organizations have identified, and then mobilize them to take actions.

Comparatively speaking, political organizations may thus face a higher number and a more diversified and complex set of publics than most corporate organizations. What is more, some political organizations – not least political parties – are unusually dependent on their relationships with different publics for their prospects of achieving their goals. This makes their political public relations strategies, tactics, and efforts even more important.

In addition, the environment that political organizations face is more complex than that of many other organizations. It is more heterogeneous, unstable, dispersed, turbulent, and characterized by conflicts and dissension than that of other types of organizations, further increasing the importance of and challenges facing political public relations. The rise of political populism and increasing political polarization across many countries has further contributed to this situation.

As noted earlier, the concept of stakeholders is related but considered distinct from publics, but is critical to the study and practice of political public relations. One key difference between the two concepts is that organizations “choose” who their stakeholders are, whereas publics arise on their own (Rawlins, 2006). According to Freeman (1984), stakeholders are defined as “any group or individual who can affect or is affected by the achievement of the organization’s objectives” (p. 46). This has been extended to application in politics (Hughes & Dann, 2009). Thus, our perspective of political public relations is inclusive of both publics and stakeholders.

The Importance of Relationships in Political Public Relations

One of the key characteristics of many definitions of public relations – including our own definition of political public relations – is the importance assigned to relationships. As noted by Jackson (2010), the relational approach has gained currency over the years, and “interprets public

relations by inverting the components of the term ‘public relations,’ so that it is relations with publics.’ The idea as such is not new, however, as Kelley (1956) already decades ago stressed the importance of relationships in public relations.

Nevertheless, the relational perspective is closely associated with the co-creational turn in public relations theory and research, and holds that

public relations is a professional practice that helps organizations and publics to understand each other’s interests. Once these interests are understood, efforts can be made to blend them or at least reduce the conflict by helping the publics and the organizations to be less antagonistic toward each other.

(Heath, 2001b, p. 3)

The rise of the relational perspective helped to move public relations from an emphasis on influencing opinion through propaganda and persuasion towards an emphasis on establishing, building, and maintaining relationships that, purportedly, are mutually beneficial to an organization and its publics (Ledingham & Bruning, 2000; Ki, Kim & Ledingham, 2015; Ledingham, 2006, 2011).

This is not to say that persuasion and opinion formation is mutually opposed with relationship management or public relations in general: persuasion as the use of communication in attempts to influence perceptions, affect, cognitions, and behavior is an intrinsic part of all public relations and political communication processes (Pfau & Wan, 2006). It is rather to say that from a relational perspective, public relations success is not measured primarily by communication output or influence on the opinions of various publics, but by the quality of the relationships between an organization and its publics. High quality relationships are those characterized by features such as trust, control mutuality, satisfaction, openness, involvement, investment, and commitment (Grunig, 2002; Grunig & Huang, 2000; Hon & Grunig, 1999; Huang & Zang, 2015; Ledingham, 2006; Ledingham & Bruning, 2000).

While the relational approach is equally valid and applicable in the context of political public relations as in corporate public relations, it is, however, again important to note that the political environment tends to be more contentious and conflictual than the environment of many other organizations (Geer, 2006; Sellers, 2010). Conflicts, often enduring due to incompatible values and interests, are at the heart of politics. This makes relationship management both more important and more difficult in political contexts, increasing the stakes involved when selecting key publics and finding strategies to approach active and hostile publics. This is particularly the case, as organizations cannot always choose their publics; the publics oftentimes choose them.

Although the goal for organizations is to establish, build and maintain quality relationships with key publics and stakeholders, oftentimes – and perhaps particularly in political contexts – organizations might find themselves in a situation with a complex set of relationships that range from mutually beneficial to outright hostile (Sellers, 2010; Strömbäck & Kioussis, 2013). All these relationships have to be managed somehow, particularly with aware and active publics.

In this context, the contingency theory of public relations is relevant. This theory has been developed mainly by Cancel and Cameron with colleagues (Cancel, et al., 1997; Cancel, Mitrook & Cameron, 1999; Jin & Cameron, 2007; Mitrook, Parish & Seltzer, 2008), as an alternative to the Excellence theory mainly explicated by J. Grunig and colleagues (Grunig, 1992, 2001; Grunig & Grunig, 1992; Grunig & Hunt, 1984).

According to Grunig and Hunt (1984), four different models of public relations can be distinguished: (1) the press agency/publicity model, (2) the public information model, (3) the two-way asymmetric model, and (4) the two-way symmetric model. The functional purpose of public relations varies across these models. In the press agency/publicity model, public relations serves a propaganda purpose. The task at hand for public relations practitioners is to maximize positive publicity, minimize negative publicity, and shape public opinion through publicity, propaganda, and persuasion. In the public information model, the purpose of public relations is to disseminate information. Both of these models presuppose one-way communication from organizations to their publics, and there is not much room for or interest in feedback. In the two-way asymmetric model, the purpose of public relations is what Grunig and Hunt (1984) describe as “scientific persuasion”; here practitioners “use what is known from social science theory and research about attitudes and behavior to persuade publics to accept the organization’s point of view and to behave in a way that supports the organization” (p. 22). Feedback is important, but mainly to provide information that can be used in further activities to persuade publics to accept the organization’s point of view. In the two-way symmetrical model, in contrast, the purpose of public relations is to achieve mutual understanding between an organization and its publics. The organization and its publics are perceived as equals, and the balance of power symmetrical.

According to Excellence theory, the two-way symmetrical model is normatively superior to the other models, and it is also the most effective model: As claimed by Grunig (2008), “excellent public relations departments use the two-way symmetrical model and that as a result they more often meet the objectives of the communication and make the organization more effective” (p. 44). However, in practice, all models are utilized, with the two-way symmetrical model being one of the least followed models. Instead, the most common model still appears to be the publicity model (Grunig & Grunig, 1992), although there are differences across sectors in society. For

example, in government agencies, the most common model is the public information model (Grunig, 2008; Lee, 2008).

There is not much research on these models in the context of political public relations, although what research there is suggests that the most common model for political parties is the publicity model (Xifra, 2010). Beyond that, it is reasonable to assume that there are differences across political organizations and contexts. For example, during political campaigns, the publicity and two-way asymmetrical models are likely to be more common than the other models, whereas the two-way symmetrical model is more likely to be used in intra-party relationships, negotiations between parties and closely linked collateral organizations, and in policymaking processes. The application of game theory offers one tool for explaining situations and circumstances when different models are more dominant (Murphy, 1991).

In either case, according to the contingency theory, which public relations model is most appropriate and normatively appealing cannot be decided out of context. Instead, it depends. As noted by Cancel et al. (1997),

The practice of public relations is too complex, too fluid, and impinged by far too many variables for the academy to force it into the four boxes known as the four models of public relations. Even worse, to promulgate one of the four boxes as the best and most effective model not only tortures the reality of practicing public relations but has problems, even as a normative theory. It fails to capture the complexity and multiplicity of the public relations environment.

(pp. 23–33)

Instead, the contingency theory posits that the practice of public relations moves on a continuum from total advocacy for an organization to total accommodation of a public (Cancel, et al., 1997; Cancel, Mitrook & Cameron, 1999; Shin, Cameron & Cropp, 2006). The different degrees of advocacy or accommodation represent many different roles that an organization might assume when dealing with an individual public. In some cases, total advocacy is the most appropriate strategy, whereas in other cases, total accommodation is more appropriate, and none of these positions are inherently superior to the others. Both empirically and normatively, it depends on the situation and the context. Some situational factors that are important are the urgency of the situation, characteristics of the public, potential costs and benefits of different strategies, whether there is a threat towards the organization, general or specific public perceptions of the issue under question, characteristics of the public's claims or actions, and feasibility of accommodation (Cancel, Mitrook & Cameron, 1999).

In the context of political public relations this theory is highly relevant, due to the complexity of the various publics, claims, and actions that political organizations face. In some cases, accommodation might be a possible strategy, but in other cases it might be counterproductive and decrease the organization's opportunities to achieve its goals (Sellers, 2010). As the appropriate strategy always "depends," the importance of environmental scanning and the identification and segmentation of publics can hardly be overstated.

What this discussion suggests is that there are a number of theories in public relations that too seldom have but could be applied in research on political public relations. Such research could help inform public relations as well as political communication and political science theory and research. To what extent the theories are equally valid in political as in other contexts is ultimately an empirical question, which is yet another reason for why it is important to encourage more integrative research on political public relations.

This is not to say that there is no research on the purposeful communication of politics. On the contrary, as noted earlier there is an abundance of research on strategic political communication, political campaigning, political marketing, and news management in political contexts. In the next section, we will discuss some of this research and how it fits into our conceptualization of political public relations.

Strategic Political Communication and Political Public Relations

Aside from political marketing already discussed, there exists an extensive body of research on political campaigning in different countries. While some of this research focuses on the professionalization of political campaigning in general (Negrine, et al., 2007; Swanson & Mancini, 1996) or as measured through the use of different campaign techniques (Gibson & Römmele, 2001, 2009; Strömbäck, 2009), other research focuses on the increasing use of and the management of political consultants – primarily although not exclusively in the United States (Bohne, Prevost & Thurber, 2009; Johnson, 2007; Plasser & Plasser, 2002; Sussman, 2005; Thurber & Nelson, 2000). There is also an extensive literature on different campaign strategies or tactics such as, for example, the use of political advertising (Kaid & Holtz-Bacha, 2006), negative campaigning (Buell & Sigelman, 2008; Geer, 2006; Lau & Pomper, 2004), and voter segmentation and targeting (Burton, 2012; Issenberg, 2013; Shaw, 2006). The literature on digital and social media, as well as the use of data analytics, in political communication and campaign processes is also growing rapidly (Chadwick, 2013; de Zuniga, 2015; Farrar-Myers & Vaughn, 2015; Fox & Ramos, 2012; Hendricks & Schill, 2015; Kreiss, 2016; Stromer-Galley, 2014).

Moreover, there are a number of books that present a more holistic depiction of election campaigns and characteristics of purposive political communication processes. In countries such as the United Kingdom and the United States, a number of books are also usually published after each election, attempting to describe and analyze the election campaigns as such, their dynamics and importance for vote results.

Outside of election campaigns, there is also extensive research on the U.S. presidency from a communication perspective. Included here is research on, for example, “going public” as a strategy for building public support and pressure on lawmakers (Kernell, 2007), the organization of the White House communications operations (Kumar, 2007), and the use of speeches for signaling the president’s preferences to other actors in the policy processes (Eshbaugh-Soha, 2006, 2011). There is also growing research on government communication (Liu, Horsley & Levenshus, 2010; Sanders, 2011; Sanders & Canél, 2013; Sanders, Canel Crespo & Holtz-Bacha, 2011).

All of this research, plus of course the extensive literature on news management and media relations (Davis, 2002; Franklin, 2004; Manning, 2001; Skewes, 2007), as well as message and framing strategies (Lecheler & de Vreese, 2019; Schaffner & Sellers, 2010; Sellers, 2010; Vavreck, 2009) in political communication processes, is relevant in the context of political public relations. The same is true of the extensive literature on attitude formation, persuasion, and propaganda (Ajzen, 2005; Albarracín, Johnson & Zanna, 2005; Eagly & Chaiken, 1993; Jowett & O’Donnell, 1999; Petty & Cacioppo, 1981) and on media effects (Iyengar, 1991; Iyengar & Kinder, 1987; Johnson, 2014; Lecheler & de Vreese, 2019; McCombs, 2014; Potter, 2012). In one way or another, all of this research is, *directly* or *indirectly*, linked with or conditions political public relations.

While it is beyond the scope of this book to investigate all the theories, contexts, linkages, and processes that are relevant in the context of political public relations, the ambition has been to include chapters that cover the most important areas and aspects of political public relations. In the next section, we will describe the outline of the book. Before that, we only wish to reiterate one of the central premises of this book; what matters is not in which field of research different theories have originated and been applied. What matters is whether different theories can cast further light on and increase our understanding of the management process by which an actor for political purposes, through communication and action, seeks to influence and to establish, build, and maintain beneficial relationships and reputations with its key publics and stakeholders to help support its mission and achieve its goals.

Outline of the Book

In this chapter, we have revisited our definition of political public relations and made an attempt to map this field of research under progress. As already noted, political public relations has a long and prominent history, which is reflected in a number of classic works and theories. In Chapter 2, “Political Public Relations in History: Historical Roots and Scholarly Foundations,” Diana Knott Martinelli revisits the historical roots and foundations upon which contemporary political public relations theory and research is founded. After that follows a chapter that addresses a key issue, too often neglected in the literature: the ethical aspects of political public relations. In “Ethical Questions, Quandaries, and Quagmires in Political Communication and a Framework for Moral Analyses,” Shannon Bowen and Yicheng Zhu offer an integrative introduction to ethical traditions and models, relevant in the context of both public relations in general and of political communication and political public relations.

If there is one area that has been radically transformed since the first edition of this book, it is certainly media environments across the world, including not least the increasing importance of all aspects related to digital and social media. In Chapter 4, Kaye D. Sweetser thus revisits theory and research on “Digital Political Public Relations,” offering an up-to-date review of how political actors use digital and social media and hence of the impact of digital and social media in political public relations processes.

As noted above, one crucial aspect of all public relations is the notion of relationships. Relationship theory has also evolved to become one of the most prominent public relations theories, and has become increasingly applied also in research on political public relations. This is evident from Chapter 5, in which Trent Seltzer reviews and analyzes “Political Public Relations and Relationship Management: Foundations and Challenges.”

Also highly important in all political public relations processes – and two key theoretical concepts – are news management and strategic framing. In Chapter 6, Philip Arceneaux, Jonathan Borden, and Guy Golan review and analyze “The News Management Function of Political Public Relations,” while in Chapter 7, Viorela Dan, Øyvind Ihlen, and Ketil Raknes review theory and research on “Political Public Relations and Strategic Framing: Underlying Mechanisms, Success Factors, and Impact.”

While political public relations is sometimes equated with news management done by political actors such as political parties or candidates running for office, a matter of fact is that among the most important political actors are governments, including different government agencies. Considering this, government communication and government’s use of public relations is strangely neglected in political communication and political public relations research. At the same time, much has happened since the first edition of this book. This is evident from Chapter 8 by

Karen Sanders, titled “Government Communication and Political Public Relations.”

Having said this, there is also no doubt that political public relations is an important and intrinsic part of election campaigning, historically as well as today. This holds true, even if many studies on election campaigning and political communication in election campaigns fail to integrate theories on public relations. Based on this, in Chapter 9, Darren Lilleker reviews theory and research on “Political Public Relations and Election Campaigning.”

A ubiquitous and largely unavoidable part of all politics is crises. This is of course true not only of politics, but there are some features that make crisis communication and management in political contexts differ from corporate or commercial contexts. Against this background, Chapter 10 by Timothy Coombs – “Political Public Relations and Crisis Communication: A Public Relations Perspective” – reviews and analyzes theory and research on crisis communication and management, and how that applies to political public relations.

Perhaps the most important and resourceful office involved in political public relations is the U.S. presidency, and in Chapter 11, Matthew Eshbaugh-Soha reviews and analyzes theory and research on “Presidential Public Relations in the United States.” This chapter shows that political public relations is crucial not only in election campaigning, but also as part of governing processes.

Political public relations is also an important part of corporate affairs, and in fact, to the extent that they have political agendas and try to influence political processes, corporations should also be considered political actors. This is nicely illustrated in Chapter 12 by Robert L. Heath and Damion Waymer, titled “Political Public Relations, Corporate Citizenship, and Corporate Issues Management.” It is also evident from Chapter 13 by Kati Tusinski Berg and Sarah Bonewits Feldner, titled “Political Public Relations and Lobbying: It’s About Shaping Public Discourse.” In this chapter they analyze lobbying at the intersection of political communication, public relations, and political public relations, and argue that lobbying needs to be reframed to include public efforts at shaping political discourse.

While most public relations might take place within national contexts, an important part is devoted to nations’ communication and relationships with foreign governments or publics. This holds particularly true as nations become increasingly interdependent. Public diplomacy, in brief referring to nations’ engagement with foreign publics, has thus become increasingly important. In Chapter 14, Jian Wang and Aimei Yang reviews and analyzes the literature on public relations and public diplomacy and their intersection, including some key shifts that are disrupting both practices. The chapter is titled “Public Relations and Public Diplomacy at a Crossroads: In Search of a Social Network Perspective.”

After that follow two chapters that focus on activism and underrepresented groups. In Chapter 15, Erich J. Sommerfeldt and Aimei Yang analyze “Political Public Relations and Activist Network Strategies: The Influence of Framing and Institutionalization on Activist Issues Management.” By drawing on several bodies of literature, they outline a network strategy framework for activist groups in pursuit of political change. This is followed by Chapter 16, in which Elizabeth Toth reviews and analyzes the literature on “Political Public Relations and Underrepresented Groups,” that is, groups of people who lack the power to effectively influence politics. In this chapter, she focuses in particular on three types of underrepresented groups: social movements, activist groups, and latent groups. Together, these chapters demonstrate the multitude of actors involved in political public relations, but also how political public relations can help groups that are less influential to affect political change.

When we published the first edition of this book, social media were just beginning to have a political impact. Since then, media environments have transformed, digital and social media have become increasingly important, and more or less populist political leaders that openly attack news media while using social media to communicate have risen to power. The most obvious example is of course Donald Trump in the United States. These changes have created new opportunities for political public relations practitioners, but also a host of new and heightened challenges. In Chapter 17, Kara Alaimo therefore reviews and analyzes “New Challenges for Political Public Relations Professionals in the Era of Social Media,” and discusses some strategies that political public relations practitioners can use to respond to these challenges.

In the final chapter, “Political Public Relations: Looking Back, Looking Forward,” we identify some of the common themes of the other chapters that can be used to inform future research and to identify some potential domains that call for further attention in political public relations research. In addition, we also develop a conceptualization of political public relations through an update of the continuum of stakeholder engagement introduced in the first edition of this book. This expansion is now an interaction–engagement matrix, with reputation and relationship quality at each end of the horizontal axis to explicate engagement between political actors and their stakeholders. On the vertical axis, the two ends explicate the type of interaction from a simple dyad all the way to an entire network. This interaction–engagement matrix highlights that political public relations is critical to all stages of stakeholder engagement, that it involves both short-term and long-term interactions between actors and multiple key stakeholders, and that political public relations is not limited to simple information dissemination or media relations.

To reiterate our definition: Political public relations is the management process by which an actor, for political purposes through communication and action, seeks to influence and establish, build, and maintain beneficial

relationships and reputations with key publics and stakeholders to help support its mission and achieve its goals. Taken together, the chapters in this volume clearly show the applicability of this definition, across different domains, types of political organizations, contexts, and processes.

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2 Political Public Relations in History

Historical Roots and Scholarly Foundations

Diana Knott Martinelli

Many scholars have noted that political communication extends back to at least the 3rd century BCE in ancient Greece, when Plato and Aristotle taught the importance of skilled rhetoric. The latter's persuasive speech elements of *ethos*, *pathos*, and *logos* are still employed in campaigns today to resonate with, persuade, and build the support and loyalty of political audiences. Indeed, recent scholarship finds that affect and emotions (i.e. *pathos*) are important "indicators of social and moral values and [are] powerful motivators for political mobilization" (Rosas & Serrano-Puche, 2018).

Heath (2009) explains that "public relations and the rhetorical heritage focus attention not narrowly on the self-interest and opinions of the organization but on the persons whose goodwill is needed for the organization to succeed" (p. 19). In this way, he says, public relations and rhetoric are "inherently other oriented," and certainly, political public relations activities are as well.

Strömbäck and Kiousis (Chapter 1) broadly outline this rich area of study as

the management process by which an actor for political purposes, through communication and action, seeks to influence and to establish, build, and maintain beneficial relationships and reputations with key publics and stakeholders to help support its mission and achieve its goals.

(see also Strömbäck & Kiousis, 2011, p. 8)

This chapter lays the foundation for scholarly inquiry by examining some of the historical roots of political public relations and revisiting classic literature that continues to yield new perspectives in the digital age (see also Martinelli, 2011).

Political PR History

Investigating the history of public relations in political contexts, one can find plenty of examples of countries' rich political public relations' pasts.

Watson (2008), for example, describes how British church leaders used public relations tactics and strategies in political communications during the “Dark Ages” of the 10th century to gain public recognition and honor for early Christian martyrs, while Read (1961) writes of Elizabethan public relations, stating that

one of the characteristic attributes of [16th century] Tudor government was its increasing interest in public relations, that is to say, in the relations between the Crown and its neighbours and the Crown and its subjects, through public channels of communication.

(p. 21)

In Sweden, Larsson (2006) traces political public relations to the 1940s “within state authorities and in line with the development and growth of the governmental sector at different levels,” including state-owned railroads and Sweden’s National Board of Health (p. 124). It was a half-century later, says Dolea (2012), when government public relations was institutionalized in Romania.

At least one political science scholar (Sheingate, 2007) points to the Progressive Era (1890 to 1920) in the U.S. as the origin of political communication innovations, including the press release, paid political advertisements, and political public relations campaigns, arguing these were the seeds for the *business* of U.S. politics and for professional political consultancy. However, Cutlip, Center, and Broom (2000) chronicle the effectiveness of strategic political public relations counselor Amos Kendall’s work for U.S. President Andrew Jackson nearly a century earlier, and Lamme and Russell (2010) chronicle how political public relations were actively used by both the British and the American colonies during the American Revolution in the late 17th century. One famous example is the so-called Boston Tea Party, which was staged by Samuel Adams “to unify colonial sentiment against the British” (Lamme & Russell, 2010, p. 313).

Election campaigns involve perhaps the most visible political public relations activities, and Strömbäck and Kiouisis (2013) write of *Commentariolum Petitionis*, likely “the first publication on electioneering and public relations” (p. 1). The pamphlet includes this translated advice: the “most important part of your campaign is to bring hope to people and a feeling of goodwill toward you” (Freeman & Cicero, 2012, p. 79) and further advises the politician to “cultivate relationships” (p. 9). Here we find an early example of the insight that public relations is ultimately about building and maintaining relationships with key publics.

In perhaps the first book specifically about public relations and U.S. campaigns, called *Professional Public Relations and Political Power*, Kelley’s introduction (1956, p. 3) reads:

The activities of the public relations man have become a significant influence in processes crucial to democratic government. Any system of government ... owes its life to some kind of support in public opinion It is into this fundamental relationship between politician and electorate between those who seek power and those who bestow authority, that the public relations man inserts himself, seeking to guide the action of the politician toward the people and the people toward the politician.

The book's inside front cover includes comments by Leone Baxter that were originally published in an issue of the *Public Relations Journal*. They read:

It's because the public relations profession, and its allied professions, know something about presenting abstract ideas, in attractive form, to masses of people who are too occupied with their daily lives to think analytically on their own account, that the average man today is in a position to know more about the trend of human affairs than ever in history.

Kelley's book (1956) provides details from public relations practitioners, including Baxter, who worked for political campaigns. Baxter and her husband, Clem Whitaker, started the first political consulting firm in the U.S., called Campaigns, Inc., in 1933 (Museum of Public Relations, 2015).¹ The book goes on to describe Dwight Eisenhower's 1952 presidential "Campaign Plan" as:

the most complete blueprint ever drawn up in advance of a presidential campaign Prepared in standard advertising agency format, the plan outlined basic strategy, organization, appeals, types of speeches, literature, advertising, television, and radio programs, the relative weight to be given to the various media, the kinds of places, and times of campaign trips and rallies, and the areas in which efforts were to be concentrated.

(p. 1)

U.S. presidential campaign strategies were documented the following decade as well in *The Selling of the President* (McGinniss, 1969). In 1968, McGinniss was given access to Richard Nixon's advertising campaign, including its memos, meetings, and production, and the strategies and tactics employed by the campaign team. Lee (2012) notes that Nixon's chief of staff, H. R. Haldeman, had previously been a senior executive at a national advertising and public relations agency, and in an effort to demonstrate sensitivity to public concerns, Nixon's administration started short-lived city "listening posts" to help reinforce his campaign's theme.

Years earlier, in the 1930s, President Franklin Delano Roosevelt's administration had employed former journalist Lorena Hickok to travel

the country, listen, and report back on the political sentiments of the public, political influentials, and local media (Martinelli & Bowen, 2009). Thus, the public relations practices of “boundary spanning” (Wilcox, Cameron, Reber, & Shin, 2013, p. 7) and of hiring journalists for political public relations work have long histories.

Media Effects Legacy

Certainly, media and political public relations are inextricably intertwined. Although German public relations activities have been traced to the Middle Ages, L’Etang (1998) notes that the mid-19th century is when organized “communication efforts of both public and private organizations appeared” (p. 113), and these efforts were tied to “the development of press and press freedom” (Puchan, 2006, p. 113).

Owing to the media’s centrality in politics, it is not surprising that communication scholarship was focused on mass media effects research as far back as the 1920s. Nielsen (2014) writes that media effects, i.e. “what media do to people,” remains a dominant paradigm in political communication research after more than 50 years of scholarship (p. 56). Born from concerns of the federal government’s influence in building support for U.S. World War I involvement—largely owing to the propaganda techniques used by the federal Committee on Public Information (of which public relations pioneer Edward Bernays and journalist and political commentator Walter Lippmann were both a part)—the direct and uniform effects model (i.e. hypodermic needle; magic bullet) reflected the perception of mass media’s power to unduly influence and persuade.

A flurry of books appeared during this decade in the U.S. about media, public opinion, propaganda, and public relations. These included *Public Opinion*, in which Lippmann (1922/1997) expressed concern about the average citizen’s ability to make informed decisions in an increasingly complex age, and thus for traditional democracy to work effectively. The same year, in *Political Parties and Electoral Problems*, Brooks (1922, cited in Kelley, 1956) argued that research about political communication should be able to help political campaigns be more strategic and efficient. He asserted that modern research methods be used to help evaluate the value of communications tactics, including advertising, speeches, and publications. His insights are particularly impressive, given they were published the year before Bernays authored the book *Crystallizing Public Opinion*, in which he spoke of the new profession of public relations counselor (cited in Cutlip et al., 2000).

In 1925, Lippmann (1925/1993) again expressed concern, this time in *The Phantom Public*, about the public’s ability to function intelligently within the modern democratic political process. Two years later, Dewey (1927) published a more optimistic account of modern political society in *The Public and Its Problems*. In this book, Dewey argues that we can

empower citizens to contribute intelligently to society and the political process by making scientific and specialized knowledge more readily available to them. The same year, political scientist and communication researcher Lasswell (1927) wrote his dissertation, *Propaganda Techniques in the World War*, which examined how America, Britain, France, and Germany gained support for their respective war efforts.

The following year Bernays (1928) published *Propaganda*, seeking to reverse the negative connotations the word had come to conjure by arguing that propaganda is necessary to a democracy because it informs public opinion. In the chapter titled “Propaganda and Political Leadership,” he writes:

Political campaigns today are all sideshows, all honors, all bombast, glitter, and speeches. These are for the most part unrelated to the main business of studying the public scientifically, of supplying the public with party, candidate, platform, and performance, and selling the public these ideas and products The politician understands the public. He knows what the public wants and what the public will accept. But the politician is not necessarily a general sales manager, a public relations counsel, or a man who knows how to secure mass distribution of ideas.

(pp. 111–112)

Bernays acknowledges that such a process is often criticized as manipulation and that its power can be misused. Yet he maintains that such organization and focus are necessary to bring order to a chaotic world of ideas. Nelson (1996) too notes the potential for ill, stating that “propagandists often willingly lie” (p. ix) and describing propaganda “as American as apple pie” (p. vii). Although the term propaganda was originally coined in 1622 by the Catholic Church and not associated with deception—but with propagation of the faith—today it is more apt to be defined as L’Etang (2006) does: “monolithic communication on a grand scale that attempts to encompass all aspects of culture” (p. 24). Certainly, therefore, the mass media era (1930–1980—see Shaw, Hamm, & Knott, 2000) was ripe for such monolithic effect.

Drawing on Cohen’s (1963) belief that media tell us not what to think, but what to think about, the classic McCombs and Shaw (1972) agenda-setting study, conducted during the 1968 U.S. presidential campaign, demonstrated that media inform and influence people regarding what political issues they believe to be important. In other words, they found that the issues covered most extensively by the media became issues deemed most salient to voters.

McCombs, Shaw, and Weaver (1997) noted that “understanding the dynamics of agenda setting is central to understanding the dynamics of contemporary democracy” (p. xiii). Therefore, it’s not surprising that since the original study’s publication, political agenda-setting studies have been

replicated around the world, and increasingly, social media have been shown to have strong agenda-setting functions for political media coverage as well (Parmalee, 2014), with message *frames* also playing a role.

For example, a study in Belgium and the Netherlands (Sevenans & Vliegenthart, 2016) found that when the media used conflict frames, the agenda-setting function of those topics on politicians' parliamentary questions was strengthened. Another Netherlands study showed "political parallelism," i.e. political parties responded only to issues raised by the newspapers their voters were known to read, and newspapers responded only to the agendas of parties that their readers were known to support (Van der Pas, Van der Brug, & Vliegenthart, 2017).

McCombs and others (Balmas & Sheafer, 2010) also have explored the second level of agenda setting, sometimes equated with framing,² which has demonstrated that media communicate not only about issue agendas or political candidates, but also the specific attributes of those agendas or candidates. Consequently, this second level of agenda setting is sometimes referred to as *attribute* agenda setting.

Political agenda-setting and -building effects have also been studied in terms of presidential influence. This type of research commonly explores the power of presidents to set the national agenda in terms of media coverage and related public and congressional support (see, for example, Peake, 2001; Peake & Eshbaugh-Soha, 2008). Specifically, *agenda building* explores how agendas come to be absorbed by or promulgated by media and political publics (Curtin & Gaither, 2004). In a study of agenda-building by the U.S. Senate Majority Leader, significant correlations of both first- and second-level agendas within media and policy-making (as well as consistencies of object and attribute salience in Facebook and Twitter messages with news coverage) were found (Kioussis, Kim, Carnifax, & Kochhar, 2014). In fact, agenda-building constitutes one of the most prominent areas of political public relations research (Tedesco, 2011).

In a recent German campaign study, Stier, Bleier, Lietz, and Strohmaier (2018) posit "persistent—although probably diffuse and mediated—agenda-setting effects between mass media and social media ... as well as within social media" (p. 67). Indeed, in his book *The Hybrid Media System: Politics and Power*, Chadwick (2013) includes U.K. and U.S. case studies and ethnographic field work with political activists, journalists, bloggers, campaigners, and government communicators to make the case that political power is wielded by those who can best aptly use *both* new and old media to their advantage.

In today's environment of frequent, often disparate, emotionally driven presidential tweets, which are then amplified through both legacy and digital media, evidence of at least what might be called *temporal* agenda-setting seems clear. However, the actual building of popular and Congressional support is far less certain.

Connolly-Ahern (2015) has extended agenda-setting research to political advocacy organizations to explore what she calls “agenda-tapping.” Her study of two nonprofit gun control organizations found media mentions of the issue were strong and significant predictors of donations to the nonprofits and to political campaigns that supported the issue. Thus, it seems all forms of agenda-setting and media research still hold rich research potential and practical implications for political public relations.

In addition, visuals increasingly command more of our time and attention, and modern political observers (e.g. Maltese, 1992; Schaller, 1992) wrote of U.S. President Ronald Reagan’s adept use of political imagery for television in the 1980s to help create and reinforce a patriotic, presidential presence. Today, “visuals are key to our understanding of the persuasive power of social media,” say Dimitrova and Matthes (2018, p. 336). “The growth of image-based social networks ... has changed the ways in which parties and politicians are leading their campaigns” (p. 336).

Hale and Grabe (2018) recently extended political and visual communications research by examining how supporters of U.S. presidential candidates Donald Trump and Hillary Clinton used Reddit. Specifically, they examined how they presented values and character traits; how the candidates were framed in terms of masculinity, femininity and gender neutrality; and how they used leadership frames.

Discourse and Relationships

Another important area of political public relations research focuses on discourse and relationships. Denton (1997), for example, argues that human interaction is the very essence of politics. “Such interaction may be formal or informal, verbal or nonverbal, public or private, but it is always persuasive, forcing us consciously or subconsciously to interpret, to evaluate, and to act” (Denton, 1997, p. xi). Indeed, it is interaction and communication that forms the heart of democracy and its free speech protection, which in turn forms the foundation for modern activism and public relations.

Twentieth-century philosopher and psychologist Dewey (1916) believed a fully informed citizenry, through education and civil communications, was key to democracy. More modern scholars, such as Carey (Hardt, 2009) in the U.S. and Williams (1976) in the U.K., made similar observations. Although individuals may now reach many others simultaneously as mass media do, true civil interaction or dialogue may be scarce, or at best greatly abbreviated, making it difficult to “let truth and falsehood grapple” as John Milton directed in *Areopagitica* in 1644 (Project Gutenberg, 2006).

Taylor (2009) notes simply, “At the heart of civil society is discourse” (p. 88); then continues: “theories of public relations can be complemented” by how society participates in what’s been called the “wrangle of the

marketplace” (p. 89). However, today’s “filter bubbles” and divisiveness threaten such a marketplace of ideas, where Mill (1913) argued people should speak and exchange ideas freely. Festinger’s (1957) classic theory of cognitive dissonance applies here, as it involves the idea of receiver attitude consistency and efforts to psychologically resolve conflicts. Dissonance can cause people to seek out messages that reinforce existing beliefs and to avoid those that contradict them, thus resulting in selective message exposure and perception (Knobloch-Westerwick & Meng, 2009). Therefore, although media channels continue to expand, people may tend to narrow their focus along ideological lines to allow for cognitive shortcuts that bypass potential dissonance and silence an ideas marketplace.

In his book *Unbounded Publics*, Gilman-Opalsky (2008) discusses Jürgen Habermas’s study of the public sphere, in which “the ideal public fulfilled the intrastate function of democratic legitimization; it served as a conduit of influence between civil society and the state” (p. xii). Gilman-Opalsky (2008) argues that an idyllic *transgressive* public sphere, one that inhabits both national and transnational simultaneously and in a complementary way, represents a new “potentiality for rethinking and expanding the parameters of political identity, civil society, and citizenship” (p. xii).

However, Rosas and Serrano-Puche (2018) present criticisms of the foundational public sphere concept. For example, they note that certain groups (or “counterpublics”) are often excluded from engagement and that, in fact, there are many diverse public spheres. They claim Habermas “idealizes a communicative rationality that does not take into account the empirical complexities of political reality and ignores communicative situations that do not necessarily lead to a consensus” (p. 2032).

Today, Macnamara (2018) laments that government and other communicators have created an “architecture of speaking” instead of an “architecture of listening” (p. 10). He calls the current trend of top-down communication approaches, even in social media (Macnamara, 2016; Wright & Hinson, 2017), as inherently *anti*-social, noting that a simple “transmission of messages is not communication” (p. 12). Such practices could be to blame in part for Edelman (2018) finding that people in the U.S. believe government is the most broken institution in their society. Instead, interpersonal communication (aka “word of mouth”) remains a more trusted and persuasive form of communication over mediated forms (Edelman, 2018).

In either case, the classic *People’s Choice* study first illustrated the political power of interpersonal influence on voters in Erie County, Ohio, during the 1940 U.S. presidential election campaign (Lazarsfeld, Berelson, & Gaudet, 1944). Its “unanticipated discovery of the role of social relationships in the mass communication process” resulted in the two-step flow model of communication (Lowery & DeFleur, 1988, p. 430). This research documented that some people attended to mediated political messages more than others, and that these people became

persuasive opinion leaders when they discussed issues with others who were less interested or informed. Recent evidence of the two-step flow model was found in a Hungarian general election, where political candidates' followers influenced their social media friends and acquaintances more than political candidates themselves did (Bene, 2018).

However, people aren't always willing to share their true political views. Inspired by her observations of life in Nazi Germany, Noelle-Neuman (1974) used the spiral of silence model to help explain the concept of a silent majority, which involves people's reluctance to publicly express what they believe to be minority opinions for fear of social or political retribution or isolation. This spiral thereby compromises a democratic marketplace of ideas. Although the spiral of silence model's greatest contribution has perhaps been its fusion of media, individuals, and public opinion research, it is ultimately rooted in the nature of social interaction or relationships.

Huge and Glynn (2013) found evidence of the spiral when they tested the time it took participants to "like" or "dislike" digitized images, both political and nonpolitical. Participants who knew they were in the minority opinion took longer to make their decisions, especially for political objects. A recent Hong Kong study (Chan, 2018) found evidence that partisan strength was positively associated with social media use, but only when there was less perceived disagreement among one's friend network—also an indication of a modern-day spiral of silence.

In addition, a study of German Facebook users under the age of 30 found that as the network grew more diverse, more self-censorship occurred (Hoffman & Lutz, 2017). They also found that active Facebook users with high political interest were more willing to speak out about political issues, while people with communication apprehension or fear of isolation were less likely to. This finding helps answer Hayes and Matthes's call (2017) to direct a political spiral of silence scholarship toward individual differences, how they affect perceptions about publicly observable political behaviors, and the role of social pressures in motivating information seeking.

In such an environment, how do public servants and citizens engage in earnest, civil political dialogue, the kind Strömbäck and Kiousis (2011) describe as *building relationships* with others to help achieve political goals? Certainly, the aims of public relations are typically dependent upon *stakeholder groups*. For example, public affairs, government, and political public relations involve communications among government agencies and entities, as well as between government representatives and constituents. NGOs, corporations, trade groups, political parties, and governments at all levels take part in efforts to influence and/or relay policies and objectives through such activities as diplomacy, lobbying, public information campaigns, advocacy, public hearings, and elections.

In *Propaganda*, Bernays (1928) suggested that a Secretary of Public Relations be created as part of the President's Cabinet "to interpret America's aims and ideals throughout the world, and to keep the citizens of this country in touch with governmental activities and the reasons which promote them" (p. 127). Today such work may be called *public diplomacy*, which is a relatively new term and formalized function. In *Propaganda and Persuasion*, Jowett and O'Donnell (2012) say public diplomacy

encompasses the cultivation by governments of public opinion in other countries; the interaction of private groups and interests in one country with another; the reporting of foreign affairs and its impact on policy; communication between those whose job is in communication, as diplomats and foreign correspondents; and the process of intercultural communications.

(p. 287)

As shown by Fitzpatrick, Fullerton, and Kendrick (2013), there are in fact many similarities between political public relations and public diplomacy. White and Radic (2014) thus claim that "public diplomacy is, in effect, a nation-state's international public relations" (p. 459). These latter scholars point to the convergence of public relations and public diplomacy and its small "intellectual divide," citing information exchange and the desire to build good will and positive perceptions as common goals.

In their study of eight European Union countries, White and Radic (2014) found a significant positive correlation between a country's level of democracy and its use of advocacy messages, and descriptive statistics indicated that countries that used advocacy strategies had better perceived reputations. In his study of 21st century Russian public diplomacy, Simons (2014) agrees that public diplomacy also includes reputation management. Therefore, he says, relational and network approaches to its study seem apt.

It makes sense, then, that scholars such as Seltzer and Zhang (2011) have applied organization–public relationship (OPR) theory to politics. They examined political parties and voters and found length of time in the party, mediated communication, interpersonal communication, interpersonal trust, and dialogic communication as significant predictors of political organization–public relationship (POPR) strength. Ledingham (2011) also provides an overview of the significance of relationship management and cultivation in the context of political public relations. And, as noted earlier, the importance of cultivating relationships was emphasized already in *Commentariolum Petitionis*, published around 64 BC (Strömbäck & Kioussis, 2013).

Therefore, given our micro-messaging environment, future scholars might seek to extrapolate to political public relations research the

theoretical underpinnings from both interpersonal as well as stakeholder literature, such as is found in nonprofit relationship management. This literature includes such components as loyalty, affect (including trust, commitment and satisfaction), and stewardship, which includes such factors as responsibility and reporting (Pressgrove & McKeever, 2016). One could certainly argue that governments and politicians should be stewards of the people's resources, and Kelly (2001) has long contended that stewardship should be considered an ongoing formal step in the public relations process.

Activism and Social Change

In contrast, drawing from the perspective of activists and social movement literature, public relations scholars (Martinelli, 2014; Mundy, 2013; Stokes & Rubin, 2010) have explored political communications beyond the realms of relationships, government communications, and campaigning. Trivedi (2003) defines social movements as “the attempt of a challenging group within society to affect change and achieve goals” (p. 3). Challengers must not only motivate, but also mobilize a “significant segment of society under a common cause or identity, often outside traditional electoral channels” (Trivedi, p. 3).

Notions of micro- and mesomobilization are drawn from sociology and involve the actors involved in movements (Gerhards & Rucht, 1992). Micromobilization actors are defined as pursuing their own goals independently or in loosely structured organizations, while mesomobilization actors coordinate and integrate the micromobilized. Gerhards and Rucht describe how mesomobilization occurred during 1988 protests in Berlin, when activist groups were connected together and achieved “a cultural integration ... by developing a common frame of meaning to interpret the issue at stake” (p. 559). This joining together of groups is similar to Shaw et al.'s agenda-melding concept, which describes how people join groups by, in effect, joining their issue agendas via both mediated and interpersonal means (Shaw, McCombs, Weaver, & Hamm, 1999). Tilly (2008) believes that such unity among large numbers of committed supporters is critical for social change success.

Gamson (1990) argued that after 1945, there were two major changes in American society that created “a radically different environment for [social] challengers” (p. 145). The first revolved around the rise of the “national security state” and its “sophisticated covert action capability”; the second change was television and its use by both “challengers and authorities” (p. 146).

In Gitlin's (1980/2003) classic *The Whole World Is Watching*, he chronicled the actions of the Students for a Democratic Society and discussed the tendency for media to support existing power structures

and frames and to marginalize those who challenge them. In the book's latest edition, he links it to critical scholarship when he writes:

Hegemonic ideology enters into everything people do and think is “natural”—making a living, loving, playing, believing, knowing, even rebelling. In every sphere of social activity, it meshes with the “common senses” through which people make the world seem intelligible; it tries to *become* that common sense.

(p. 10)

Weaver, Motion, and Roper (2006) used critical discourse theory as a “means of understanding the significance of the public relations contribution to the formation of hegemonic power, constructions of knowledge, truth, and the public interest” (p. 21). Thus they concluded that “public relations becomes a tool of social power and change for utilization by not only those who hold hegemonic power, but also those who seek to challenge and transform that power and reconfigure dominant perceptions of the public interest” (p. 21).

Conclusion

Theories that arose in the 20th century continue to be adapted, tested, refined, and expanded to explain political public relations processes in today's fragmented, but highly connected world. Certainly, as Generation Z—the world's first digital natives and most diverse generation in history (Kane, 2017)—continues to come of voting age, our explorations of their media use and interpretation, political information seeking and influencers, and social change inclinations and motivations hold great promise for new insights. Whether viewed from the traditions of rhetoric, critical cultural, media effects, relationships, activism, or something else, our political landscape beckons public relations scholars.

Although political communication has long been recognized as an area of study, with a “self-consciously cross-disciplinary focus” starting in the late 1950s (Denton, 1997, p. xi), Nielsen (2014) urges today's political communication scholars to “re-engage with the rest of media and communication studies and embrace a broader and more diverse [research] agenda” (p. 5). Macnamara (2018) likewise urges public relations scholars to engage in communication studies literature and beyond to “develop new knowledge beyond that of ... the disciplines involved” (p. 14).

No doubt, public relations scholarship has much to add and much to gain from such transdisciplinary efforts, and also from more culturally diverse and inclusive studies. Likewise, public relations scholarship—including political public relations scholarship—has much to gain from a more thorough understanding of the historical roots and theoretical classics that have formed contemporary practice and theory (Martinelli,

2011). As noted by Strömbäck and Kiouisis (2013), the practice of political public relations is virtually as old as politics itself, with many contemporary public relations strategies and tactics having historical roots, some going back to ancient times.

Amid all of this scholarship, one thing is certain: Political public relations has been an area of professional discussion and public concern for more than 100 years. It is hoped this chapter conveys a sense not only of its rich historical past, but also of its vast potential for future research.

Notes

- 1 In 2012, *The New Yorker* (Lepore, 24 September) included an article about this agency and its influence on the “business of politics.” For a more modern take on political consultants, see Sheingate (2016, 10 January), who discusses modern political campaigns and their “admen and advisors” in *Salon*.)
- 2 For a discussion of theoretical differences, see Scheufele, D. A., & Tewksbury, D. (2007).

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3 Ethical Questions, Quandaries, and Quagmires in Political Communication and a Framework for Moral Analyses

Shannon A. Bowen and Yicheng Zhu

Much of the advancement of public relations theory and practice is accompanied with a reconceptualization of organization–publics power balance and the ideal, or normative, two-way and perhaps symmetrical communication models. This development led to the invention of ethical standards and models within the context of the Excellence Study. The purpose of the current chapter is to supplement the emerging field of political public relations with an integrative introduction to ethical traditions and models. It will also offer an overview of how ethics has been studied in political communication, public relations, and political science, which involves related topics such as issues management, government relations, and public diplomacy. Among these, the emphasis will be given on how a principle-based model of ethical analysis can be integrated into the shifting context of political public relations. The current book's definition of political public relations is:

Political public relations is the management process by which an actor for political purposes, through communication and action, seeks to influence and to establish, build, and maintain beneficial relationships and reputations with key publics and stakeholders to help support its mission and achieve its goals.

(Chapter 1, see also Strömbäck & Kioussis, 2011, p. 8)

We would add to this definition that the seeking of influence for political purposes must be undertaken ethically, in accordance with the moral principles offered by philosophy, and reviewed in this chapter. Strömbäck and Kioussis (2013) argued that the political arena is arguably the oldest for public relations but that it is underrepresented in predominating corporate theory development. Neither business-based nor politics-based theories of public relations have yet been saturated with ethical theory or understanding, and many questions remain.

Defining Ethics

Ethical terrain in political communication is nebulous and often arises in unexpected ways, so it is wise to begin by clearly defining what is meant by ethics. Ethics is concerned with not only what actions are right or permissible and wrong or impermissible, but also what actions are obligatory or noble (Brennan, 2005). Ethics, in the philosophical sense, also seeks to provide discernment about the intentions, motives, and characters of moral agents, also called decision-makers or communicators in our discipline. Those who study ethics determine what values be upheld, what principles should apply, and to develop, in most cases, rationally consistent frameworks that can help reason through ethical problems. Normative ethics examines how moral theories can be best applied to create the most ethical solutions to problems. In its applied form, ethics seeks to describe how those normative theories of ethics apply in the real world. Ethics, in a normative sense, has been defined by contemporary scholars (De George, 1995; Flew, 1979; Jaska & Pritchard, 1994) as well as eminent philosopher Immanuel Kant (1974/1793). For example, ethics is “concerned with how we should live our lives. It focuses on questions about what is right or wrong, fair or unfair, caring or uncaring, good or bad, responsible or irresponsible, and the like” (Jaska & Pritchard, 1994, p. 3). The Kantian definition is focused on how human beings “become worthy of happiness” (Kant, 1974/1793, p. 45).

Scholars agree that there is little distinction between ethics and morals, but also that the study of these forms of analysis is best undertaken in the rigorous discipline of philosophy (Shaw, 2011). Yet, it is important to note that moral standards are different from other types of standards (such as professional standards) because they take priority: moral standards are profoundly important to human welfare and well-being (Shaw, 2011). Therefore, moral philosophy will be applied to communication in the political realm for our purposes, and this chapter will review the moral standards or ethical guidelines that can be applied in the political context.

Shaw (2011) noted that moral standards take priority over all other standards, including self-interest, and are “more important than other considerations in guiding our actions” (p. 9). Indeed, moral standards or ethical decisions must be made based on sound rationality, good reason, and moral judgment. The value of these standards depends not upon who enacts them but on the quality of their reasoning, grounds, or justifications. Do not confuse morality with cultural norms, religious beliefs, etiquette, or legal standards because these concepts are not equivalent concepts. Rigorous moral standards must drive ethical decisions in order for them to be consistent, logical, and defensible across various worldviews and cultures, and concepts such as cultural norms or legal standards often develop after a sense of ethical values. It is important to understand the

sociopolitical context that involves ethics in political communication, as these variables can also come into play in determining values, and those values are often in conflict; a brief review of sociopolitical context is in order before delving further into ethics.

Sociopolitical Context

Ethics does not depend on culture; it stands apart from culture through the use of rational and defensible arguments. However, a consistent source of conflict and political communication comes from differences in values. Understanding those values, and the cultural context in which values and norms arise, can help to determine a shared, larger underlying moral principle for use in ethical problem solving.

Capitalism and Its Values

A capitalistic system is one in which private and individually owned businesses and corporate entities compete for resources and profit based upon their unique mix of competitive advantage and strategy in a marketplace. Although the degree of regulation depends upon the sociopolitical system, regulations in capitalistic businesses are ideally minimal so that they pose less constraint on competition and innovation (Collins, 1985). Supply-side capitalism is a socioeconomic system that seeks maximal deregulation and freedom from constraints, stimulating top-down investment in business and labor which, in turn, provide disposable resources to stimulate the economy, offering rapid economic growth and low unemployment. Conversely, demand-side capitalism needs demand from the market to stimulate economic growth of business and labor, and often involves increased government spending, which creates economic growth and lowers unemployment at a steady but slower rate. Both of these capitalistic approaches have in common ethical values of private ownership of business, innovation, free-market liberalism, competition, hard work, reinvestment, and fairness. This system has an emphasis on time or the value of speed, as in the adage “time is money.” In the capitalistic socioeconomic system, entrepreneurship and private ownership of business are valued and encouraged; owners may fail or become wealthy depending on business and marketing conditions. Therefore, individualism and self-reliance pervade capitalistic societies, as well as an applied tradition of Protestant work ethic (Collins, 1985). In this sense, the norm of moral autonomy or individual responsibility and independent decision-making works in ethical principle along with free-market capitalism. A focus on individual moral autonomy is often congruent with Kantian or deontological ethics, presented in more detail below.

Socialism and Its Values

Socialist or Marxist economies are often referred to as mixed-economies because they hold both private ownership of business and property as well as government ownership of business and property (Collins, 1985). In the mixed economy, the means of production are reliant upon government even when privately owned due to an increased presence of government regulation, oversight, control, and taxation. Of course, there are various forms of socialist or mixed economies, but in theory they are a mix of private ownership and government control and ownership with a mixed role for the mass media (Adorno, 1991). Governments in socialist economies can impose high burdens on businesses and can also give businesses freedom from taxation as a benefit, while retaining oversight authority. Therefore, large businesses in a socialist economy can often be quite profitable, as they may hold an advantage over small businesses who do not have the negotiating heft of their corporate counterparts.

Citizens depend on the government to maintain regulatory oversight of business including competition and fairness, as well as to run state operated businesses, such as the transportation, energy, or utility sectors. Socialist values include social equality and the general welfare of society, and a “safety net” or caretaking approach to members of the society in terms of public services. Values include a collective trust in authority or reliance on government, as well as a belief in the individual right to ownership of property. Working for the greater good or in the public interest is often congruent with a utilitarian form of decision-making, presented in more detail below.

Communism and Its Values

In a communistic socioeconomic system, there is extremely limited or no private ownership of the means of production or business. Government ownership is common in all sectors of the economy and determines the work and to some extent, lives of individuals through what is legal, expected, and provided. In a communistic system, individuals have limited decision-making freedom based upon the role that is allotted to them by the government; professions are often determined by educational aptitude and demand, and many communistic societies rigorously control details such as individual housing and location (Collins, 1985).

Power, authority, and decision-making ability are concentrated in the hands of a few decision-makers who work in the government or its primary and influential institutions. In a communistic society, collective values or the good of the masses is used as an ethical standard that supports the system. Collective good, respect for elders and others, equality for citizens (although there are often pronounced differences between genders), and respect for the system are all ethical values in this approach. For

example, the collective good of all can be defined as less competition for business in this system, yielding a more cumbersome structure but one that offers full employment. Although the government of a communistic system is supposed to work in the public interest, normatively, it is often to be feared in the applied sense due to the constraints it places on freedom, moral autonomy, or individual liberty. Therefore, authority is respected, revered, or feared depending on the communistic system. A collectivist yet interpersonal ethos arising from Asia originated in the form of ethics known as Confucianism that will be presented below.

Each framework for ethical decision-making presented below should also be considered within the socioeconomic context of the ethical dilemma. The values across systems are often different, but underlying moral principles can be found, through analyses and research, that support universal moral standards such as dignity, fairness, honesty, integrity, and safety.

Political Ethics and Public Relations Ethics

For the study of public relations, the incorporation of ethics as a guiding normative principle was of paramount importance. This is because the practice of public relations has been misunderstood for long by society at large: public relations workers were often regarded as news spinners, doctors of minds, and manipulators of public opinion (Farnsworth, 2015; McNair, 2004; Sumpter & Tankard, 1994). This stereotype can perhaps be even more serious within the field of political public relations. For the addition of *political* before *public relations* could inevitably remind readers about politics. And, within the context of this chapter, political public relations ethics could also remind readers about political ethics.

Political ethics is generally separated into two fields of inquiry: ethics of *process* (Hampshire, 1978; Thompson, 1987) and ethics of *policy* (Bluhm & Heineman, 2007). The former deals with the morality of political management, election, persuasion, or even assassination (earlier in history) as political processes. For political ethics of *process*, the first and perhaps the most famous example is *Il Principe* of Machiavelli (1891). The main idea of the Italian philosopher, arguably writing from the exemplary successes of Pope Alexander VI and Cesare Borgia, is that the ends of political actions justify the means (Machiavelli, 1883). Most philosophical forms of ethics disagree, yet political perspectives such as *The Prince* can be used to justify an otherwise immoral action. The latter type, political ethics of *policy*, is concerned with the extent to which political policies such as regulations and laws are ethical (Gutmann & Thompson, 2014). A recent example would be debates about whether civil liberty should be sacrificed to protect public safety in the post 9–11 era (Ignatieff, 2013). Simply put, the former ethics is about means of political actions, and the latter is mainly about the competing and sometimes conflicting ends of political actions.

Political public relations ethics could be understood as a type of political ethics of *process* in the particular field of public relations practice. Bowen (2011) analyzed political ethics of *policy* and the duties of policy creation, a form of government public relations ethics. To understand this, it is necessary to know the normative nature of public relations ethics within the larger context of the dominant paradigm of the field known as the Excellence Study, which was conducted and extended by public relations scholars to illustrate how excellent public relations should be executed (Dozier, Grunig, & Grunig, 1995; Grunig, 1992; Grunig, Grunig, & Dozier, 2002). Thus, from the political science perspective, political public relations ethics could be understood as an ethics of the process of conducting political public relations activities: such as information gathering, voter research (Puglisi, 2004), lobbying (Haug & Koppang, 1997), election campaigns (Kiousis, Mitrook, Wu, & Seltzer, 2006), or political activism (Henderson, 2005), and policy analyses and creation. Moreover, it should be guided by a normative public relations ethic (Bowen, 2010) specifically designed for political purposes. This means that political public relation ethics, as illustrated in this chapter, should not be merely a comparative analysis or an academic debate, but should rather indicate what is the ethical mechanism that can lead to responsible, trustworthy, credible, and good ways to do public relations for political purposes.

Connecting Public Relations Ethics to Political Purpose

Ethics has been incorporated into the Excellence Study as one of the ten normative principles of public relations practice (Bowen, 2004). It was first proposed as a principle and was later reconceptualized as one of the dimensions of public relations behavior (Laskin, 2009). This reconceptualization can be largely attributed to the theoretical expansion of the Excellence Study in other cultures, countries, and arenas of public relations practice, including political public relations.

However, ethics has hardly been fully elaborated as a principle in the specific context of political public relations when compared to corporate public relations. The reasons are manifold: they include the contextual differences in focus on purposes, intentions, distribution of power, knowledge level, and even macro-level distinction of sociocultural background. Perhaps the comparison of definitions of political public relations and traditional public relations is an ideal place to start this elaboration.

The definition of political public relations used in this book and chapter specifies that a mission and goal are the end state or desirable purpose of these activities. This means that unlike corporate public relations, the effectiveness of political public relations can be best considered on a goal-attainment basis. Moreover, this definition, like other previous definitions of political public relations, has two traits with ethical implications: first, the definitions by Zipfel (2008) and McNair (2017), as well as the one

cited above (Strömbäck & Kioussis, 2011), define political public relations in connection to a purpose, an aim, or an interest. The use of the proposition “by which” in the above-cited definition may have hinted that political public relations can be *utilized*. The second trait of definitions of political public relations is that the desired purposes, aims, or interests do not end in people or a group of people directly. For example, the purposes of political public relations as defined above are strategic: to “support its mission” and “achieve its goals” (Strömbäck & Kioussis, 2011, p. 8).

To further clarify the ethical implications of these two traits of political public relations, a comparison between the definitions of public relations could be helpful. Grunig and Hunt (1984, p. 4) define public relations as “the management of communication between an organization and its publics.” In Harlow’s (1976, p. 36) definition, the first-mentioned purpose of public relations returns is “to serve the public interest” before “to help anticipate trends.” The key takeaway here is that traditional public relations in a corporate setting has its final interest in people themselves, and the relationships that result, despite the fact that such interest is often expressed as “mutually beneficial.” Yet public relations cannot always be mutually beneficial as it often involves the management of conflict and the resolution of disputed public policy. Thus, political public relations is more asymmetrical; it is often based on a goal-attainment approach rather than a strategic constituencies approach, with the end result of a zero-sum game (winner and loser) often the outcome of political action during election cycles. Consider the “scorched Earth” policy of Vercingetorix burning all the crops Julius Caesar’s army in France needed to survive: he risked starvation of his own army but his bold strategy united the Gauls for the first time at the battle of Alesia; yet, he was forced to surrender to Rome.

Public relations also holds a well-developed Kantian ethics model (Bowen, 2004), which is able to maintain other assumptions and phenomena in corporate public relations in harmony, even in a normative sense. This is because the definitions of traditional public relations facilitate Kant’s (1785/1964) humanity formulation of the categorical imperative, which states that ethical actions should always have humanity as an end, and never simply as a means to an end.

Public relations theorists (Bowen, 2004, 2005, 2011; Bowen, Moon, & Kim, 2018) have published several Kantian deontological models for use in public relations ethics, and also proposed an integrated model of ethical public relations involving both the utilitarian and deontological approaches of ethical evaluation (Bowen & Gallicano, 2013). In the meantime, such a model could be modified to suit political public relations: firstly, it needs to consider how rules in a utilitarian approach are different, when the utility is political rather than corporate-oriented; secondly, in terms of deontological evaluation, it would direct how political missions and goals

could return to humanity itself, to avoid the violation of Kant's second categorical imperative. The returning to humanity as an *end* of political public relations activities could be one important determinant that such activities are not propagandistic but are of moral worth in a larger sense.

Another perspective on the ethics of public relations with a political purpose comes from Spicer (1997), who explicated three different normative approaches to ethics in organizational public relations, and emphasized the difference between the stakeholders' and the organizations' observations in the process of making moral judgments about actions. More specifically, Spicer's chapter (1997, p. 272) on the "appraisal of ethics" discussed two important factors in making an ethical determination related to political public relations: 1. attribution of *responsibility* and, 2. *values* of political purposes. These two concepts are essential for the current chapter to develop further the connection between political ethics and public relations ethics, as responsibility and value of action are central ethical constructs.

Attribution of Responsibility: Dilemma for Governments as Organizations

Political ethicists were faced with the challenge of attribution of responsibility since classic times, when Machiavelli (1883, I, 9) argued that "although the act condemns the doer, the end may justify him." Is the king, judge, or the executioner responsible for the condemned? For contemporary politics, especially in a democratic setting, the question is who should be accounted as responsible as "the dirty hand." In more concrete terms, Walzer (1973) was concerned about the cases where a right action of the *government* as an organization could leave a *man* who does it guilty.

Walzer (1973) was mainly concerned with "dirty" decisions such as bribes, war crimes, assassinations, terrorism, torture, and so on. However, in terms of political public relations, some commonly known unethical decisions include disinformation, deception (Hiebert, 2003), manipulation, spying (Manheim & Albritton, 1983), and concealment of information (Pearson, 1989). If a political decision made by the government is perceived to be unethical, the attribution of responsibility would become important. For example, the George W. Bush administration justified the war on Iraq with the information that the Iraqi regime possessed weapons of mass destruction, which were threatening the U.S. and its allies in the region. Post-war investigations found little proof of the administration's war justification, and a considerable portion of the general public believed that the war was either hastily started or unjustified. Another example is related to the George Bush Sr. Administration in the run-up to the first Iraqi war, where the public relations firm Hill and Knowlton engaged in deception. More specifically, Hill and Knowlton faked Congressional hearings testimony to justify war efforts with fictional accounts recited by

the daughter of the Kuwaiti ambassador, whose true identity and location outside the countries in question was revealed later. Thus, some publics challenged the morality of the rationalization process of both Iraq Wars and demanded a more ethical accounting of events. With the assumption that disinformation to domestic citizens was a communication strategy adopted by the administrations of Bush Sr. and Bush Jr. (Ahmed, 2005), then who should be blamed for such disinformation? We return to the theories offered by moral philosophy to help shed light on these types of ethical questions, quandaries, and quagmires.

Three Traditions of Political Public Relations Ethics

Political Public Relations Ethics with a Utilitarian Tradition

The utilitarian approach to ethics looks for the utility generated by a decision in order to determine its moral worth – quite literally examining the potential outcomes of an action. As such, this approach is also known as consequentialism because the potential outcomes, good or bad, determine the ethical nature of an act. The goal of utilitarianism is to enact decisions that create the greatest amount of aggregate good, while minimizing negative consequences or harms. The theory was studied by others but popularized by John Stuart Mill (1957/1861), a philosopher who gave us the utilitarian calculus. He used the phrase “The greatest amount of good for the greatest number” to conceptualize a form of ethics that government and justice could follow that would ultimately work in the public interest of the majority of people (Mill, 1859). As mentioned earlier, utilitarianism has values that line up well with a public good or public interest approach, similar to the values of socialism or Marxism. It values the public good over individualism and seeks to serve the majority of people while diminishing negative outcomes for all.

A few deficits of utilitarian theory remain that make it best suited for use in application with other philosophies. It views morality not as a principle, but as a consequence, and these are difficult to predict, often rapidly-changing, and based on the needs of a number of people rather than the merit of an argument. It also sides in favor of the majority each time, even if the minority has a good point. Although some utilitarian philosophy is more refined and seeks to use case history and broadly applicable rules, it is easy to fall into a numbers game or even weigh the wrong “good” to be maximized and come up with a bizarre rationale. Still, the theory has common values with socialism, is helpful for postulating outcomes, and can be valuable in determining the broad public interest in terms of public policy, implementing majority-favorable outcomes, and satisfying a large voting block or sector of a mixed economy.

Political Public Relations Ethics with a Deontological Tradition

Deontological moral philosophy was pioneered by Immanuel Kant who lived 1724–1804. Kantian philosophy is based on moral principle rather than outcomes, although outcomes are not ignored. The driving factor behind decisions is the extent to which it maintains universal moral principle and good will as viewed through reason. The theory is based on moral autonomy, or the individual ability to reason independently and without bias. Kant designed his supreme principle of right, the categorical imperative, to examine potential actions for fault or weakness. The categorical imperative commands, *act only on that maxim that you can will to become a universal law* (Kant, 1785/1964, p. 88) so that all others would be equally obligated.

This approach goes further than the golden rule because it is not based on self-interest and reciprocity but a benevolence owed to others (Sullivan, 1989). Another exposition of the categorical imperative elaborates on a demand that all persons be treated as ends in themselves, rather than means to an end, ruling out selfishness and bias. Perhaps most importantly, the categorical imperative demands that all people make decisions that would harmonize with a universal kingdom of ends, based on good will alone. Good intention alone must be the cause for action in order for it to retain moral worth.

The enlightenment rationalism that spurred deontological philosophy is credited with bringing the modern turn to the new world (Giddens, 1991). Rationalism displaced emotion, tradition, or reliance on other forms of analysis with one of reason that became a cornerstone of deontology. Because of the reliance on moral autonomy in deontology, it is also called the premier philosophy of Protestantism. This approach offers a reliance on Western values such as self-reliance, individualism, autonomy, and innovation that spurs on competition and free market capitalism. Deontology's insistence on dignity and respect pair well with the Protestant work ethic, and the tenet of acting from good will alone is akin to the benevolence found in a Judeo-Christian ethos. Democratic values pair well with deontology as a moral framework.

Political Public Relations Ethics with a Confucian Tradition

Public relations scholars such as Sriramesh (2009), Verčič, Van Ruler, Bütschi, and Flodin (2001), and Huang (2000) separately attempted to internationalize public relation theories in other social and political contexts, and studied other factors such as collectivism (Grünig, 2000), interpersonal communication, cultural ambassador activities (Taylor, 2000), and guanxi (face saving measures) in public relations (Huang, 2000).

The conceptualization of Confucian ethics for political public relations has two overlapping routes: the first is the consideration of a Confucian political ethics, and the second is that of Confucian thoughts on public relations. Because public relations is a relatively contemporary concept compared to Confucianism, this chapter will have to connect Confucian thoughts about public policy, administration, public opinion, market and commerce with the modern notion of public relations.

Contemporary Neo-Confucians proclaimed that Western ethics, either the utilitarian school from Britain or the Kantian theories of deontology, were not perfectly suitable for the Chinese public (Yu, 1998). The statement has resonated with Anscombe (1958), who argued for the need to revive Aristotelian ethics in Western philosophy. For Yu (1998, 2013), Aristotelian and Confucian ethics are based on virtue, and virtue-based ethics have been long-ignored with the development of rule-based and duty-based schools of ethics (also see MacIntyre, 1984) in the Christian world.

But what does virtue stand for in terms of political public relations? Unlike modern Western ethics, for Confucius and classical Confucians, the core question asked by Confucius, as well as Aristotle, was not “what is good or bad?” or “how to decide if something is good or bad?”, but rather “how to become a good person?” Confucius believed that virtue is deepened through the process of ritualization, and virtue was also inertly existent in a new-born human (Waley, 2012).

For politicians, classical Confucians travel around from one city-state to another in Ancient China asking kings and dukes to deepen their virtue by self-correction and respond to courtesy (Waley, 2012, p. 296).¹ Confucius emphasized the importance of ordinary publics in governance, noting “if the people have no faith in their rulers, there is no standing for the state”² (Waley, 2012, p. 302). Mencius, as a Confucius protégé, made a further extension on political administration: he argued that how heaven decides on whom to endorse is by listening to the voice of the people (Legge, 1861, p. 232).

Moreover, Confucius has also emphasized the importance of hierarchy and boundaries. Confucius once proposed: “There is government, when the prince is prince, and the minister is minister; when the father is father, and the son is son”³ (Waley, 2012, p. 306). Confucius also said that “The people may be made to follow a path of action, but they may not be made to understand it”⁴ (Waley, 2012, p. 205).⁵ He was clear about the relationship between the ruler and the subjects, as well as the importance for the administration to control the information environment of the people.

Neo-Confucianism reached its academic peak in the works of Zhu Xi, a politician, educator, and philosopher of the Song dynasty (1130–1200)

(Spring, 2007). The main achievement of Neo-Confucians was the establishment of *rationality* as the way of heaven. Therefore, Zhu Xi and other Neo-Confucians connected the *way of heaven* to an external *rationality of the universe*,⁶ rather than believing in fate or a mandate of heaven like Confucius did. This means that both the emperor and the people need to find that external rationality through the study of the reasons of things (Chu, 1990). Politically, this meant a return to the balance between the throne and other social classes. Zhu Xi also encouraged the merchants to actively participate in the *cultivation* of ordinary folks by giving out donations to schools and making connections to nobles for policy support (Lam, 2003).

In the early years of the twentieth century, a group of scholars emerged as the *contemporary Neo-Confucians* (Liu, 2003). They were heavily influenced by democratic ideas from the West and had one idea in common: the equality of all human beings, also a central theme of Kant's deontology (Cha, 2003). Confucian ideas were challenged after World War I, and purged during the Cultural Revolution (Fan, 2011).

Confucian ideas missed the opportunity to engage with the modern concept of public relations. After World War II, when General MacArthur planned to establish public relations offices throughout Japan's governmental bodies, they found no Japanese word that would fit the modern meaning of public relations (Cooper-Chen & Tanaka, 2007). The later translation turned out to be Kou-Hou,⁷ which literally means publicity or public information (Inoue, 2003). However, in both China and Japan, one thing that seems to be certain is that ethics is tightly connected to politics. For Confucius, politics is ethics⁸ (Waley, 2012, p. 312),⁹ but for political public relations in the West, the boundary between politics and free market capitalism seems to allow for different sets of ethical standards about how information should flow in the society. For Japan, the existence of the Kisha Clubs, for the purpose of quick and verified public communication, was studied and often criticized for restricting information accessibility, and promoting arenas for manipulations of information (Farley, 1996; Seward, 2005). However, Kisha Clubs (press clubs) could have merits that correspond to philosophical traditions that the nation values (Kelly, Masumoto, & Gibson, 2002).

Thus, a Confucian politician would believe that political public relations is ontologically a constituting part of ethics: knowing the preoccupations of the people and understanding the importance of public opinion¹⁰ is inertly important for a ruler's virtue, otherwise, the ruler is doomed to lose the favor of heaven (Classical Confucianism) or the rational reasons of the universe (Neo-Confucianism).

By providing this concise introduction about the connection between Confucianism and political public relations, this chapter hopes to illustrate

the possible depth of the topic and expand its use in political public relations. Previous studies in political public relations, political communication and mass communication have explored the role of Confucianism, collectivism, or guanxi (Huang, 2000; Jo & Kim, 2004; Sriramesh, 2009; Verčič et al., 2001). However, it is necessary to understand that these concepts can hardly be translated using a framework of modern Western sociology or philosophy. To understand and analyze political public relations policy in a Confucian country, one needs to know Confucianism itself as the analytical framework.

Implementation of Ethics in Political Public Relations

Moral philosophy, political theory, and ethics in public relations have been examined in order to provide a normative framework, yet one that is imminently practical and can be implemented in the world of political communication. Figure 3.1 summarizes the three primary approaches to ethical analysis, in the context of sociopolitical and socioeconomic structures, values, and the responses of constituents, stakeholders, and publics to political communication in an ongoing dialogue.

This figure is offered as a tool to help deliberate and analyze ethical decisions in the political realm. Although there are no easy answers, using such a tool can offer more thorough ethical consideration than that which simply relies on professionalism, experience, or codes of ethics. The rigor of relying on moral philosophy means that decisions should result that are less biased, more thorough, defensible, rational, and well considered than actions undertaken from other means. To most rigorously analyze a situation, the moral agent should conduct the analysis using all three forms of moral philosophy discussed herein.

Figure 3.1 asks the decision-maker to consider ethics in terms of sociopolitical context and values, while working through each of the three frameworks and in determining what actions maintain greatest moral worth. Utilitarianism is represented by a culmination of “the good,” deontology because of its basis on moral principle culminates in “the right,” and both forms of Confucianism lead to “the virtuous.” Each of these three forms of analysis should result in moral insight, and yet the answers may conflict; the strongest argument in terms of rational merit is that which is ethical. The point of ethics is not to give a formula for divining a perfect answer, but to offer an analytical process that yields greater insight and the potential for better decisions overall. By using an analytical process, political public relations can become both morally defensible and ethically worthy.

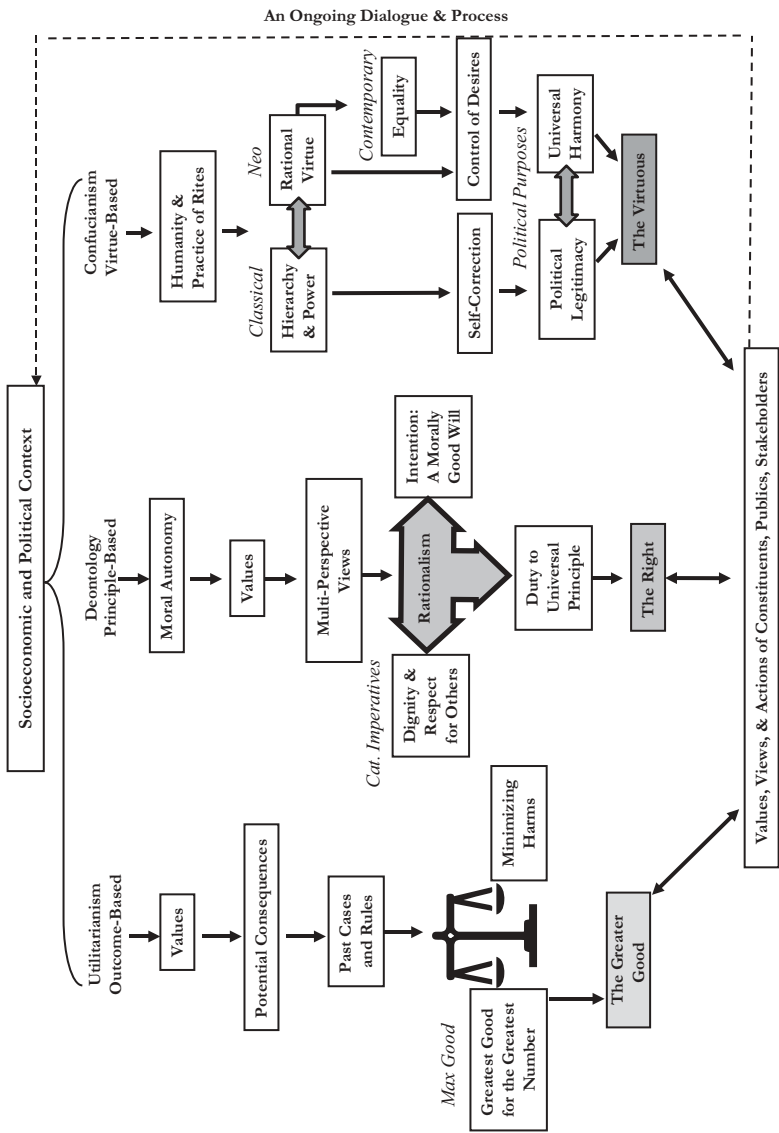


Figure 3.1 Model of three approaches to ethical decision making in political public relations: Utilitarian, Deontological, and Confucian Ethics

Conclusion

This chapter has offered overviews of political theory, moral philosophy and values, public relations ethics, and a new integration of both Western and Eastern ethics for the modern world. In a world that is continually becoming more globalized, understanding the sociopolitical context, economic theories, and resulting values that drive ethics can help political communicators and political public relations practitioners to make decisions that are responsible, analytical, and based on reason rather than caprice or fiat, in reaching varied stakeholders and publics. Those types of decision maintain the dignity and respect of constituents, stakeholders, and publics, and help to build dialogue and relationships over time.

Although political communication and political public relations is often built on asymmetry or zero-sum games, that view may be more useful in terms of political campaign communication than in the management of government and public policy issues. Government has a responsibility to communicate ethically with its citizens, and political communicators can use these ethical standards derived from moral philosophy to advance and enhance their ethical decisions, relationships with publics, and the moral responsibility of government and political actors.

Cases for Illustration

Perhaps political public relations' association with political policy is less known to the public than that with political process (e.g. elections). However, emerging communication technologies have attracted more attention to national and international political policies regarding political public relations. Ethics of policy is also concerned with concealment and disinformation: for example, the morality of the PRISM program to monitor U.S. citizens exposed by former CIA employee Snowden has been questioned by national and international communities. As for disinformation, ethical elaboration is needed for cases such as the Russian use of social media to spread disinformation in the 2016 U.S. elections, and the misuse of Facebook data by Cambridge Analytica using deception for political purposes.

Using the Cambridge Analytica case as an example, the *utilitarian* question would focus on the consequences of misuse of Facebook data. On one hand, banning the use of Facebook data, inserting governmental inspection in Facebook would hopefully reduce the possibility that such data is used unnecessarily as determined by the policy maker. Also, it would make foreign entities less capable of using that data for political purposes beyond American voters' concerns. However, a more stringent policy would also create barriers for researchers who would want to access Facebook data and would also make Facebook and the U.S. government's operation on such data less observable by the general public. Thus, the

utility of a stronger gatekeeping role of Facebook, as well as that of the Federal Government, is dependent on whose benefits are under consideration. A utilitarian analysis would determine that more harmful outcomes than benefits resulted from Facebook selling impressions to Cambridge Analytica for deceptive political purposes, meaning the act was unethical.

Meanwhile, the deontological approach would focus on the intentions of the policy and whether such policy is congruent with political duty and obligation to moral principle. Mark Zuckerberg's appearance at the Congressional Hearing to explain his understanding of the Cambridge Analytica deception of users left unclear the intention of Facebook. His proposal of ensuring a stronger gatekeeping policy could be aiming at the providence of a better information environment for Facebook users, but undoubtedly, such policy is also made with the intention to ensure Facebook's survival as a leading social network platform. Facebook's lack of responsibility appeared to fail all three forms of the categorical imperative tests of deontology. Confucian virtue would likewise conclude that the overriding moral responsibility was to the millions of Facebook users rather than Cambridge Analytica, also meaning that Facebook acted unethically in its leadership or stewardship role.

Case Discussion for the Ethics of the Political Public Relations Process

As introduced earlier, the ethics of the political process are concerned with public officials and the methods they use. Examples for the process of political public relations would include presidential campaigns, negotiations with political activists (or actually conducting it), and informing the general public about political decisions and policies, and so on. One extreme example could be the possible disinformation given to U.S. citizens before the second Iraq War about its *casus belli*.

For the Iraq War disinformation case, if one is concerned with ethics of process, then utilitarianism would point to the outcomes or the utility of disinformation within the process of the fortification of its *casus belli*, as well as *jus ad bellum*. Letting the American voters know that there are weapons of mass destruction would get the administration a more understanding audience. However, in a democratic system such as the United States, establishing a strong *casus belli* would also make it more difficult for the administration to back down from war in the future. Furthermore, the consideration of a political public relations process often goes beyond the ethics of communication: the outcome of disinformation needs to be connected to the actual outcomes and costs of the political decision, such as gaining geopolitical power in the Middle East (Le Billon, 2004) and stabilizing U.S. currency with oil production (Clark, 2005), and so on.

The deontological approach would thus focus on analyzing whether the initiator of such policy was an ethical actor when making such decision. That is, although the George W. Bush, Jr. administration consisted of

thousands of politicians, military delegates, academics, governmental staff, the usual method for the general public and the mass media is to find a representative: for example, many were concerned about the President himself as the war declarer and the person who (knowingly or unknowingly) delivered seemingly false information; others were concerned with the precision and intentions of the nation's intelligence service when informing the upper level about weapons of mass destruction. There are merits of using a deontological approach in the ethical elaboration of political public relations ethics. In certain scenarios, a person's or an entity's qualities, characteristics, or perceived intentions are more directly accessible, which could facilitate a deontological analysis. Referring to Figure 3.1, how can using the ethical framework offered in this chapter help you analyze this situation? Where did things go wrong? If you were in charge of a similar situation in the future, what moral responsibilities would guide your decision-making process? It is possible that deontology and Confucian ethics will lend similar analyses and that a rule utilitarian approach, based on historical and principled outcomes, may also agree. Would the intent of using the information about weapons of mass destruction change the potential ethicality of the situation?

Future Research Directions

This chapter has made an initial effort to combine ethical traditions from the western consequentialist, principle-based, and eastern predominant schools of moral philosophy, and apply them in the context of political public relations. Although we do not claim to have an exhaustive paradigm of ethics, we believe that it is robust. Significant strides can be made in examining the ethics of political public relations when approaching questions from this three-paradigm approach. Future research should attempt to include other traditions that could enhance and extend the paradigm, such as the questioning approach of Judaic ethics or the community-centered approach of Ubuntu ethics. Applying this paradigm in real-world situations, as well as quantitative and qualitative study, could further strengthen our understanding of ethics in the political public relations process.

Notes

- 1 In other versions and/or translations of *The Analects of Confucius*, see Book of Yen Yuan, I.
- 2 In other versions and/or translations of *The Analects of Confucius*, see Book of Yen Yuan, VII.
- 3 In other versions and/or translations of *The Analects of Confucius*, see Book of Yen Yuan, X.
- 4 Original text is 民可使由之不可使知之, because Classical Chinese hardly uses a punctuation system, scholars have been fiercely debating exactly what

- Confucius meant. Confucian scholars in various eras have given dramatically different interpretations of the sentence. Depending the placement of punctuation, the sentence could also be interpreted with the opposite meaning.
- 5 In other versions and/or translations of *The Analects of Confucius*, see Book of Tai Po, IX.
 - 6 This rationality could be compared to Hegel's *absolute idea* or *absolute knowledge* (Hegel, 2014). Philosophically, their theories belong to respectively Eastern and Western branches of objective idealism. Another Confucian scholar of the Ming Dynasty, Wang Shouren, proposed a Confucian subjective idealist theory, claiming that the way of heaven is in the heart of every person. Wang's theory became popular in Japan and Korea.
 - 7 Romanization of 広報 in Japanese.
 - 8 政者正也, the character for politics/governance “政” have the same pronunciation and lexical root to ethics/justice “正”。 Waley's (2012) translation was “to govern means to rectify.”
 - 9 In other versions and/or translations of *The Analects of Confucius*, see Book of Yen Yuan, XVII.
 - 10 Mencius also had the idea of 君轻民重, which means rulers are light and the people weigh heavily. This proposition weighs the people as more important than rulers (Lau, 2003, p. 315).

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4 Digital Political Public Relations

Kaye D. Sweetser

At its very core, politics have always been about reaching and serving the public (Sha, 2017; Strömbäck & Kioussis, 2011a, 2013). Whether to reach the public in order to solicit votes or support, or as service to improve the lives of the public, politics cannot function without the public. The political system needs the people it serves, and the people it serves often use communication channels to access and assess the political system. To this point, Bernays (1928) and Lippman (1922) noted how central public relations and communication strategy were to shaping public opinion and creating an informed electorate.

Given this interdependence, it is not surprising that political public relations emerged as one of the earliest contexts in which the overall field of communication strategy appeared (Strömbäck & Kioussis, 2011a, 2013). In their now classic definition of political public relations, Strömbäck and Kioussis (2011b, p. 8) defined political public relations as

the management process by which an organization or individual actor for political purposes, through purposeful communication and action, seeks to influence and to establish, build, and maintain beneficial relationships and reputations with its key publics to help support its mission and achieve its goals (for a slightly updated definition, see Chapter 1).

This definition mirrors lexicon and concepts in the general definition of public relations, but acknowledges the backdrop of persuasion and the desire of political actors to move their target publics toward specific behaviors.

Digital political public relations, as a strategic approach within the field, allows the political actor the opportunity to truly connect with citizens (Bimber & Davis, 2003; Dozier, Shen, Sweetser, Barker, 2016). As communication channels evolved and digital tools emerged, the growth of *digital political public relations* presented more efficient and even tailored opportunities for the political system and its players to connect with the public. Lee and Xu (2018) surmised that given the breadth of research pointing to the connection between social media activities and electoral

outcome, political public relations practitioners integrate digital tools as key components of an overall strategy. This evolution brings digital political public relations far from its beginnings where campaign strategists claimed to avoid digital interactivity with constituents (Karlsson, Clerwall, & Buskqvist, 2013; Stromer-Galley, 2000) and were even accused of faking interactivity (Rosenstiel & Mitchell, 2012; Stromer-Galley & Baker, 2006).

From Euphoria to Ubiquitous

Though recent data from the Pew Research Project has suggested that a declining majority of Americans say that digital communication has improved society (Smith & Olmstead, 2018), historically, research shows that adults tend to view such tools positively. Digital spaces initially allowed the public a greater field for information gathering, and quickly became a social tool to enable political discourse. Among those who asserted that the internet has been good for society, a majority of respondents in a Pew poll based their opinion on the speed and accessibility of information facilitated through the internet (Smith & Olmstead, 2018).

Today, digital spaces represent a variety of options for the public with a large range of interactivity from solely surveillance to engaged conversation. Public relations activities and tactics now can exist within every level of this engagement, ranging from mass communication internet publishing of information about an issue, campaign, or candidate, all the way to directly engaging the public through interactive features such as asynchronous responses to social media comments or synchronous events like “Facebook Live” broadcasts. In between these obvious examples of digital public relations comes the less obvious tactics as well, such as influencer engagement or empowerment of the community to create a groundswell.

The development of digital political public relations depended on the adoption of digital tools in general, from early adopters to a now ubiquitous presence of internet-connected computers, smart phones, tablets, and other devices. With technology services so prevalent and accessible, Pew reported that one-in-five Americans are “smartphone only” inside the home, meaning they do not subscribe to traditional broadband service in the home (Smith & Olmstead, 2018). Even developing nations are filled with little devices connecting the user to the greater world around him or her.

This chapter will discuss the use and impact of digital political public relations in the context of campaigns and candidates, the voting public, government, and activists. These separate, and often overlapping lenses, through which tools are deployed and experienced provide a general taxonomy for discussing the growth and impact of the digital political public relations field internationally.

Campaign and Candidate Use and Impact

History of Adoption

In general, the earliest reference to online activities in a public relations context occurred in a 1975 article in *Public Relations Review* that discussed the term “website” (Verčič, Verčič, & Sriramesh, 2015). Following the trends of digital adoption by society, focused efforts in scholarship did not occur until the mid-1990s (Verčič, Verčič, & Sriramesh, 2015). Web-based tools initially became a repeater for campaign messaging and information, where Tedesco (2004) noted that early campaign websites were little more than online brochures using the channel in a one-way broadcast-only model. By the late 1990s and into the early 2000s, campaigns began to experiment with digital political public relations tools by incorporating targeted messages, fundraising opportunities, and more interactive strategies (Tedesco, 2004; Trammell, Williams, Postelnicu, & Landreville, 2006; Zhang, Johnson, Seltzer, & Bichard, 2009).

An online presence for a candidate or campaign represented unique content control and the ability to usurp the traditional gatekeeping process (Lee & Xu, 2018). Not only did personal digital spaces free candidates from having to vie against their opponent for airtime, they also avoided competing with the other news of the day unrelated to the campaign. Digital spaces offered limitless time and space constraints, meaning campaigns could upload as much content as desired in even longer formats. Soon, these benefits led to increased ways to keep top-of-mind with external publics like media and voters, where a constant flow of new content could be pushed to users and draw attention to digital presence.

While mainstream media marveled at the novel opportunities available through digital tools, some scholars expressed great skepticism. In 1997, after the so-called “internet election,” Margolis, Resnick, and Tu (1997) asserted that though the internet had the potential to change the nature of American electoral politics, they doubted it would. These scholars suggested internet tools might reduce organizational costs for campaigns as participatory democracy spread through digital avenues, but would reinforce the existing structure of the political system in America rather than change it (Margolis, Resnick, & Tu, 1997). History has since proven their error. Presumably, their view of politicking was colored by the television era, which appeared to be a much more personal view than previously possible on such a wide scale, literally beaming candidates with personalities into homes nightly. Jackson and Lilleker (2011) submitted that digital media added such a dimension to the personalization previously offered by television and a chance to speak directly (without traditional media filtering content) to voters that it changed the paradigm. Towner and Dulio (2011) reinforced this idea that social media actually changed information flow.

Though 2008 is thought of as a turning point in the U.S. for digital political public relations for campaigns, the first-ever U.S. campaign website launched in 1992 by the Clinton campaign. During this period, a fringe candidate held a press conference online, even though such technology was found in less than 5% of American homes at that time. In that same election cycle, political discourse occurred online within the forum Usenet, and there was even information online about how to register to vote. One candidate set up a toll-free 800-number to take donations, which was considered an innovation in fundraising.

In between the 1992 and 1996 election in the U.S., Americans integrated digital tools much more in their daily lives, home, and work. The development of new, user-friendly web browsers and in-home internet connection services such as AOL and Prodigy enabled that accelerated adoption. An artifact is evidenced by the Library of Congress in moving previously microfilmed presidential papers to digitized online versions. Between 1998 and 2005 the Library digitized several presidential papers from Washington, Madison, and Lincoln as an extension of the 1957 legislation directing the Library to arrange, index, and share presidential papers to libraries across the country. The Library continued digitizing and sharing these documents, which they dub a first draft of history.

In 1993, the Clinton administration became the first to publish traditional information subsidies online, such as press releases, the president's travel schedule, speeches, etc. By the 1996 U.S. election, all serious U.S. presidential candidates published websites as a means to increase viability and magnify the dissemination of their messages (Williams, Trammell, Postelnicu, Landreville, & Martin, 2005). This leap in integration into campaigns and adoption now occurs within each U.S. election cycle. In the U.S., the 2000 election is known as the internet election (even though it had been used in the two previous elections), the blogging election in 2004, the YouTube election in 2008, the Twitter election in 2012, and the Facebook election in 2016 (even though Facebook was founded in 2004).

Some campaigns experimented more than others with digital political public relations. In the 2000 election cycle, McCain was the first candidate to begin online fundraising, an advancement from the toll-free innovation eight years prior. The Dean campaign during the 2004 primary allowed supporters to publish their own blogs on a special campaign-hosted blog site. Campaigns began to respond in real-time to debates via the campaign blog, and would later live tweet debates (Trammell, 2006). In 2012, one could donate to a campaign from Twitter, contributing to the rebranding of campaign donations from large-scale donations to smaller amounts donated from a larger pool of people. Campaigns began to release and archive campaign ads online and eventually created internet-only ads. Super PACs in the United States also experimented with this approach,

trying to benefit from increasingly popular social networking sites and shape digital political discourse (Sweetser, English, & Fernandes, 2015). Though Margolis, Resnick, and Tu (1997) characterized digital political public relations tools as cost-effective for the organization (e.g., the campaign) in the early days of integration, a firm that tracks and forecasts campaign spending estimated a 789% increase in digital ad spending from the 2012 to 2016 election (Miller, 2017).

The U.K. experienced their first internet election in 1997, but Ward and Gibson (1998) noted the rapid integration into campaigning. For instance, the main candidates participated in online question-and-answer sessions, a number of MPs were accessible via email, and the parties broadcast their messages on their websites. In France, politicians appeared to adopt Twitter more quickly than the general population (Frame & Brochette, 2015), and to exhibit more sophisticated and diverse use of the medium than some contemporary U.S. campaign examples which simply use Twitter for promotion.

Uses and Effects

Digital political public relations, though unique in its ability to target specific publics/voters and mine data from users to enhance the experience, consistently draws from best practices in traditional public relations. Internationally, campaign use of digital political public relations varies. In Sweden, campaign communication via digital channels during the 2010 election increased just prior to the election in such a way that lent itself more to political marketing than digital political public relations (Karlsson, Clerwall, & Buskqvist, 2013). In France, Frame and Brochette (2015) noted politicians used Twitter for both traditional surveillance public relations functions in environmental scanning as well as impression management and reputation uses. Specifically, French politicians used social media to interact with key audiences such as journalists and voters.

As a means to communicate differences from the opposition, candidates and campaigns communicate policy statements and sometimes attack the opponent. Analyzing blog posts from the two main candidates in the 2004 U.S. election, Trammell (2006) found that candidates mentioned the opponent in more than half of their own blog posts, with nearly all of these mentions being attacks. More than a decade later, Lee and Xu (2018) found that half of the tweets from the two main candidates in the 2016 U.S. election contained attacks, and that content strategy was effective in garnering user engagement in retweets and favorites on Twitter. The most common tweet topic for each candidate was in fact not discussion of a campaign issue, but an attack on the opponent (Lee & Xu, 2018). These attacks proved to be significant predictors for garnering likes, retweets, and other interactions for both candidates (Lee & Xu, 2018). As such, it appears that freedom of space and time constraints in

digital political public relations lends itself toward an increase in negative campaigning. While some scholars suggest that such negative campaigning might backfire, Trammell (2006) submitted that the target audience for digital political public relations content is often a supporter looking for ammunition to support her stance. To some degree, Lee and Xu (2018) suggested this stance continues on Twitter when they noted the viral nature of users sharing candidate tweets in 2016.

Platforms such as Twitter, which limit the length of messages, appear to be less of a means to spur political discourse and more of a publicity tool. Adams and McCorkindale (2013) found that candidates in the 2012 election used Twitter most frequently to promote events and or other online content (e.g., websites, photos, visits, encourage return visits). Their analysis found less than a handful of tweets written by the candidates themselves, suggesting a low level of transparency. Fountaine (2017) argued that digital political public relations tools, such as Twitter, can extend the audience for campaign tactics that have traditionally been one-on-one oriented. A candidate can promote one-on-one interactions such as door-to-door canvassing or exchanges at a coffee shop across digital channels, turning the one-on-one experience into a shared event. In this way, Fountaine (2017) suggested that digital tools can create efficient and meaningful interactions for the candidate.

In the 2016 election cycle, Trump diverted from the Twitter campaign managed by staff, and primarily authored his own tweets. In the 2014 election in New Zealand, Fountaine (2017) analyzed tweets from opposing female candidates and found the digital tool was mostly used for impression management purposes. Building off the work of Goffman (1959), the use of a likeability framing tactic provides the experience of a glance behind the curtain, giving voters an impression of what the candidate is really like (though still constructed for public consumption).

The Publics' Use and Impact

In previous eras, one could shut one's self off from debates about public affairs and political issues. This is increasingly difficult for today's voter, according to a Pew Research Center survey (Duggan & Smith, 2016), which calls encroachment of political messages and debate a regular fact of digital life. Even though most online users don't have strong feelings about the amount of political content they see in digital space, a growing number claim to be "worn out" by it (Duggan & Smith, 2016). For political public relations practitioners, this creates a familiar challenge of reaching and engaging a disinterested public.

Not dissimilar from other contexts where public relations compete in a large marketplace of ideas, the political arena – and especially digital political public relations – presents as many challenges as it does benefits. On one hand, practitioners are able to micro-target their audiences. This

means that messages can both be tailored for specific groups or focused in distribution to specific groups, offering a benefit. On the other hand, the sheer amount of information online and difficulty of grabbing attention (even from those who sign up for updates from you) can be great. In Sweden, for instance, scholars suggested analog and traditional approaches dwarfed digital tools (Karlsson, Clerwall, & Buskqvist, 2013).

Digital political public relations practitioners must balance their knowledge of what works in traditional messaging and breaking through the noise, and determine the best way forward in digital platforms. Even a task as seemingly small and benign as composing the subject line for an email can have a great impact on whether the email is opened. In these cases, research offers practitioners the best opportunity to crack the code on what works. Simple A/B testing of messages and message delivery options is inexpensive and can be used to quickly make determinations on which subject line of an email, Facebook teaser to a website link, or type of multimedia receives the desired impact.

The key, then, to quality digital political public relations is quite similar to the key in the more generalized practice in the field. Practitioners can employ environmental scanning and other formative research techniques to optimize effort for effect. Practitioners must identify their audiences and truly understand both what they know and need to know, assess the best way to break through, and find the best vehicle to deliver the message. Setting specific objectives for communication, and measuring their movement toward those objectives will help practitioners chart whether the tactics employed were effective. This process takes the entire 4-step public relations campaign approach into account by making use of data (often more readily available than in other parts of public relations work) to inform both strategy and tactics. Using formative and summative evaluation will ensure practitioners approaches are informed by an understanding of the situation, and summative research would then attend to the actual impact of those tactics.

Political Ideology and Party Identification

In traditional political communication research, political party identification and ideology have been noted predictors toward certain attitudes and behaviors (Jost, Kruglanski, Glaser, & Sulloway, 2003; Rudolph & Evans, 2005). Research has shown that we not only seek out information that reinforces our political bent, but also scrutinize information we consider biased against our beliefs (Cacciatore, Meng, Boyd, & Reber, 2016; Taber & Lodge, 2006). Digital media and the insularity of some social networks make this self-selecting and self-limiting exposure process even easier, by filtering out opposing views.

Sweetser (2014, 2015) first examined personality dimensions as they related to political ideology, and later connected work on personality, ideology, and

organization–public relationship (Sweetser, 2017). Sha (2017) noted that more often scholars study the relationship perceived between a voter and his own party, but in every election, there is a winner and a loser. Looking at one's relationship with the opposing political party provides broader significance for society since all voters are then governed by the winner. To that point, Sweetser and Browning (2017) observed that just as voters have a relationship with their own party, so too do they have a relationship with the opposing party.

Political Participation Redefined

The definition of the activities considered to be political participation evolved over generations (Himelboim, Lariscy, Tinkham, & Sweetser, 2012), to the point where some now consider engaging online with a politician, searching for a campaign's issue platform online, or even retweeting a campaign tweet as political participation (Bucy, 2005; Bucy, D'Angelo, & Newhagen, 1999; Bucy & Gregson, 2001). Opinion about these acts, once considered shallow when compared to door-to-door canvassing or engaging in a face-to-face debate about a political issue, has evolved along with the increased abilities of surveillance acts mixed with the opportunities to actually engage others in political discourse (Dozier, Shen, Sweetser, & Barker, 2016). Recent examples of online social movements include #BringBackOurGirls, #LoveWins, #MeToo, #BlackLivesMatter, and #TakeaKnee, among others. In these cases, hashtag activism as it is called allows a geographically dispersed group of people to join forces digitally. They can then engage in everything from discussing the issue to formulating a plan for resistance or action.

Looking at online and politically interested citizens, U.S. research suggests that they tend to be older, wealthier, and more liberal (Dozier, Shen, Sweetser, & Barker, 2016). When it comes to what they gain from digital surveillance, it appears they obtain less incidental information, which suggests an echo chamber effect (Dozier, Shen, Sweetser, & Barker, 2016).

From the European perspective, a survey of citizens in 16 European Union states found evidence of an echo chamber in the E.U. as well (Vesnic-Alujevic, 2012). There, politically engaged citizens tended to be better educated and reported higher political interest (Vesnic-Alujevic, 2012). In Italy, citizens reported engaging with their local municipalities via Facebook because they wanted to get more information about government initiatives and increase their sense of political participation while becoming part of the conversation (Lovari, & Parisi, 2015). Female users served more as hubs than their male counterparts due to their sharing frequency (Lovari & Parisi, 2015). Lovari and Parisi (2015) created a taxonomy for classifying users of government sites, describing roles such as likers, mono-interaction users, multi-interaction users, and full interaction users.

Public as the Media

The most discussed aspect of digital political discourse is the democratization of content, and the ability of anyone with an internet connection to become a publisher. While exaggerated early on, democratization of content appears to have grown into reality. Today, an everyday user can quickly step into 15 minutes of fame through a crafty tweet or Instagram post. The term *citizen journalism* arose from the phenomenon where everyday citizens began using their personal digital technology to “report” on what is happening in the world and in their communities. The acceptance of citizen-generated content as journalism has grown to the extent that some media organizations credentialed citizen journalists alongside their own journalists (Sweetser, 2007), and CNN even created a feature called iReport to showcase curated citizen journalism products as part of the news ecosystem. Trained traditional journalists, who still conduct interviews with sources, also quote social media posts taking on a new form of intermedia agenda setting (Lee & Xu, 2018).

From a political public relations perspective, these changes in the media industry challenge practitioners. In digital spaces, perhaps more than any other context, practitioners must consider their audience. Will engagement with nontraditional publishers such as an influencer or citizen journalist be a better avenue or more direct route for a message? Can the connectedness of social media create opportunities for traditional journalists to usurp official channels and information subsidies? The questions abound with the graying of lines once starkly drawn around the definition of journalism.

Government’s Use and Impact

Digital endeavors in political public relations are not limited to campaigns and candidates or organizations promoting issues. Government itself has been as a key user of digital political public relations, notably given the increase in transparency and efficiency offered through online channels. Chadwick (2006, p. 179) elaborated by suggesting that e-government initiatives:

if implemented properly, can improve current government services, increase accountability, result in more accurate and efficient delivery of services, reduce administrative costs and time spent on repetitive tasks for government employees, facilitate greater transparency in the administration of government, and allow greater access to services due to around the clock availability of the internet.

Europe was a noted early leader in so-called e-government, however countries around the world from the United States to war-torn and fragile nations such as Afghanistan now employ a number of digital initiatives. It is

now apparent that government can potentially use digital tools much like any other user (e.g., broadcast messages, interact, surveillance) or move government services into digital spaces. Hong (2013), in turn, shows empirical incentive for e-government by finding support for a positive relationship between citizen experience with e-government and that citizen's trust in government. As such, the once utopic depictions of digital political public relations enhancing the bond between government and citizens appear possible.

Local Government Serving Citizens

It is not uncommon now for cities to have apps where users can report potholes, request public records, or even pay taxes or a speeding ticket. Even with such programs, Graham and Avery (2013) suggest that digital tools are underutilized by local governments. They estimate an only 70% overall use rate based on U.S. survey results of local municipalities (Graham & Avery, 2013). Looking beyond the use/don't use data, the extent of local use was scant, with Facebook and Twitter the tool most frequently used. With regard to websites, an analysis of sub-Saharan African Police Service sites found the web presence of law enforcement could be greatly improved through more two-way communication interactive features, such as allowing citizens to report crime activity (Madichie & Hinson, 2014).

Considering the promise of e-government in creating transparency, adoption of specific transparency laws across Latin America offered an ideal context to assess whether the presence of such laws might impact government websites. Searson and Johnson (2010), however, found no difference in interactivity offered through government websites based on transparency laws and posting of a transparency policy. While this may seem to suggest that governments are embracing transparency by hosting websites in the first place and that laws may not necessarily facilitate greater public access to information via government websites, it spotlights how few government websites (even when transparency laws are present) post transparency policies (Searson & Johnson, 2010).

Public Diplomacy

Public diplomacy, an extension of a government's political outreach to groups and people in another country via communication channels, is a form of political public relations. While some in the public diplomacy field do not see their work as public relations, Fitzpatrick, Fullerton, and Kendrick (2013) illustrated the connections between public diplomacy and political public relations. Given their findings, public diplomacy – and especially online communication efforts to inform and engage a foreign audience – is included within the context of political public

relations. Public diplomacy scholarship, however, is often presented in a wider range of disciplines than political public relations (e.g., marketing, political science, international relations).

Cull (2013, p. 125) enumerated characteristics for digital public diplomacy, asserting the importance of relationship-building, dependence on listening functions that enable two-way communication, and the necessity for a horizontal structure to networks and conversations. Zhong and Lu (2013) argued that in such an interconnected world as we live today, governments recognize the importance of using digital communication in their public diplomacy efforts overseas. Seo and Kinsey (2013) classified Korean perspectives for users of digital political diplomacy efforts from the U.S., and found users to be outcome based, sincerity based, and access based. For governments reaching out to diverse publics, such as those across China, digital communication allows an embassy an opportunity to connect with elite influencers and engage in discourse (Zhong & Lu, 2013).

Innovations in digital public diplomacy exist, as in the case of the Apps4Africa project hosted by the U.S. The digital outreach effort allowed the United States and private industry to join forces and solicit contest submissions from East African citizens focused on how technology could solve regional problems and improve life (Milam & Avery, 2012). This extremely targeted tactic was deemed a success, and might serve as a model for other digital public diplomacy efforts (Milam & Avery, 2012).

Himmelboim, Golan, Moon, and Suto (2014) argued that existing scholarship up to that time had only focused on what organizations were doing as a part of their digital political public relations strategy, and had ignored the third-party actors presumably influential due to the social networking capabilities of these digital channels. In their study, they looked at external voices discussing and connecting with the U.S. State Department as a part of the U.S. government's public diplomacy work. The network cluster analysis found journalists to be influential mediators echoing and connecting the U.S. State Department message; third-party informal actors were the most influential nodes in the Middle East and North Africa, and formal mediators most influential throughout the rest of the world (Himmelboim, Golan, Moon, & Suto, 2014). These findings suggest that in social media spaces, such as Twitter, traditional journalism sources take a back-seat to other external voices, such as NGOs. For digital political public relations practitioners, such findings then shift the strategic engagement focus in social networks away from traditional sources (like media) and more toward these third-party actors, as appropriate. Zaharna and Uysal (2016) provided a case study in Turkey where diverse online activists formed an alliance together online targeting a shared adversary.

Looking at embassies in Central-Eastern European and Western nations, Dodd and Collins (2017) found both one-way communication in broadcasting messages and two-way communication through engagement to be important strategies in public diplomacy efforts online.

Use for Activism

Activists may find online tools especially helpful in promoting their causes, as digital tools allow them to disseminate their ideas, engage in discourse with others, and make connections not otherwise practical or possible. Saffer, Taylor, and Yang (2013, p. 3) called on the work of Burke (1969) in suggesting that political activism “is a natural part of a democracy because it brings people and ideas together in ‘the wrangle of the marketplace’ (Burke, 1969, p. 23).”

In most cases, one thinks of activist as the individuals promoting ideas. For instance, Smith and McDonald (2010) found that bloggers were able to play a role in challenging traditional news coverage and impact public opinion. These scholars suggested that individuals online truly gained ground in having their voices heard, moving from the margins to actively counter mainstream media (Smith & McDonald, 2010).

The lesser considered, but arguably more powerful manifestation of digital activism, goes beyond the individual and happens at the organizational level. Organizations made up of these activists can create a focus of resources aimed at addressing issues. When joining with other, like-minded organizations, the impact can be exponential (Saffer, Taylor, & Yang, 2013). Specifically, digital tools are well-suited to serve in an organization’s strategy for political activism (Saffer, Taylor, & Yang, 2013).

In a classic activist sense, the Syrian Electronic Army describes itself as an independent hacking group, not connected to the government of Syria. Even their self-description on their Twitter profile portrays the group as youths responding to the call of duty to protect Syria against cyber-attacks. However, Al-Rawi (2014) asserted that the Syrian government uses the activist group as a political public relations tool. This is an example of how activist groups can support organizations, even when not initially created by the organization.

Petitions

While many think of activism from the perspective of the activist public standing up against an organization or government, activism can also be enabled by the government. That is, government can empower the public and give a voice to activists (Wright, 2012), representing an open systems approach (Broom, 1986) and enabling the potential for two-way communication (Dozier, Grunig, & Grunig, 1995; Grunig & Hunt, 1984). When doing so, government adopts what was commonly called e-democracy in the early e-government literature. Graham and Avery (2013) contend that a critical aspect of e-government lies in e-democracy, as the latter enables government to interact directly with its citizens.

As a component of the Open Government Initiative, the U.S. government launched an online petition service in 2011 (<https://petitions.whitehouse.gov>). Certainly, online petitions were not new at this point, as the two popular sites

MoveOn.org and Change.org were established in the U.S. in 1998 and 2007, respectively. Indeed, government-enabled online petitions had already been available in Australia (www.aph.gov.au/petitions) and Great Britain since 2006 (<https://petition.parliament.uk>), and Germany since 2005 (<https://epetitionen.bundestag.de>), among other nations (see Wright, 2012). ABC News in Australia covered its government online petitions, framing the digital political public relations tool as a tactic to create transparency for government and inspire participation among the people (Wynne, 2016). That said, the article also noted that petitions can seemingly go into a so-called “black hole” and receive no feedback from the government, and that they often focus on trivial requests (Wynne, 2016). Wright (2012) called for greater academic analysis of the U.K.’s petition system, heralding it as a “highly successful democratic innovation” (p. 453), and predicting that the U.K.’s perceived success would result in more nations employing this digital political public relations tactic.

The U.S. “We the People” online petition service was also framed as creating a more transparent government where issues could rise from the people to attract attention at the highest levels of government (if the petition received 100,000 or more signatures). A Pew Research Center (Hitlin, 2016) content analysis of five years of “We the People” petitions and White House responses revealed a broad list of concerns regarding the health care system, disease and health-related topics, issues concerning veterans and the military, immigration, animal rights, and requests regarding criminal cases. From the 4,799 publicly available petitions analyzed by Pew, the report noted only four instances where a petition resulted in legislation or impacted the opinion/actions of the President.

From a political public relations perspective, the creation of the “We the People” and other government online petition sites represent a gesture if not a step toward symmetrical communication (Dozier, Grunig, & Grunig, 1995; Grunig & Hunt, 1984), especially considering that some U.S. and U.K. petitions received official government responses and resulted in action (Hitlin, 2016). According to the Pew analysis, responses to popular U.S. petitions were penned by prominent government officials for the first three years of the petition program; responses from 2015 on became managed by an apparent online community manager, shortening the response waiting time for petition writers by more than 100 days on average (Hitlin, 2016). Similarly, the U.K.’s online petition website strategically promotes the symmetrical communication success on the top of their petition website, where it posts the number of petitions that received a response from the government and number of those debated in the House of Commons. This tactic-within-a-tactic further frames the petition program to citizens as making a difference and provides evidence of a feedback loop (Broom, 1986).

These approaches to democracy as an extension of e-government in digital political public relations appear to extend the industry-best practices of creating excellence by enabling two-way symmetrical communication

(Dozier, Grunig, & Grunig, 1995; Grunig & Hunt, 1984), and operating at times as an open system (Broom, 1986). As Wright (2012) illustrated through an interview with a senior U.K. official, the online petitions are aimed at providing an easy avenue for empowerment of citizens and in turn benefiting the government by revealing public sentiment, areas of concern to the people, and levels of that concern (p. 456). In this sense, digital tools can help dissipate the sometimes-adversarial view public relations practitioners have of activists (Grunig, 1992). To this point, Bochel and Bochel (2016) examined the potential of the U.K.'s use of online petitions, concluding that while the government does face some risk, the value of enabling political participation and educating voters about democracy and decision-making outweigh the threat. Democracies, in particular, may benefit from the groundswell approach of this type of listening campaign, if well-designed and managed (Bochel & Bochel, 2016). Wright (2012) argued that management aspect is shared with the petition submitters, who appear to be most successful when pairing the petition with online discourse, social network promotion, and mainstream media coverage. A key in the success of all of the government-hosted petition websites is the open system approach (Wright, 2012), though sifting through the trivial petitions may be tedious. In sum, academic research suggests that online petitions are not meant to be efficient for the government, rather they are meant to be empowering to the people.

Theory in Digital Political Public Relations

With a rich and growing level of scholarship focused on digital public relations, the use of theory in these studies still remains scant. Among the theories most employed and ripe for further exploration are traditional public relations and mass communication theories, such as agenda-setting theory (to include agenda building, intermedia agenda setting, intercandiate agenda setting) and framing, as well as relationship theory.

One example of agenda building occurred during the U.S. 2016 election. Trump's publicity skills allowed him to better set the agenda of the media than his opponent Hillary Clinton, even though she had had much greater funding for her campaign (Allison, Rojanasakul, Harris & Sam, 2016; Lee & Xu, 2018). Trump was said to have set the agenda with a mere 140 characters via his personally run Twitter account (Lee & Xu, 2018). Though some question Trump's content and overall strategy, the tactic certainly worked if the goal was intermedia agenda setting (Lee & Xu, 2018; Sweetser, Golan, & Wanta, 2008) and even intercandiate agenda setting (Kioussis & Shields, 2008). The opportunities for agenda-setting type research in digital political public relations are the most obvious in terms of being useful for practitioners who want to better understand the media and the public's path toward political information.

Framing theory, similarly, operates in the same fashion for digital political public relations as it does for traditional public relations (Froehlich & Rüdiger, 2006; Hallahan, 1999). Early on, Bichard (2006) analyzed the frames of candidates on their blogs to examine how they shaped their own narrative through the campaign. Though the majority of framing research in political public relations is characterized as agenda building, looking from the perspective of how the candidates use framing in digital spaces presents a variety of opportunity for scholars to further develop our understanding of their strategic decisions.

Political organization–public relationship (POPR) research gained the most traction among digital political public relations scholars. Seltzer and Zhang’s (2011) establishment of POPR as a specific avenue of relationship research began momentum continued through work by others (Sweetser, 2015, 2017; Sweetser, English, & Fernandes, 2015; Sweetser & Tedesco, 2013). POPR offers the most promise, given the uniqueness of digital tools enabling real two-way relationships between organizations (be it the candidate, campaign, party, political organization) and its publics (be it voters, constituents, supporters, detractors). Recent research has begun to consider POPR between elected officials who then serve constituents who voted for the other candidate (Sweetser & Browning, 2017). This ability to turn relationship on its head provides vast opportunities for understanding the often-ignored realities faced by voters, elected officials, and political parties after an election. Aside from that, the extent to which presidential campaigns in the United States use social media for relationship cultivation has also been investigated, with the results suggesting that there are clear limits to the extent to which they use social media for true relationship cultivation (Svensson, Kiouisis, & Strömbäck, 2015). This, then, suggests that political campaigns still do not use the full potential of digital political public relations when it comes to relationship cultivation.

Future Avenues for Digital Political Public Relations Research

Given seismic changes in the digital political public relations landscape every election period, one can speculate about what future tools and applications scholars will find five or ten years from now. That said, with every election there have been great leaps and bounds with regard to both the sheer number of studies published but also the breadth of contexts in which scholars examine the field. Looking forward, there appear to be four distinct areas that emerge as worthy of further investigation.

Defining the Core of Political Public Relations

In the editor’s essay to accompany a special issue on political public relations in the *Journal of Public Relations Research*, Sha (2017) questioned the paradigm of the political public relations as a whole. Sha’s essay noted

that while the Strömbäck and Kiouisis (2011b) definition of political public relations was structured much like the more generalized definition of public relations (Broom & Sha, 2013), the former's focus was to support the political actor/organization's mission and goals whereas the latter is grounded in mutually beneficial relationships (Sha, 2017). This suggests that in this early phase of political public relations scholarship, the definition and focus has been more tactical, and less strategic. Similarly, early digital scholarship looked more at specific tactics and tended to be more descriptive than strategic. This tactics-only, snapshot-in-time approach is not the core of what public relations offers organizations or its publics. Taken together, scholars should use this warning from Sha (2017) as a call for examining (digital) political public relations through a strategic lens as well as considering the overall good (or damage) occurred to society. Moving past descriptive work, scholars should look deep to the core of public relations which focuses on the two-way exchange and interdependence of an organization with its publics. Future scholars should not just describe how political actors are using a new digital tool to communicate and how it might differ from previous technology, but instead examine the impact of strategy and include an ethical component in that analysis.

As noted by Saffer, Taylor, and Yang (2013, p. 6), "social capital becomes *political capital*" (emphasis added). These scholars were writing in the context of organizations binding together to create a unified political coalition made up of their combined publics in order to pursue a political agenda. In digital spaces, this occurs at a much easier rate than in other contexts, thanks to the networked capabilities inherent in online tools. Hazleton and Kennan (2000) believed such social capital could allow organizations to transfer the power of their relationships with their publics into movement toward the organization's goals. This would then put pressure on the organization to remain true to the ethical component of political public relations. If indeed social capital (the joined networks of multiple organizations' publics) does become political capital, then political actors must pause to ensure their end goals and mission are good for society and not just the good of their bottom line. With the exchange of social capital into political capital, political public relations practitioners should ensure they are truly serving the public good rather than just the organization's good.

Focusing on the Fourth Estate

Of all the institutions public relations relies upon, the fourth estate remains the most important. Even in a world of ad hoc content creators where an everyday untrained citizen can play the intermittent role of journalist, in a majority of cases, the citizen journalist remains an intermittent amateur. Though operating on an ever-changing media environment, traditional or mainstream media continue to serve an important role in the political ecosystem.

Since the 2016 U.S. presidential election, the concept of “fake news” and “alternate facts” have become part of everyday vernacular. While the majority of assaults on the reliability of sources and the quality of information fall on our counterparts in journalism, the public relations field is not immune. Considering the role of social media in the Cambridge Analytica scandal, where the firm used data mining during the election in an attempt to impact voters through strategic communication, political public relations scholars should enact a research program investigating the perception of low-quality sources and inaccurate information, as well as the impact so-called fake news might have on the public. Ethical political public relations activities can be negatively impacted by such nefarious forms of strategic communication, and corrupt practitioners may employ these methods in a reprehensible manner.

Widen Aperture to an International Lens

Today, most of digital political public relations scholarship is focused on the United States. That is, studies examine how tools or strategies play out in U.S. elections, with American politicians, by government in the United States, and American voters. This is not universally the case (see, for example, Agostino, 2013; Al-Rawi, 2014; Galvez-Rodriguez, Saez-Martin, Garcia-Tabuyo, & Caba-Perez, 2018; Karlsson, Clerwall, & Buskqvist, 2013; Lovari & Parisi, 2015; Madichie & Hinson, 2014; Zaharna & Uysal, 2016); however, most studies that spotlight digital political public relations outside of the U.S. are mostly public diplomacy studies. There appears to be a disconnect based on the ratio of non-U.S. digital political public relations innovations and uses from across the globe with the amount of scholarship within the field that focuses on them (Valentini, 2013). Given the leadership in Europe through e-democracy initiatives, and the opportunities that exist in developing nations which boast high adoption rates for personal technology, scholars should push beyond the boundaries of the U.S.-centric work and look to other examples worldwide.

Building on this, special attention should be paid to the use of digital tools in totalitarian governments. Do totalitarian governments inhibit democracy by turning social capital into social credit, or otherwise subvert their citizens' use of digital tools? Conversely, does the anonymity associated with digital technology allow for greater activism in totalitarian systems? In our ever-connected world, it will become more important for scholars to examine how potentially democratizing tools are being used to empower or challenge citizens living under highly regulated governments.

Theory as the Tie That Binds Generations of Scholarship

Finally, and perhaps most importantly, the future direction of digital political public relations is toward theory-driven work. A number of the

studies and articles that informed this chapter incorporated theory of course, and even better, some tested theory. That said, an alarming trend earlier pointed out by Sallot, Lyon, Acosta-Alzuru, and Jones (2003) that public relations scholarship lacks a theoretical base continues today. Theory is the device that allows us to connect what we know about one context to a totally different content. Theory allows us to chart changes by using the same ruler as measurement.

Scholars must do more to look at existing theory – such as agenda-setting, relationship management, dialogic theory, uses and gratifications – and, when appropriate, suggest new paradigms. Scholars must move past merely descriptive work and non-empirical snapshots of the digital landscape at the moment. Theory will assist future scholars in making longer-term, trend comparisons on technology, uses, and impact.

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5 Political Public Relations and Relationship Management

Foundations and Challenges

Trent Seltzer

The relationships that exist between organizations and their publics have long held special significance for both public relations scholars and practitioners. From an academic perspective, scholars have argued that relationships should be the primary unit of analysis for the discipline (Ferguson, 1984); analyses of scholarship to date have noted the widespread popularity of such a relational perspective among public relations researchers (Ki & Shin, 2015). From a practitioner perspective, public relations has been defined as “the management function that establishes and maintains mutually beneficial relationships between organizations and the publics on whom its success or failure depends” (Broom & Sha, 2013, p. 2). The Public Relations Society of America (PRSA) defines *public relations* as “a strategic communication process that builds mutually beneficial relationships between organizations and their publics” (PRSA, 2012, para. 3); denoting that these relationships should be “mutually beneficial” for both parties in the relationship echoes one of the primary tenants of the relational perspective (Ledingham, 2003, 2006).

If relationships are at the heart of traditional public relations, then it logically follows that relationships would also be the focus of political public relations. Strömbäck and Kioussis (2011) stressed the importance of relationships in both political communication and public relations stating,

both political communication and public relations are about *relationships* [emphasis added] formed through communication, and in both cases, the relationships between various actors are interdependent and shaped within the boundaries set by structural and semistructural factors such as laws and constitutions, cultural norms and values, and the overall media and political systems.

(p. 4)

Both the importance and challenges of managing relationships constrained by such boundaries should be obvious when one considers the myriad relationships that exist within the political environment, such as those between special interest groups and legislators, political parties and citizens, corporations and

activist groups, local government and communities, political campaigns and voters, and so on. Each of the groups¹ involved in these relationships seeks to engage the others to achieve political goals—whether that be passing legislation, creating a political environment favorable to advancing corporate initiatives, balancing the interests of community stakeholders, or gaining and retaining office. Given the need to work collaboratively and to seek compromise to achieve many political goals, the quality of the relationships among these political entities becomes a key outcome of political public relations practice.

The importance of relationship management in achieving these outcomes is evident in the definition of *political public relations*, outlined in the first chapter of this book:

Political public relations is the management process by which an actor for political purposes, through communication and action, seeks to influence and to *establish, build, and maintain beneficial relationships* [emphasis added] and reputations with key publics and stakeholders to help support its mission and achieve its goals.

(see also Strömbäck & Kioussis, 2011, p. 8)

Here, political public relations is positioned as a key mechanism for managing relationships among political groups. Thus, understanding the application of relationship management concepts and theory to the study and practice of political public relationships is essential. It is also noteworthy that relationships are distinguished from reputations, a distinction that becomes important when determining which communication and action strategies to employ in pursuit of these outcomes of political public relations practice.

In the previous edition of *Political Public Relations*, Ledingham (2011) examined relationship management within political contexts. His overview of the relational perspective explicated relationship management theory and discussed its potential within political settings, as well as highlighted the similarities and differences between relationship management and political public relations. Building on Ledingham (2011), this chapter will review the research examining the relationships among political actors, publics, and organizations as well as models of these political organization–public relationships (POPR). This is followed by a discussion of environmental factors that present challenges to the study and practice of relationship management within political contexts, namely the constraints presented by increased affective polarization, social sorting, and political media. The chapter ends with a call to continue the exploration of relationship management within political contexts.

The Relational Perspective

The roots of the relational perspective within public relations scholarship begin with Ferguson (1984) who first suggested that the primary unit of

analysis in public relations research should be the relationships that exist between organizations and their publics. Early work in this vein sought to define what constituted a *relationship* within a public relations context. Broom, Casey and Ritchey (1997) concluded that relationships form between entities when they

have perceptions and expectations of each other, when one or both parties need resources from the other, when one or both parties perceive mutual threats from an uncertain environment, and when there is either a legal or voluntary necessity to associate Relationships consist of patterns of linkages through which the parties in the relationship pursue and service their interdependent needs.

(p. 95)

Scholars continued to produce relationship-centered theoretical and empirical work, giving rise to the relational perspective. This perspective has been important not only in defining public relations as an academic discipline, but also as an approach that could inform real-world public relations practice. Ledingham and Bruning (2000) stressed the benefits adopting such a perspective could have:

the relationship paradigm also provides a framework in which to explore the linkage between public relations objectives and organizational goals, for constructing platforms for strategic planning and tactical implementation, and approaching programmatic evaluation in ways understood and appreciated by the ruling management group.

(p. xiii)

Relationship Management Theory

Ledingham (2003) outlined the tenants of a relational perspective, a perspective that views an organization's public relations function as crucial in balancing the needs and concerns of that organization with the interests of publics that are critical to its success. Ledingham listed four key developments that led to the rise of the relational perspective:

- 1 Ferguson (1984) championing "relationships" as the focus of public relations scholarship,
- 2 the growing perspective among academics and practitioners that viewed public relations as a critical organizational management function and not simply a tactical communication function responsible for generating publicity,
- 3 the identification of dimensions of organization–public relationships as well as the proposal of different means for measuring these dimensions, and
- 4 the development of models of organization–public relationships.

In addition, Ledingham (2003) articulated several axioms regarding these relationships. Among Ledingham's key observations were (a) identifying relationship attributes, including that relationships evolve over time, are goal-oriented, and involve exchanges between relational partners that form a relational history; (b) a recognition that antecedents, such as needs, prompt groups to form relationships with others and that these relationships have consequences; and (c) a recognition that while communication among relational partners is necessary for sustaining relationships, the actions of these groups must reinforce what is communicated.

Based on these axioms, Ledingham's (2003) relationship management theory stated that "effectively managing organization–public relationships around common interests and shared goals, over time, results in mutual understanding and benefit for interacting organizations and publics" (p. 190). Later, Ledingham (2006) convincingly argued that relationship management theory met the requirements for a "good" theory, could serve as a general theory of public relations, and should form the basis of a relational perspective that could inform future public relations research, training, and practice.

Relationship Management, Political Marketing, and Political Public Relations

There are those who suggest that political communication and political marketing would also benefit from the adoption of relationship management concepts (Bannon, 2005; Strömbäck, Mitrook, & Kiousis, 2010). A relationship management approach to political communication and political public relations would be more likely to produce stronger, more stable, long-term relationships that result in favorable perceptions, attitudes, and behaviors; increase focus on issues and policy deliberation in lieu of using negative tactics that exacerbate polarization; help political groups with different perspectives and positions better understand each other; and potentially improve the ability of government to meet the needs of its citizen stakeholders (Bannon, 2005; Ledingham, 2011; Strömbäck & Kiousis, 2011).

The definition of political public relations presented above would suggest that political public relations inherently operates from a long-term, relationship management perspective; however, in political contexts, public relations historically has been consigned to handling media relations and event management—predominantly tactical practice areas that are short-term oriented and position public relations in a role similar to that which it occupies in a traditional marketing context (Lilleker & Jackson, 2011). Furthermore, Ledingham (2011) identified several ways in which political public relations differs from true relationship management as conceptualized in the mainstream literature. While relationship management focuses on shared interests and goals, adopts a long-term orientation, is collaborative, and seeks mutually

beneficial outcomes, political public relations tends to be market-oriented, short-term in nature, seeks to accrue power rather than share it, and focuses on winning above all. Additionally, political public relations tends to focus on building and enhancing organizational reputation; relationship management focuses on relationship quality (Strömbäck & Kioussis, 2011).

This is unfortunate because absent a relational approach, political public relations is relegated to a marketing public relations role that fails to capitalize on the benefits of authentic relationship management. Market-oriented political entities typically seek to identify the needs of strategically important publics and then develop “products” to satisfy those needs (Strömbäck et al., 2010). Here, target publics include party members, the electorate, special interests, etc. that are treated like consumers in a traditional marketing context (Lilleker & Jackson, 2011). Meanwhile, the product comprises issue positions, policy initiatives, candidates, platforms, and so on (Strömbäck et al.). These products are purchased via an exchange, such as when a voter casts a ballot for a candidate or a donor contributes to a political party. Adoption of market-oriented strategies ultimately disadvantages organizations by focusing on individual, short-term transactions rather than nurturing long-term relationships (Bannon, 2005; Johansen, 2005).

Some scholars have suggested that relationship marketing is an effective approach to managing relationships in a political context. Relationship marketing facilitates “mutually satisfying exchanges and the building of customer relationships as central to generating loyalty and repeat business” (Bannon, 2005, p. 74). While purportedly supporting the goals of both entities in the relationship, relationship marketing’s focus on profit (Gönroos, 1994) paints a picture of an exchange-based relationship whereas the relationships produced via authentic relationship management can be communal in nature, with one group in the relationship producing benefit for the other without expectation of anything in return (Hon & Grunig, 1999).

Organization–Public Relationships

Central to the relational perspective is the concept of organization–public relationships (OPR). An OPR is “the state that exists between an organization and its key publics in which the actions of one can impact the social, economic or political well-being of the other” (Ledingham & Bruning, 1998, p. 62). To further explicate relationships, scholars have proposed dimensions comprising OPR as well as scales to measure those dimensions. The most widely used is the Hon and Grunig (1999) Relationship Management Scale that incorporates dimensions of trust, satisfaction, commitment, and control mutuality. Here, *trust* represents perceptions of whether the other group in the relationship is fair, exhibits integrity, demonstrates

dependability, and possesses the competence to follow through on promises. *Satisfaction* assesses to what degree relational partners feel that engaging in the relationship is a positive experience that produces benefit. *Commitment* gauges whether relational partners feel it is worth the investment of resources to maintain the relationship. *Control mutuality* represents perceptions that power is being shared equitably among relational partners—or at the very least, partners accept how power is distributed (Grunig & Huang, 2000; Hon & Grunig, 1999). Other scholars have proposed additional dimensions and scales for measuring OPR. Ledingham and Bruning (1998) developed a relationship scale comprising the dimensions of trust, openness, involvement, investment, and commitment. Later, they would develop a multi-dimensional scale that assessed OPR along three dimensions representing different types of relationships: community, professional, and personal (Bruning & Ledingham, 1999).

Recently, Sweetser and Kelleher (2016) developed a scale to measure an organization's communicative activities that contribute to OPR maintenance. This scale comprised two dimensions: (a) *communicated commitment*, which represents the degree to which the organization demonstrates their commitment to the relationship, and (b) *conversational voice*, which represents the degree to which organizational communication is perceived as engaging. It is worth noting that in all cases, these measures are simply assessing individuals' perceptions of OPR; the scales do not measure tangible OPR features that exist outside the perceptions of the relational partners (e.g., Grunig & Hung-Baesecke, 2015; Ki & Hon, 2007).

In addition to the development of tools for measuring relationship quality, type, and cultivation, several models of OPR have been proposed (Broom, Casey, & Ritchey, 1997, 2000; Grunig & Huang, 2000) that have stimulated significant OPR research (Huang & Zhang, 2015; Ki & Shin, 2015). Although the terminology varies from model to model, they tend to focus on four primary relational concepts: (1) *antecedents* leading to the formation of an OPR, (2) *cultivation strategies* employed to establish, manage, and nurture the OPR, (3) the *state* or *quality* of the OPR, and the (4) *outcomes* of OPR (see Figure 5.1). These outcomes include attitudes, behaviors, and a host of other variables that are specific to the context investigated in a study. Relationship management theory suggests that cultivation strategies that are symmetrical in nature are the most effective at developing positive OPR perceptions that lead to favorable outcomes. These symmetrical strategies are characterized by two-way communication exchanges between relational partners in which each partner considers the interests of the other and is willing to adapt to the other partner's needs (Grunig, 2006).

A number of symmetrical cultivation strategies have been suggested in the literature (Grunig & Huang, 2000; Hon & Grunig, 1999), including: (a) *access*—providing the public with access to internal decision makers and being responsive to requests for access, (b) *positivity*—making the relationship an

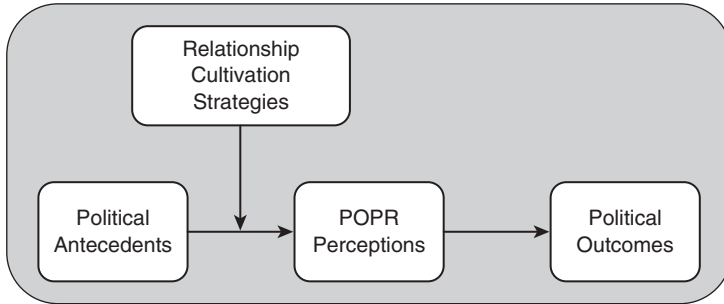


Figure 5.1 Conceptual model of political organization–public relationships

enjoyable experience for those involved by being positive, serving as a resource, and adding value, (c) *openness*—acting transparently and disclosing information that publics need to make informed decisions, (d) *assurances*—letting the other group in the relationship know that its concerns and interests are legitimate and then demonstrating this through action, (e) *networking*—relational partners should work to build relationships with common third-party groups, (f) *sharing tasks*—relational partners should engage in joint problem solving and pursue opportunities that provide mutual benefit. There are also several conflict resolution strategies that have been identified as symmetrical; these strategies include engaging in dialogue and joint decision making, cooperation, being constructive, and when all else fails, agreeing to disagree while leaving open the possibility for continued dialogue in the future.

Despite the effectiveness of symmetrical cultivation strategies in managing OPR, several scholars have proposed that not all relationships are the same in regard to the degree of involvement that relational partners exhibit; consequently, some organizations and publics may not require a relational approach. To address this point, scholars have posited a relational continuum that is anchored by low involvement—or *reputational*—relationships at one end and high involvement—or *experiential*—relationships at the other end (Grunig & Hung-Baesecke, 2015; Hutton, Goodman, Alexander, & Genest, 2001; Kioussis & Strömbäck, 2011). Here, reputational relationships are formed through superficial, indirect experience with an organization, such as hearing about the organization in the news. In contrast, experiential relationships are formed through meaningful, direct interaction with the organization. As a result, this continuum suggests that different levels of interaction are required to maintain different types of relationships. Experiential relationships should warrant a relational approach employing symmetrical cultivation strategies. Reputational relationships, on the other hand, should require either simple reputation-building approaches (e.g., publicity) or no action at all if, as theorized by Hallahan (2000), the publics involved

have little to no knowledge of the organization or if those publics perceive that their relationship with the organization is not particularly relevant or important.

Relationship Management Research in Political Contexts

Adopting a relational approach to the study of political public relations would allow for the identification of effective strategies for managing political OPRs that could potentially produce positive outcomes not only for the relational partners involved, but potentially for the greater political system. To that end, scholars have sought to apply the relational perspective to understanding the dynamics of relationship management within political contexts. What follows is an overview of political relationship management and politically situated OPR research published to date. It should be noted, that while the bulk of this research focuses on election campaigns in the United States, the findings should be applicable to other political contexts, especially in those political systems where a “permanent campaign” state exists that permeates the overall political environment.

Early Inquiries

Although references to political public relations professionals and their role in managing relationships between politicians and the electorate appeared as early as the 1950s (Kelley, 1956), little formal research on political relationship management was conducted until the late 2000s. At first, political relationship management research was sparse and scattershot, applying a relational perspective to the analysis of limited political contexts. For example, Wise (2007) applied a relationship management framework to the examination of lobbying in the United States. Key findings included that maintaining positive relationships with Congress and congressional staff was essential for lobbyists to effectively do their jobs. Managing the OPR between Congress and the interest groups that the lobbyists represented allowed the lobbyists to serve as boundary spanners. The key cultivation strategies employed by lobbyists in managing these relationships included facilitating access, sharing of tasks, and openness.

In an examination of the 2008 Obama campaign, Levenshus (2010) studied how the campaign used online tools to manage its grassroots efforts. Using a relationship management framework, Levenshus concluded that the success of the Obama campaign’s online efforts was the result of the campaign staff effectively building and maintaining mutually beneficial relationships with grassroots supporters. These relationship management efforts were implemented using several strategies, beginning with authenticity—Obama campaign managers viewed the relationships formed online as beneficial for both the campaign and its supporters. This led to the campaign implementing symmetrical cultivation strategies that empowered

supporters by providing the resources they needed to effectively contribute to the campaign. Other strategies included conducting formative and summative evaluation, as well as being open, willing to participate in dialogue with supporters, and willing to change because of that dialogue.

A Focus on POPR

Eventually, systematic investigations began examining OPR within political contexts by applying a relationship management perspective. Zhang and Seltzer (2010) sought to integrate OPR and relationship management concepts with existing models of civic and political engagement. They found that citizens' favorable perceptions of their relationship with their political party resulted in increased civic and political participation as well as increased confidence in government. Furthermore, engaging in symmetrical communication with a party had positive direct effects on citizens' perceptions of OPR with their party as well as indirect effects on civic and political participation via the citizen-party relationship.

Seltzer and Zhang (2011a) followed this study with an examination of the 2008 general election wherein they sought to develop and test a model of *political organization-public relationships* (POPR). They described these relationships as,

having politically relevant antecedent variables; as being mediated by cultivation strategies employed by political parties; as being measured along dimensions of control mutuality, trust, satisfaction, and commitment; and that the state of the POPR between citizens and political parties results in attitudinal and behavioral outcomes that have consequences for parties as well as the larger political system.

(Seltzer & Zhang, 2011a, p. 28)

Results indicated that higher levels of interpersonal trust and longer time spent in the relationship served as influential antecedents that increased positive perceptions of respondents' OPR with their political party. Again, increased engagement in symmetrical communication with a party contributed to more positive perceptions of POPR; in turn, more favorable POPR perceptions led to positive outcomes. POPR outcomes included increased favorable attitudes toward the party and an increased likelihood to engage in behaviors that would support the party (e.g., casting a ballot for the party's candidate). Seltzer and Zhang's primary conclusion was that a strategic orientation toward long-term POPR development would benefit political parties.

Next, Seltzer and Zhang (2011b) examined how partisan strategic communication regarding a specific issue (e.g., the 2009 efforts to reform the U.S. health care system) potentially influenced the POPR between voters and their political party, as well as how POPR perceptions influenced

publics' attitudes toward the issue. Seltzer and Zhang found that exposure to issue-specific partisan strategic communication influenced POPR perceptions, especially when that communication was viewed as symmetrical in nature. In turn, increasingly favorable POPR perceptions led to more positive attitudes toward the party, stronger party affiliation, and increased party-consistent attitudes toward health care reform. Interestingly, increased exposure to one's preferred party's strategic communication efforts also resulted in less favorable perceptions of the POPR with the opposition party.

Taking a different approach, Seltzer, Zhang, Kiambi, and Kim (2011) examined whether public relations practitioners could frame POPR attributes within media coverage via information subsidies. To that end, Seltzer et al. performed a content analysis of media coverage of the health care reform debate as well as information subsidies from a variety of sources. The researchers coded for the presence of substantive and affective attributes that described dimensions of the POPR between the public and the Democratic Party, the Republican Party, and the Obama Administration. The results indicated that POPR attributes for a variety of political actors were present in both media coverage and information subsidies, leading the authors to conclude that "there does appear to be a discussion of organization-public relationships woven into the fabric of strategic political communication and media coverage of political issues" (Seltzer et al., 2011, p. 10). Furthermore, the salience of these attributes appeared to be transferred from information subsidies to media coverage and back via a reciprocal relationship, suggesting an agenda-building effect. The authors concluded that in lieu of or in addition to short-term framing contests surrounding the issue of the day, political public relations practitioners should also concern themselves with framing the long-term relationship between the political actors they represent and those actors' strategic publics.

Seltzer, Zhang, Gearhart, and Conduff (2013) sought to incorporate reputation management into the POPR model to test the reputational-experiential relationship continuum proposed by Kiousis and Strömbäck (2011) to determine whether citizens' POPR with political parties were built via direct interaction with the parties or via indirect experience with the parties as facilitated by exposure to media coverage and interpersonal communication. The results suggested that exposure to symmetrical partisan communication predicted positive POPR; partisan strategic communication consistently exhibited the strongest direct effects on POPR as well as exhibiting direct and indirect effects via POPR on the parties' reputations. At the same time, indirect experience did not predict or was a weak predictor of POPR. These findings led the authors to conclude that partisan strategic communication perceived as symmetrical in nature was the key to building positive experiential and reputational relationships.

Broader Applications

Following these POPR-focused inquiries, a series of studies contributed an assortment of insights regarding political relationship management, although these studies did not follow a systematic line of inquiry. Valentini (2013) examined political public relationship and reputation management in the European Union, concluding that the political context of the EU hampered reputation and relationship management. Waymer (2013) argued that government public relations practitioners should allow some publics—particularly those that had been historically mistreated—the opportunity to distance themselves from an organization rather than be forced into an experiential relationship, especially when these publics were in an involuntary relationship, such as a local community's *de facto* relationship with their local government. Ki (2015) used a relationship management framework to draw parallels between public relations and public diplomacy. Several studies investigated factors that could enhance POPR perceptions, including trust (Kim, 2015), the use of relationship nurturing strategies by campaigns (Pressgrove & Kim, 2018), and exposure to political campaign social media (Painter, 2015).

Social Media & Political Relationships

As in the mainstream public relations literature, the use of social media for relationship management has also been of interest to political public relations scholars, with several studies focusing specifically on the use of social media to foster relationship building. Karlsson, Clerwall, and Buskqvist (2013) examined the 2012 Swedish national election to investigate the use of digital media tools in building OPRs between parties and voters. While digital tools enabled an ongoing exchange between parties and the public that was necessary to facilitate relational maintenance, parties seemed to use digital tools to spark dialogue with constituencies only during elections. Hong (2013) found support for a positive relationship between an individual's experience with government online tools and the level of public trust in government. Sweetser, English, and Fernandes (2015) examined how political groups used social media to manage relationships during the 2012 election. They found that increased engagement with political organizations via Twitter led to favorable POPR perceptions.

Svensson, Kiouisis, and Strömbäck (2015) made a particularly noteworthy addition to the study of political relationship management via an examination of the use of digital and social media in the 2012 presidential general election. They conducted a content analysis of Obama and Romney campaign volunteer emails, Facebook posts, and tweets posted between the end of the Republican primary and election day to gauge to what degree relationship cultivation strategies were integrated into these

digital campaign tools. Each message was coded for the presence of eight cultivation strategies, including collaboration, co-creation, openness, assurances, feedback, common interest, networking, and reward systems. Findings indicated that collaboration was used to a much greater degree (47% to 57% of messages) than other strategies, with common interest and rewards the second and third most used strategies for both campaigns (8% to 16% of messages); all other strategies were used in less than 6% of campaign messages. In contrast to Levenshus (2010), Svensson et al. (2015) concluded that the high use of collaboration in conjunction with common interest and reward strategies seemed to indicate that campaign digital and social media were not being used to cultivate relationships with supporters and lacked a true relationship management orientation. These findings echoed those from earlier studies of social media and relationship building in non-political contexts wherein social media tools—although designed to facilitate the necessary dialogue that forms the basis of authentic relationship management—were consistently underutilized by organizations for this purpose (e.g., Bortree & Seltzer, 2009; Rybalko & Seltzer, 2010).

Extending POPR

From 2014 to 2017, Sweetser and her colleagues made significant contributions to the study of POPR that extended earlier work by Seltzer and Zhang. Sweetser and Tedesco (2014) examined candidate–constituent relationships in the context of post-election calls for bi-partisanship. They found that such calls made by Obama following the 2012 election contributed to positive relationship perceptions among voters who saw Obama’s election night speech. Sweetser (2015) studied first-time voters to examine the influence of POPR on party affiliation. The findings demonstrated that POPR could predict strength of party affiliation; first-time voters exhibiting weak POPR were more open to party switching. Sweetser and Browning (2017) examined voters’ views of “interloper” candidates—individuals running as a party candidate, but who historically had not been affiliated with that party, such as Donald Trump in 2016. The findings suggested that both Democrats and Republicans exhibited greater relational satisfaction toward the Democratic Party than they did toward the Republican Party. Sweetser and Becktel (2017) conducted an experiment to test the impact of message medium (e.g., press release, blog, video) on first-time voters’ POPR perceptions. Findings included that text-based messages were less likely to contribute to perceptions of conversational voice and that message medium had no impact on perceived candidate credibility. Sweetser (2017) again examined first time voters, this time during the 2016 election, to study the influence of perceived candidate authenticity, party credibility, and party reputation on POPR with the party. Findings from the study demonstrated that first-

time voters exhibited weak to moderate POPR with their party but were still likely to support their party's candidate.

Challenges for Political Relationship Management

Strömbäck and Kiouisis (2011) noted that although relationship management could benefit political public relations, adopting an authentic relationship management approach within a political context could prove difficult. While an increasingly fractured, combative political environment would benefit from the consensus building, understanding, and trust that effective relationship management could provide, those same characteristics of the modern political environment present challenges to implementing authentic political relationship management (Strömbäck, Mitrook, & Kiouisis, 2010). Increasingly, the political environment is one rife with conflict. Not only do political organizations and publics frequently have competing interests, but in many cases, those interests are diametrically opposed and heavily values-laden. Furthermore, these conflicts often center on securing and exercising political power, making it increasingly difficult to find an amicable, mutually beneficial resolution (Strömbäck & Kiouisis, 2011). The level and tone of the conflict present in the political environment is the result of several pervasive and interrelated trends such as increased affective polarization among partisans, increased strengthening of partisan-aligned social identities, and the increased influence of biased information sources. Collectively, these trends present significant challenges for integrating relationship management within political contexts.

Although political relationship management and POPR research is carried out almost exclusively within the context of U.S. electoral campaigns, two factors potentially make political polarization relevant beyond U.S. contexts when considering the challenges facing effective political relationship management within international contexts. First, American-style campaigning has been exported to other countries, and many of the biased information channels that are exacerbating polarization in the United States, such as partisan social media, are also used for political communication purposes in other countries (e.g., Balčytienė & Juraitė, 2015; Karlsson, Clerwall, & Buskqvist, 2013); thus, it is reasonable to assume that other countries' political systems are characterized by some of the same political communication norms that contribute to polarization in the United States. Second, increasing polarization and social fragmentation is a global phenomenon. From the United States to Pakistan to the nations of Western, Central, and Eastern Europe and beyond, political polarization has been on the rise, in some cases, making the effective governance of some countries difficult if not impossible (e.g., Balčytienė & Juraitė, 2015; Esteban & Schneider, 2008; Kriesi, 2015). This increased political and social polarization contributes to the breakdown of social and political systems, inhibits

effective political processes and progress, stifles economic development (especially in developing countries), and can lead to internal conflict as well as external conflicts across international boundaries (Esteban & Schneider, 2008). Given the widespread presence of heightened social and political polarization, this issue presents a potential impediment to the effective practice of a relational approach to political public relations in an array of political systems across the globe.

Affective Polarization

Iyengar, Sood, and Lelkes (2012) argue that polarization is not contingent on party sorting, policy positions, or ideological differences, but rather affect toward an opposition party. Such *affective polarization* is grounded in social identity theory which proposes that people classify themselves and others into social groups. Individuals who identify with a group will exhibit positive affect for their group (the *in-group*) and negative affect toward others (the *out-group*) (Tajfel, 1970; Tajfel & Turner, 1979, 1986). Such social identities are instrumental in contributing to increased motivated processing, selective exposure, intergroup discrimination, incivility, and intense hostility (Hansen & Kosiara-Pedersen, 2015; Iyengar & Westwood, 2015; Kalin & Sambanis, 2018; Levendusky, 2013; Miller & Conover, 2015). Partisan affiliation functions in the same fashion as identification with other social groups (Fowler & Kam, 2007; Iyengar et al., 2012).

Conflict and hostility among political groups is exacerbated further by *social sorting* wherein an individual's partisan identity aligns with their other social identities, including social identities based on organization membership, religion, race, etc. (Mason, 2016; Mason & Wronski, 2018). Increasingly, even non-political groups exhibit cues regarding with which party they should be aligned; as a result, individuals either identify with groups that “fit” their existing partisan identity or they gravitate toward identification with a given party due to their existing social identification with other groups. Thus, individuals develop a single partisan social identity comprised of an amalgam of their other party-aligned social identities, wherein “the cumulative effects of party–group alignment reveal a psychologically durable partisan social identity that can be singular in nature—in essence, a tribe that binds all other identities together” (Mason & Wronski, 2018, p. 274).

Affective polarization and social sorting are reinforced by communication from political elites, campaigns, and partisan media. Political elites routinely portray their out–group opposition in a negative manner, which reinforces negative perceptions of the out–group among in–group party members. This also forces elites to eschew compromise with political opponents lest they be seen as betraying their in–group party (Abramowitz & Webster, 2016; Mason & Wronski, 2018). In addition, campaign messaging frames policy debates as win–lose contests with no room for compromise, portray the opposition as an unscrupulous enemy, and raises the salience of partisan

identities (Geer, 2010; Hetherington, 2009; Iyengar et al., 2012; Miller & Conover, 2015). Increased exposure to campaigns increases affective polarization among partisans, especially in close races and regardless of the number of parties involved (Hansen & Kosiara-Pedersen, 2015; Iyengar et al., 2012). Finally, both traditional and partisan media exacerbate the problem by repeating partisan messages, framing the news to advance a preferred political agenda, and by constantly reminding partisans of their in-group partisan affiliation (Iyengar & Westwood, 2015; Jamieson, Hardy, & Romer, 2007; Levendusky, 2013).

Implications for Political Relationship Management

Increased affective polarization and partisan social identification present unique challenges for integrating relationship management into political contexts. First, an organization's efforts to establish and maintain experiential relationships with some publics may not work depending on those publics' predispositions and biases toward other organization-aligned groups viewed as possessing certain social partisan identities. The ability of in-group members to serve as boundary spanners who collaborate, network, compromise, and share tasks with out-group counterparts could be constrained or discouraged by the in-group's animosity toward the out-group; any efforts to work with out-group members could cause potentially collaboration-minded in-group members to be viewed as "traitors" who are appeasing the "enemy" (Iyengar & Westwood, 2015).

Secondly, affective polarization and the intergroup hostility it generates could both constrain the range of relational cultivation strategies that are available to political entities as well as result in cultivation strategies that are used to build relationships with in-groups simultaneously undermining relationships with out-groups. Increased affective polarization leads to less civility among in- and out-group partisans. Civility requires individuals to act in a fair, tolerant, and respectful manner (Hansen & Kosiara-Pedersen, 2015), and is somewhat analogous to—or at least a prerequisite for—symmetrical cultivation strategies such as positivity, openness, and providing assurances of legitimacy. If incivility is the norm among in- and out-groups, then there are limited opportunities to successfully implement many symmetrical cultivation strategies. Additionally, the use of in-group cultivation strategies and communication efforts could inadvertently contribute to affective polarization by making in-group partisan identities more salient (Iyengar et al., 2012). This in turn makes it less likely that in-group members will perceive that they share common goals and interests with supporters of the opposing party.

Discussion and Conclusion

Clearly, significant challenges exist for implementing authentic relationship management practices into political public relations due to the polarized

nature of the modern political environment. Hopefully, future research focusing on political public relationship management and POPR will build on the extant literature to overcome or minimize these challenges. Given the increase in affective polarization, further investigation of the role of relational cultivation strategies in political contexts is warranted, especially if these strategies have the potential to contribute to negative POPR with political opponents (Seltzer & Zhang, 2011b). Political public relations researchers need to identify the unintended consequences of relationship management as well as the most effective means for implementing authentic relationship management in political contexts. Also, the phenomenon of social sorting potentially increases the complexity of managing relationships with multiple publics in a political environment. Research is needed to determine whether an organization forming relationships with social groups viewed as aligned with a party influences the perceptions of POPR with that organization among other groups that are not aligned with the same partisan social identity.

One tool that has significant potential for relationship building in political contexts is social media. Much of the public relations research on relationship building and social media has shown that social media, despite being designed to facilitate the dialogue necessary for effective relationship building, is routinely underutilized by organizations, used to implement one-way communication, or merely feigning interest in engaging in dialogue and inviting relational interaction with publics. However, when used appropriately, digital and social media do have the capacity for enabling dialogic communication and relationship building (e.g., Kent, Taylor, & White, 2003; Sweetser & Lariscy, 2008). If applied properly in political contexts, digital and social media could provide a platform for implementing a wide range of cultivation strategies to build relationships among a variety of POPR, including government–citizen, political party–member, campaign–supporter, and interest group–public relationships. Recently, however, digital and social media have shown themselves to be susceptible to the influence of malevolent efforts to poison the political processes of countries around the world. In addition, some research suggests that increased use of social media may exacerbate political division among users (e.g., Bail et al., 2018). Thus, additional research is needed to determine the best methods for designing and implementing political relationship building via digital and social media so as to avoid the potential problems that could result from its misuse, abuse, or technical vulnerabilities.

Seeking answers to these challenges and other questions surrounding POPRs should animate political relationship management researchers and contribute to the integration of relationship management into political public relations practice. As demonstrated by existing research on relationship management and POPR there are significant benefits to applying a relational perspective to the study and practice of political public relations. When practiced effectively, relationship management holds great potential

for enriching not only the practice of political public relations, but also improving the tone and tenor of political discourse. Encouraging political organizations and actors to build mutually beneficial relationships grounded in shared goals and common interests would go a long way toward elevating the level of compromise and civility that the modern political environment so desperately needs.

Note

- 1 The terms “party” and “parties” are frequently used in relationship management literature when referring to the organizations and publics that are involved in relationships. However, given the use of “party” and “parties” in a political context, alternate terms such as “group,” “relational partners,” etc. will be used when referring to relational entities. The terms “party” or “parties” will be reserved for when referring to political parties.

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6 The News Management Function of Political Public Relations

Phillip Arceneaux, Jonathan Borden, and Guy Golan

Like any corporate or non-governmental organization, political candidates, parties, and institutions operate largely in the eye of the public, and therefore, must devote a considerable amount time and resources to cultivate and maintain a desirable, or at least functional, public image. Where it can be both costly and difficult for political entities to effectively reach mass audiences numbering in the millions, such actors make use of traditional public relations strategies for media relations and information subsidies in order to use the mass media to disseminate strategic messages favorable to a political candidate, party, or institution. This chapter offers a theoretical basis from the public relations and mass communication literature to illustrate how practitioners can use the news management function of political public relations to engage with key stakeholders and influence public opinion, in ways that benefit the interests of the political actor.

What Is Political Public Relations

Primarily concerned with the facilitation of desirable political and legal outcomes, political public relations is the extent to which political entities make use of traditional public relations tactics to manage the public image and position of said actor in the eyes of the public. Indeed, Strömbäck and Kioussis define political public relations as,

the management process by which an organization or individual actor for political purposes, through purposeful communication and action, seeks to influence and to establish, build, and maintain beneficial relationships and reputations with its key publics to help support its mission and achieve its goals.

(2011a, p. 8)

Such a definition was the first attempt to crystalize a uniquely political approach to public relations, given the field's dominance in corporate and non-profit contexts (Lieber & Golan, 2011).

Since the publishing of the first edition of this book (Strömbäck & Kiousis, 2011b), the field of political public relations has gained considerable attention. Due to its broad conceptualization, political public relations literature to date has addressed a variety of areas, including local government communications (Graham & Avery, 2013), national politics (Kiousis, et al., 2014; Lambert, 2018), election campaigning (Karlsson, Clerwall, & Buskqvist, 2013), and international political spheres (Dhani, Lee, & Fitch, 2015; Froehlich & Rüdiger, 2006; Rice & Somerville, 2013). Further, such literature has also addressed specific mediated contexts, including both traditional mass media coverage (Lambert, 2018; Rice & Somerville, 2013) as well as new media contexts (Choy, 2018; Karlsson, Clerwall, & Buskqvist, 2013).

Based on nomenclature alone, the ties between political public relations and traditional public relations are evident; however, similar ties exist with the field of *public affairs*. As a widely ambiguous term (Fleisher & Blair, 1999), public affairs departments are ubiquitous throughout political and governmental institutions and organizations. From a traditional public relations perspective, public affairs deals with those organization–stakeholder relationships that directly, or even indirectly, impact public policy outcomes.

To this end, based on the extent to which its end goals center on the internal and external influence of policy-making bodies, i.e. political institutions, public affairs professionals serve various relationship-centered functions, making them similar, if not indistinguishable at times, to political public relations practitioners (Grunig & Grunig, 2001). The definitional overlap between political public relations, public affairs, and traditional public relations creates both opportunities and challenges for scholars. Since the organization–stakeholder relationship serves as the focus of all three, scholars can benefit from previous research findings which can guide and inform those who manage such relationships. At the same time, the lack of clear boundaries separating the three areas may result in both continued confusion and ambiguity, potentially undermining fundamental theoretical assumptions and methodological research designs.

Regardless, political public relations practitioners share many core interests, goals, and responsibilities with traditional public relations and public affairs practitioners. Such areas include political marketing (Lilleker & Jackson, 2011), election campaigning (Baines, 2011), political risk assessment (Toth, 1986), crisis communication and management (Coombs, 2011), global public diplomacy and foreign policy (Molleda, 2011), corporate issues management (Heath & Waymer, 2011), and the news management functions of media relations and information subsidies (Lieber & Golan, 2011; Strömbäck & Esser, 2017). It is the principles and practices embedded within the concept of *news management* that this literature seeks to explore. The remainder of this chapter outlines the theoretical framework behind the news management function of political

public relations, and adds to the literature through discussing the evolution of information flow between political actors, the mass media, and public opinion, with particular emphasis on issue salience and the notion of strategic narrative (Miskimmon, O'Loughlin, & Roselle, 2013, 2017) as a parallel concept to strategic framing (Hallahan, 2011). It concludes with an overview of the implications of the news management function of political public relations in the 21st century.

The News Management Function: Theoretic Foundations

In a democratic system, political power extends from the will of the people. Marshalling popular support for candidates, policies, agencies, or ballot initiatives is the fulcrum of success in any democracy. Political forces of the modern age, however, face a unique problem in appealing to the public. Few, if any, of the electorate have direct access to candidates, agencies, or issues up for debate. As Lippmann observed in describing the voting public, "The world that we have to deal with politically is out of reach, out of sight, out of mind. It has to be explored, reported, and imagined" (Lippmann, 1922, p. 13).

Without direct access to their constituents, politicians, policies, or positions up for debate are reliant on media coverage of those topics to inform public opinion, shape public attitudes, and guide voting or political behaviors. This process, the way in which information flows from political elites through the mass media and to the public, has long been the subject of theoretical exploration. The agenda building (Kim & Kioussis, 2012) component of agenda-setting theory (McCombs & Shaw, 1972) offers a model for the role of institutions in influencing the agenda of the mass media, in turn shaping public discourse and public opinions. What is less frequently discussed, however, is the role of the political public relations practitioner as the lynchpin of this information flow.

The fact is, the political public relations practitioner serves to influence, engage, and build relationships with key stakeholders in order to shape and frame public perceptions of a political candidate, party, or organization (Kioussis, et al., 2009). The job is to marshal the type of public support necessitated by democratic systems of governance. To do this, practitioners are largely dependent on earned media coverage (Lovett & Staelin, 2016) in order to reach their publics. Subsequently, organizational relations with the mass media continue to be a fundamental aspect of political public relations (Zoch & Molleda, 2009). Where, though, do political public relations fit within extant models of information flow such as that proposed by agenda building? What tools are at their practitioners' disposal in order to assure consistent coverage of strategically preferred narratives surrounding the political interests their institutions represent?

Agenda Setting

It would be difficult to overestimate the impact of McCombs and Shaw's observation that "the mass media set the agenda for each political campaign, influencing the salience of attitudes toward the political issues" (1972, p. 177). Agenda setting is one of the most cited theories in examining the flow of information from political and social elites to the general public via the mass media, having proven robust over more than four decades and 400 studies (Carroll & McCombs, 2003; McCombs, 2004). In its modern iteration, agenda setting has evolved into several variations, or *levels* associated with, but distinct from, McCombs and Shaw's early work (McCombs & Shaw, 1972).

The first level of agenda-setting deals with the relationship of media coverage with issue salience in the public (McCombs & Shaw, 1972). Expanding the issue salience transfer beyond mere issues to also include attributes, sub-issues and affect, the second level of agenda setting may provide a richer context for understanding news related media effects (Golan & Wanta, 2001; Sheafer, 2007). This attribute agenda setting associates specific attributes with the topic at hand; mass media coverage affects the way issues are judged by the public by building associations wherein certain attributes of the issue are more readily recalled by the public (Kim, et al., 2012; Scheufele & Tewksbury, 2007). Attribute agenda building begins the task of shaping public perceptions as to the relative goodness or badness of the story or topic at hand.

In political public relations, effective attribute agenda-setting is imperative to ensuring that preferred strategic or policy narratives become salient in mass media coverage (Shanahan, McBeth, & Hathaway, 2011). Cancianosi defines this as a "clear and compelling vision and strategy for the future" (2015, para 2). While political elites may be responsible for crafting strategic vision for their constituencies, agencies or nations, it often falls to the practitioner to craft materials that effectively communicate this vision to the voting public. These strategically constructed *stories* are the *lifeblood of politics* (Shanahan, McBeth, & Hathaway, 2011). The effective communication of these narratives to the public, via various media (Baumgartner & Jones, 1993) is critical to the creation of positive public sentiment in support of preferred policy pathways (Jones & Jenkins-Smith, 2009)

However, the mass media's agenda does not merely evolve apropos of nothing. It has been observed that cultural or political elites, special interest or activist groups, businesses or organizations may function to set an agenda for mass media coverage that is subsequently communicated to the public (Kioussis, et al., 2006; Kioussis & Strömbäck, 2010; Parmelee, 2014; Wanta, Golan, & Lee, 2004). Lippmann noted that the mass media simply lack the time and resources to truly cover all the events of the day, "Newspapers do not try to keep an eye on all mankind. They have

watchers stationed at certain places” (1922, p. 338). As key sources of the typical mass media agenda, political elites play a key role in influencing, either literally or metaphorically, the mass media agenda (Meraz, 2009; Sweetser, Golan, & Wanta, 2008). Facilitating this process is precisely the place occupied by political public relations professionals (Zoch & Molleda, 2009). From the agenda-building perspective, mass media content can be considered the product of a triad of groups, political elites, the press and the public relations practitioners, who bridge the gap between them.

Public Relations’ Role in Agenda Building: News Management

The political public relations practitioner functions, in part, to engage in agenda-building consistent with the overarching narratives or objectives of the political entities they represent (Kiouisis, Popescu, & Mitrook, 2007; Kiouisis & Strömbäck, 2010). These agendas, however, exist in abstraction until crystallized in the form of a singular event or factual moment. “The facts of modern life do not spontaneously take a shape in which they can be known. They must be given shape by somebody” (Lippmann, 1922, p. 345). It is the political public relations practitioner’s task to create this shape, to convert abstract policy or opinion into concrete, reportable events in order to build the agenda. Such news management goals in political public relations are traditionally achieved through strategies such as press releases, press briefings, press conferences, personal interviews, public speeches, publicized debates, commentary on broadcast media programs, and more and more often, social media content.

Historically, many components of the practitioner’s toolkit are dedicated to creating these newsworthy moments and engaging in the agenda-building process (Zoch & Molleda, 2009). Press conferences and speeches (Kiouisis & Strömbäck, 2010), for example, are intended to create these concrete moments, shaping the *facts of modern life* by giving them tangible form, subsequently informing media coverage of those we represent. Gaps between these high-profile moments can be filled by public appearances, campaign stops, press tours, and photo-ops (Kiouisis & Shields, 2008), all events intended to overtly influence media coverage by providing the press with ready-made news stories giving shape to the political abstractions represented (Lippmann, 1922). Covertly, however, a second component of this agenda-building process is a function of a relationship between the press and public relations specialists seldom seen by the public: information subsidies (Gandy, 1982).

Information subsidies refer to the way in which practitioners provide controlled access to pre-processed or specialized information at little cost or effort to the media (Curtin, 1999), thus subsidizing the costs of information gathering for the press. Strained by ever increasing costs of news production and conjoined with decreasing time and budgets, the mass media increasingly rely on information subsidies from political public

relations practitioners to offset the costs of information gathering (Curtin, 1999; Sweetser & Brown, 2008; Zhang, et al., 2017). Behind the scenes, information subsidies have become a major component in the practitioner's work in agenda-building on behalf of the interests they represent (Ragas, 2012). Hence, Lieber and Golan define them as the "currency of trade within the marketplace of information" (2011, p. 59).

Information subsidies encompass press releases, media alerts, media kits, and a variety of other traditional public relations tactics (Curtin, 1999). However, as Esser and Spanier (2005) note, journalists cast increasing suspicion on information gleaned from official sources, with skepticism about information subsidies driving meta-coverage of *spin* in the press. In response to this skepticism and the subsequent decreasing efficacy of traditional information subsidies is the rise of non-traditional subsidies, such as selective information *leaks* (Tomic & Grbavac, 2016) or the "non-official disclosure of information to persons outside an organization" (Patz, 2017, p. 1051). By strategically disclosing confidential but potentially beneficial, or potentially harmful to opponents, information off-the-record, political leaders and their representatives attempt to strategically steer mass media coverage by giving access to information the press may otherwise not be able to access (Flynn, 2006; Patz, 2017). Pozen refers to these unofficial information subsidies as "pleaks," residing somewhere between a planted story and a true leak (2015, p. 515), and acknowledges that strategic information leaks have a significant impact on political strategy, mass media agenda, and public sentiment of issues, topics, or individuals under consideration.

In essence, overt as well as covert efforts towards agenda-building on behalf of organized interest are referred to as news management (Lieber & Golan, 2011) or media management (Tomic & Grbavac, 2016), and are critical aspects of effective political public relations, including marshalling public support and achieving strategic objectives in the democratic space.

21st Century News Management: Digital Media Scanning

The role of the political public relations practitioner in creating and disseminating strategically useful content is only part of this relationship with the news information cycle and the public. A second, critical component of the practitioner's function is to communicate public and mass media expectations and trends to the political actors that they represent, ensuring that their clients are creating content consistent with topical or issue trends in society at large. The political public relations practitioner functions as a bridge between the client, the mass media, and the public. They are responsible for representing their organizations or clients to the mass media and the public, but they are also required to represent the public and mass media to their clients. Two interrelated skills articulate this process: environmental scanning (Dozier, 1986; Lauzen,

1997) and media scanning/media monitoring (Howard & Mathews, 2013).

Environmental scanning refers to the “gathering of information about publics, about reactions of publics toward the organization, and about public opinion toward issues important to the organization” (Dozier, 1986, p. 2). In environmental scanning, the public relations practitioner tracks public conversations and major topics directly or indirectly affecting client or trends in issue salience that can or may affect a client’s operations. Once identified, these trends are used to strategize future behaviors, craft key messages, formulate policy positions, or to brace for potential crises. Some groups frame environmental scanning as an integral part of ethical public relations, with effective knowledge of the environment central to social responsibility (Du, Bhattacharya, & Sen, 2010) or social advocacy (Dodd & Supa, 2014) behaviors.

While political entities may lack the flexibility necessary for proactive actions such as those made by privately owned corporations and public relations firms, environmental scanning is integral to the political public relations practitioner’s task to prepare the political figures or organizations they represent for changes or trends in the environments where they operate. For instance, in 2018, multiple U.S. congresspersons visited and held press conferences at immigration detention centers in response to the salience of immigration policy in the U.S. domestic political environment (Weigel, 2018). In cases such as this one, environmental scanning revealed the importance of key issues among respective constituent bases, and thus elected officials reacted accordingly.

While environmental scanning focuses on abstract issues or topics of discussion that may or may not affect the client, media scanning, or media monitoring, prioritizes *specific* mentions of the client or organization in mass media coverage (Cision, 2018). Typically, reports are compiled on a daily, weekly, or even monthly basis, in the case of outside contracting, to itemize and explicate all of the mass media coverage a client has earned or received in the preceding timeframe. While preferences in media scanning reporting may vary from client to client, it is common to list factors such as: publication type, content, tone/frame, and relative circulation or likely impressions of the content, in order inform decisions on whether or not to respond.

For example, imagine two stories, one extremely negative but published on a fringe blog, the other slightly negative but published in *The New York Times*. Although *The New York Times*’ coverage may be less negative, the likely overall impact of the content constitutes the greater threat, when multiplied by the size of their circulation and the overall social capital and credibility of the newspaper. The blog post could likely be ignored, whereas *The New York Times*’ story would likely merit a response or rebuttal. Media scanning such as this is

intended to catch, analyze, and evaluate these stories as they occur, and respond to them accordingly when deemed necessary.

This case in point explains the response of Saudi Arabia's Crown Prince Mohammad bin Salman in the aftermath of the death of journalist Jamal Khashoggi. Having been implicated in Khashoggi's killing by the U.S. Central Intelligence Agency, the Crown Prince became one of the most salient issues in mass media coverage, largely in a negative light (Schmitt & Fandos, 2018; Strobel, 2018). Having been dubbed the *Prince of PR* (de Bellaigue, 2018) for his international tour of the United States, Great Britain, France, and Egypt to improve global public sentiment of Saudi Arabia (Jacinto, 2018), the Crown Prince used another tour, this time of Arabic countries with a stop at the G20 summit in Argentina (Hajali, 2018; Landale, 2018), to engage in crisis management and begin the process of redeeming his image abroad. It was media scanning that identified the severity of the Jamal Khashoggi coverage to the Crown Prince's public image, thus necessitating a response. While representing the public or media's agenda to the client, via environmental and media scanning, has long been a critical component of the political public relations practitioners' toolkit, several trends have amplified their significance in the news management process such as the digital/social revolution and the growing fragmentation of the media landscape.

Where mass communication theories such as agenda and frame building provide a useful framework for the examination of the news management function of political public relations, micro level examinations are very useful for testing the news management goals of specific issue-based campaigns. However, in order to best understand the macro communication strategy of organized interest, it is important to look beyond mere frame promotion and towards an organization's strategic narrative that positions its values and mission in the eye of the public. As noted by Ihlen et al. (2018), public policy advocates often make claims of public interest outcomes. For example, post September 11, 2001, the White House positioned the PATRIOT Act as an executive order that aimed to advance the protection of U.S. citizens from terrorists' threat. However, hosts of interest groups claimed the PATRIOT Act violated citizens' basic constitutional rights, and even international laws with the detainment of prisoners in Guantanamo Bay. Ultimately, the ability to align organizational values with public values is paramount for successful organization-to-public relationship outcomes (Kent & Taylor, 2002). In this context, we argue that the emergent literature on strategic narratives (Miskimmon, O'Loughlin, & Roselle, 2013, 2017) provides a useful theoretical framework for understanding the news management function of political public relations and larger organizational attempts at issue alignment with their key stakeholder.

Strategic Narrative and Political Public Relations

The core tenet of political public relations is to engage a public audience with communication strategies aimed at presenting and diffusing a predetermined public opinion or image of a political candidate, party, or organization. A specific tactic in which organizations achieve this effect is through presenting information in carefully constructed formats designed to bring about desired results. Political communication literature has begun to see the diffusion of a new concept from the international relations field: *strategic narrative* (Miskimmon, O’Loughlin, & Roselle, 2013, 2017). This concept articulates how national governments use communication strategies to bring about public outcomes that support the interests of the state. Indeed, “narratives are designed or nurtured with the intention of structuring the responses of others to developing events” (Freedman, 2006, p. 22).

Strategic narratives are foundational to political public relations because they are a parallel concept to what Hallahan (2011) refers to as *strategic framing*. As he puts it,

Framing *facilitates* or *enables* communication by shaping *perceptions* and providing a *context* for processing political or other information. Framing fundamentally *enables* communication, but has often been described as a process that delimits the information considered.

(Hallahan, 2011, p. 178)

Where strategic narratives created within political entities constitute “framing by source,” providing internally created strategic narratives to media organizations constitutes “framing by intermediaries,” which ultimately impacts and affects how mass media audiences then process and perceive the public image of the political entity, i.e. “framing by message audiences” (Hallahan, 2011, p. 179). In all, the wide scope of the framing literature allows for varied applications of strategic narrative, including framing social and political situations, issues, attributes, risk, arguments, and responsibility.

The fact that such narratives are constructed “strategically” emphasizes the extent to which they derive from a culture of persuasion (Miskimmon, O’Loughlin, & Roselle, 2013), i.e. there is a proactive intent behind strategic narratives to persuade a target audience to believe certain ideas or act in certain ways they otherwise would not.

Political leaders use narratives, discourse, and frames strategically, thinking through the likely effects or responses at home and abroad. If some actors rely on habit and frame or narrative a situation in a less than convincing way, their failure demonstrates a lack of skill, not that intentionality and strategy do not exist.

(Miskimmon, O’Loughlin, & Roselle, 2013, p. 13)

While there can be a sliding scale for the analysis of outcome effectiveness, the core piece of strategic narrative is its inherent function to persuade.

Beyond this intent to persuade, strategic narratives must be projected to target audiences through appropriate channels. While political institutions can, and do, engage directly with the public through owned and social media, they also make use of the mass media and related institutions to reach mass groups of people. Through information subsidies, political institutions utilize media relations as a tactic to supplement the projection and diffusion of organizational strategic narratives.

Important to note, however, is the idea that organizational narratives are strategic not only for their capacity to persuade a target audience, but also their capacity to out-perform adversarial narratives. “Actors must take into account an environment in which they may be challenged and their messages contested” (Miskimmon, O’Loughlin, & Roselle, 2013, p. 10). As Miskimmon himself has explained, narratives are “contestation around meaning” (Heinrich-Böll-Stiftung, 2017). Rhetorical narratives offer meaning for the understanding of such events, and the strategic way in which organizations construct narratives is a function of organizational efforts to dominate the social understanding of an event as well as the public perception of the organization. Not unlike what Borah (2011) coined as *frame competition* in “competitive elite environments” (Chong & Druckman, 2006, p. 99), strategic narratives must be built to compete in the complexity and intensity of the 21st century media ecology to have any real capacity for acceptance.

Where strategic narrative articulates state behavior insofar as it relates to political communication, to understand the concept in such a limited scope is to miss the larger picture. Miskimmon, O’Loughlin, and Roselle (2013) first introduced strategic narrative in the light of state centrality, while Miskimmon, O’Loughlin, and Roselle (2017) sought to expand the concept to non-state actors. This chapter furthers this trend by exploring how the conceptual framework of strategic narrative, as parallel to strategic framing (Hallahan, 2011), extends through the practice of political public relations, beyond the confines of political communication alone. Such work attempts to reappropriate strategic narrative from political science and place it more centrally in traditional mass communication scholarship.

Strategic Narrative and Identity Formation

As Bernays argues, “The three main elements of public relations are practically as old as society: informing people, persuading people, and integrating people with people” (1952, p. 12). Strategic narratives communicate information to the public at large, whether directly (owned and social media) or mediated through information subsidies (traditional and earned media). Further, they present information in purposefully

crafted content that encourages the public to interpret the information in ways that benefit the organization. Lastly, they offer a social perception of events that is shared by a large and diverse group of the public, creating a kind of social identity. “In this way, narratives do more than transmit information; they are used to position and construct the audience and its identity so that a responsive disposition is cultivated” (Miskimmon, O’Loughlin, & Roselle, 2017, p. 39). For example, while rarely viewed as a traditional political institution, the Vatican and the Pope regularly use strategic narratives to frame their interests and institutional identity to both the public and the mass media (Golan, Arceneaux, & Soule, 2018).

As the Public Relations Society of America suggests, “public relations helps our complex, pluralistic society to reach definitions and functions more efficiently by contributing mutual understanding among groups and institutions” (2012, p. 12). Though political public relations practitioners may use strategic narratives to influence public opinion, i.e. perceptions of political characteristics tied to both internal and external social behavior (Toth, 1986), carefully constructed accounts of events designed to influence the public to favor organizational interests is a core foundation of traditional public relations.

With knowledge in persuasive tactics, the ethics of public relations is often discussed (Bowen, 2007). While some see public relations as a profession of spin and propaganda (Dhani, Lee, & Fitch, 2015), the field’s basis in influencing public opinion is not nefarious. Where framing theory suggests specific interpretations of information based on the selection and salience of specific cues (Entman, 1993), strategic narratives seem to be a tactic of strategic framing. However, as the construction of strategic narratives involves the selection and salience of information designed to promote organizational goals, strategic narratives move far beyond theoretically driven gambits. Rather than mere tactics, they constitute a larger strategy due to the organizational identity and history driving the strategic framing of the narratives.

As Miskimmon, O’Loughlin, and Roselle (2013, 2017) argue, identity is a key component in the construction of strategic narratives. Organizational characteristics that are foundational to the identity of the organization are likely to be a guiding principle in the construction of the strategic narrative. For example, the historical composition of the United States’ Democratic party has long been a conglomerate of minority groups. Such an identity was a key concept in the narrative around Hillary Clinton’s 2016 presidential campaign, i.e. “breaking the glass ceiling” and pioneering the way for women in U.S. presidential politics.

Considering another example, the U.S. narrative struggle with North Korea poses particular interest. In the 1950s, the United States’ containment policy toward communism brought U.S. military forces to the Korean peninsula. The aim was to support the democratic south against the communist north. Having recently emerged victorious from World

War II, the United States embraced the mentality of being the global defender of democracy. Following the end of the Korean War in 1953, the U.S. shifted from an offensive military strategy to a narrative one. Using a variety of storytelling tools from Voice of America to Radio Free Asia, the United States attempted to diffuse a narrative of North Korea designed to isolate the country both in the region and abroad.

Where this policy extended through the Cold War, the post-Cold War strategic narrative of North Korea has continuously grown to frame the country in a negative light. Where the post-Cold War United States has long viewed itself as the “leader of the free world,” U.S. policy has attempted to strategically portray North Korea as its antithesis. Bill Clinton referred to the United States’ struggle with North Korea as the “Cold War’s last divide” (Clinton, 1998, p. 115), linking North Korea with the Soviet Union’s “evil empire” of the Reagan era (Reagan, 1983, para 48). More famously, George W. Bush coined the phrase, “Axis of Evil” to represent the danger posed by North Korea, Iran, and Iraq. Such a narrative served to not only cement domestic support among the U.S. populace, but to garner international support against North Korea. To the contrary, North Korea has spent nearly six decades pursuing one strategic narrative of the United States, that of an aggressive colonial power bent on the destruction of the Korean homeland. Where the United States and its allies view the Korean conflict as having ended in 1953, the North Korean strategic narrative argues that the war still continues (Lee, 2017).

Linking their historical identity as an oppressed people to the political identity of the communist government, the North Korean strategic narrative stresses the oppressed perspective of a small minority righteously defending their homeland from a fierce enemy. Per Kim Jong Un, “The massacres committed by the US imperialist aggressors in Sinchon evidently showed that they are cannibals and homicides seeking pleasure in slaughter” (Sang-Hun, 2014, para. 3). Both the United States and North Korea have used strategic narratives based in reflexive identity to establish the tone through which global public opinion perceives the state of political affairs on the Korean peninsula.

While strategic narratives exist in environments filled with counter narratives, not all counter narratives are antagonistic. What cannot be denied, however, is that political entities maintain teams of public relations professionals to develop narrative-based strategies to influence public opinion in ways that benefit the interests of the organization. Again, while developed in international relations (Miskimmon, O’Loughlin & Roselle, 2013, 2017), strategic narrative is a concept that is a universal to the work of organizational image maintenance, i.e. public relations.

Where strategic narratives are tools used by political entities to tell social stories that predispose their candidate, party, or institution to be perceived positively in the light of public opinion, many view such a phenomenon

as a function of framing, i.e. salience and salience of informational cues (Entman, 1993). However, while strategic narratives do frame information in purposive ways, they encompass something larger than strategic framing alone; they embody institutional identity in ways that make strategic narratives vehicles for the diffusion of an organization's own perception of itself. Where framing may help to model how strategic narratives are purposefully created, other theories such as agenda building help to better model how strategic narratives are purposefully diffused, through the media, to the mass public.

Conclusion

The current chapter aimed to highlight some of the key theoretical considerations of the news management function of political public relations. Understanding that agenda and frame building are not limited solely to mass media coverage of specific issues, but rather should be understood in the context of a political actor's overall public positioning, we argue for the need to incorporate the literature on environmental and media scanning, as well as strategic narratives, into the body of literature on news management.

It is the role of the public relations practitioner to be the eyes, ears, and mouth for the client institutions and organizations they represent; so too is the role of the political public relations practitioner. Where it is understood that there will always be contestation around issue framing, particularly in political contexts, it is the responsibility of political public relations practitioners to advise their clients on strategies for crafting and diffusing such narratives. While there are many strategies and tactics available, the news management function has traditionally served as one of the most effective routes for engaging in frame competition via access to mass public audiences.

In Western contexts, the news management and agenda setting processes have historically been more linear than they are today. Political and cultural elites fed news to a finite number of broadcast outlets who then dutifully forwarded the content to the public, similar to what Entman (2003) referred to as the cascade activation model. Today, however, the landscape is much more complex, and the flows of information are no longer as directional and stable.

Historically, publics chose from a handful of television or radio stations and a few local or national broadsheet publications. Today, publics have hundreds of mass media options and practically infinite multi-media channels available online. As audiences gravitate towards mass media content that fits with their *a priori* beliefs about the world (Stroud, 2008), the contemporary political public relations practitioner must recognize and create consistency among 1) content strategy, 2) channel choice and 3) audience expectations, in order to be effective in news management. This

suggests that the public has some capacity to set the agenda for both political institutions and the mass media. That is, rather than elites setting the agenda for the mass media, who in turn set the agenda for the public, publics can increasingly influence agendas, via issue salience, for the mass media by selectively consuming, or avoiding, content based on personal preference.

It should further be considered that the rise of social media has had two profound effects on the news management process. First, with the capacity to create and distribute content via social media, the public can raise issue salience amongst itself, directly contributing to, or even contradicting, preferred public discourses. For example, during the Occupy Wall Street movement, activists used social media to communicate with each other and raise public issue salience, forcing broadcast media to follow along with an agenda set by an active public (Grzywinska & Borden, 2012). As a result, rather than focusing media scanning on a handful of traditional channels, political public relations practitioners must now scan across a myriad social media platforms and channels for trending topics and potential threats. The prominence of social media platforms as key channels of public discourse provides organizations with unique abilities for environmental scanning, via social media listening. By understanding how, where, when, and what stakeholders are conversing about, political organizations can respond to and manage their news function and their stakeholder relations.

Second, political elites are increasingly using social media to cut out the mass media as intermediaries, instead appealing directly to the public. In the 2016 U.S. presidential primaries, then-candidate Donald Trump used Twitter to engage key stakeholders and appeal directly with the public, rather than relying on traditional mass media coverage to reach potential voters (Wells, et al., 2016). This has been a major shift in traditional information flow, and as the use of social media continues to permeate society (Zhang, Borden, & Kim, 2018), the reliance of political entities on social media to directly reach the public will continue to accelerate.

A third consideration is that mass media sources have more power in their relationships with political elites than has historically been the case. If a mass media channel rejects content delivered by the political public relations practitioner, then the practitioner cannot earn coverage for the interests they represent. The issue or political client is simply dropped from the news cycle and potentially ignored by the public. This shift is subverting traditional news management flows by forcing political elites to adapt their strategic narratives to the news cycle rather than vice versa. Strömbäck (2008) describes this tipping point as the fourth stage of “mediatization” where, rather than the media being forced to adapt to the preferred narratives or logics of agenda-building political elites, elites

are now forced to adapt to the preferred narratives of mass media (Strömbäck & Esser, 2017).

This has resulted in a change in the way political narratives are formulated and disseminated to the public. One such example is the rise of the *sound bite*, a two or three second, quotable or appealing message to be featured in an evening news broadcast. This has contrasted the way messages are crafted and delivered by politicians and the public relations practitioners representing them, with complex or abstract policies and narratives now distilled into pithy one-line statements (Rinke, 2016). Rather than the mass media changing to accommodate the styles of political elites, elites must now accommodate media styles. In essence, then, while political elites still can shape the mass media and public agenda, today these agendas can equally shape those of political elites.

Though the news management function is far from new, social and technological changes have necessitated a newer multilateral approach to engaging in the agenda and frame-building process. The rise of social media and the increased influence of public opinion has contributed an enormous number of voices in an already highly saturated arena of social debate. Therefore, to effectively engage in news management, contemporary political public relations practitioners must be able and willing to engage in effective mass media and public relationship management through the insights made available through environmental and media scanning. Such activity is merely one of the many responsibilities expected of the those who practice the art and science of political public relations.

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7 Political Public Relations and Strategic Framing

Underlying Mechanisms, Success Factors, and Impact

Viorela Dan, Øyvind Ihlen, and Ketil Raknes

Contentious issues—such as irregular migration, physician-assisted suicide, or gun control—tend to be very complex. Thus, attempts to reference all nuances of such an issue when communicating are bound to fail, or to result in lengthy treatises incompatible to most people’s willingness and capacity to process. For this reason, when communicating, political actors select some aspects of the issue they are addressing, and build their reasoning surrounding their selection. Their communication then emphasizes the aspects of the issue that were selected and advances an interpretation of what the problem is, what caused it, how it should be dealt with it and by whom, and what to make of it (see Entman, 1993, p. 52). Such interpretations of issues are known as frames; they act as “*organizing principles* that [...] *structure* the social world” (Reese, 2001, p. 11).

Described in this way, the act of framing—i.e., of conveying and advancing frames—seems like an inevitable dimension of communication. Certainly, this is an accurate description. Yet, framing *can* take on a strategic character, especially in the political realm. Political actors use frames strategically to articulate their views on contentious issues, sway others, and advance their agenda. In the words of Hallahan (1999, 2011), at least seven areas of public life and debates are subject to strategic framing: situations (relationships between individuals, for instance in organizational negotiations); attributes (the way objects, events, or people are characterized); choices (e.g., tying particular positive or negative aspects to certain choices); actions (pointing to positive or negative aspects concerning actions in order to achieve compliance with organizational goals); issues (e.g., using particular descriptions of social problems); responsibility (e.g., trying to attribute a cause to individual or systemic problems); and news (ways of presenting stories).

On account of its focus on these acts of selection and emphasis, and given the possibility to do so deliberately, scholarly interest in framing has been high in public relations research (Lim & Jones, 2010; Zoch & Molleda, 2006), in political communication research (Grabe & Bucy, 2009; Kioussis & Strömbäck, 2015; Strömbäck & Esser, 2017), and in political science (De Bruycker, 2017; Helboe Pedersen, 2013; Klüver &

Mahoney, 2015). In all these fields, communication materials are not only intended to inform audiences, but also to convince them to accept preferred interpretations (see Pan & Kosicki, 1993). Setting up and sustaining common frames with regard to issues of mutual concern is crucial for effective relations between an organization and its publics (Hallahan, 1999, 2011). Thus, framing is an essential part of political public relations (Kiousis & Strömbäck, 2015), understood as

the management process by which an organization or individual actor for political purposes, through purposeful communication and action, seeks to influence and to establish, build, and maintain beneficial relationships and reputations with its key publics to help support its mission and achieve its goals.

(Strömbäck & Kiousis, 2011, p. 8)

We define strategic framing in the political realm along the lines proposed by Strömbäck and Esser (2017):

Strategic framing refers to structuring the meaning and significance of a political message in order to influence the version of the story that the media will feature. This process of putting a favorable interpretation on information is intended to determine the parameters of a debate before it even begins

(Strömbäck & Esser, 2017, p. 75)

Yet, we propose that strategic framing should be conceptualized more broadly to include audience effects (direct and mediated) and effects on policy. Traditional and social media are just a tool, albeit an important one, in this regard.

Scholarly investigations into strategic framing and the consequences it brings about are valuable as they acknowledge political actors' interests, knowledge, skills, resources, and status (Carragee & Roefs, 2004; Dan & Ihlen, 2011; Hallahan, 2011; Pan & Kosicki, 2001), and factor these conditions in the analysis of their communication. Much of the research uninformed by this strategic perspective risks taking frames in communication for granted and acts as if frames "were not part of a larger conversation, serving particular interests, and undergoing changes over time" (Reese, 2007, p. 149).

This chapter first provides a brief introduction to framing theory before it sheds light on the specific ways in which political actors use frames strategically and to what effect. We provide a review of the literature on 1) the factors influencing the chances that actors articulate frames that are able to succeed (*framing expertise*); 2) actors' relations to others when engaging in framing (*framing contests*; *framing coalitions*); and 3) the way strategic framing impacts media coverage (*frame building*), the members of the audience (*audience effects*), and political decision makers (*policy effects*). These phenomena and processes are illustrated in Figure 7.1. Throughout

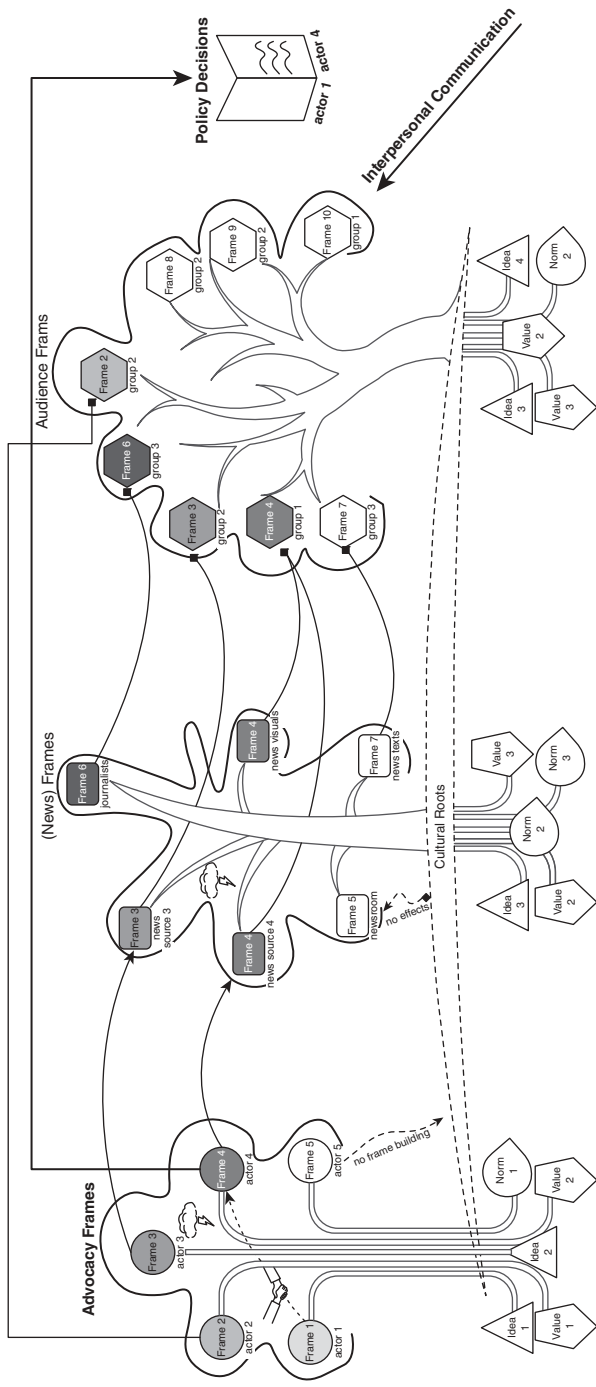


Figure 7.1 The Process of Framing

the chapter, we refer back to this figure when we address each of the components. In the conclusion, we bring together the main research findings and highlight gaps to be addressed in future studies.

A Brief Introduction to Framing Theory

The writer and journalist Walter Lippmann (1922/2004) was the first to acknowledge that (mass) communication does not simply *express* reality, but rather actively *constructs* it. This idea set the stage for the emergence of the social constructionist paradigm (Berger & Luckmann, 1966) and, subsequently, for that of framing theory. The foundation of what we now refer to as framing theory was laid in the late 1960s and early 1970s in at least three disciplines: social anthropology (Bateson, 1972), cognitive psychology (Bartlett, 1967), and sociology (Goffman, 1974). Framing entered communication studies in the 1980s, a development that owes much to the work of media sociologists such as Tuchman (1978/1980), Gitlin (1980), and Gamson (1989).

Perhaps the most influential article published in a communication journal during this time—and arguably long after—was authored by Entman. In his 1993 article in the *Journal of Communication*, Entman delineated a research program based on framing theory and argued that it should be able to turn communication studies into “a master discipline” (p. 51). Since then, framing theory became almost indispensable in investigations into the social construction of reality and its effects. About a decade later—after the majority of framing scholars had focused exclusively on the verbal components of communication, such as news texts (Matthes, 2009)—Messaris and Abraham’s (2001) seminal publication managed to pique scholars’ interest in investigating visuals for the frames they entail. Another decade passed until Grabe and Bucy (2009) and Coleman (2010) truly fueled research into visual framing. Recently, scholars grew critical of verbal-only and visual-only framing studies. Elsewhere, we devised and implemented methodological advice on how scholars can analyze frames in multimodal material (i.e., verbal and visual) (see Dan, 2018b).

The mixed background of framing theory has enabled research into the entire process of meaning making, ranging from strategic communication, through news reporting, until media effects. Media effects scholars relied more on the psychological underpinnings of framing, whereas those interested in the content of communication stayed true to the sociological tradition.

Each of the “founding” disciplines and each of those in which framing was used has left an imprint on framing theory and has molded it into the shape it is today (see D’Angelo, 2018; Reese, 2018). Still, scholars generally stay true to the key premise of framing theory, i.e. to the acts of selection and emphasis addressed in the introduction to this chapter.

Strategic Framing in the Political Realm

As already pointed out, many of the issues that are subject to public debate are controversial. This implies that numerous (political) actors holding different views will get involved and attempt to advance their frames. In the literature, these frames are generally known as *advocacy frames* (Dan, 2018a). They are located on the left-hand side of Figure 7.1.

In this dynamic process (Baumgartner, Berry, Hojnacki, Kimball, & Leech, 2009), political actors have two options. They can work against others and engage in *framing contests*, or they can work together with others and form *framing coalitions*. In Figure 7.1, framing contests are illustrated by a lightning symbol (affecting actors 3 and 4), while a handshake symbol is used for coalitions (involving actors 1 and 4). In this section, we address these two processes in more depth. But first, we take a closer look at the skills and resources involved in strategic framing, i.e. *framing expertise*.

Framing Expertise

“Framing expertise” is an umbrella term for the knowledge and the skills in designing and promoting frames (Dan & Ihlen, 2011). In Figure 7.1, those actors who exhibit high degrees of framing expertise (actors 2, 3, and the coalition between actors 1 and 4) succeed in influencing the media coverage, audiences, and policy decisions. Actor 5, who was unable to reach his framing goals (an arrow pointing to the ground depicts this in Figure 7.1), can be assumed to score low on framing expertise. While it seems plausible to attribute success in strategic framing to knowledge and skills, we caution that actors’ status, credibility, and resources are also likely to play a role (also see the indexing hypothesis Bennett, 1990; Busby, Flynn, & Druckman, 2018; Carragee & Roefs, 2004; Entman, 2004; Geiß, Weber, & Quiring, 2017; Reese, 2018; Ryan, 1991; Sheaffer & Gabay, 2009). Thus, journalists, audiences, and politicians might ignore underdogs even if the latter exhibit high levels of framing expertise.

Knowledge about the priorities, habits, and views of regular people, journalists, and politicians constitutes a prerequisite to actors’ ability to develop compelling frames. Such knowledge concerns the underlying culture, media conventions, and politicians’ proclivities. Yet, however multifaceted, knowledge alone does not suffice. Framing expertise involves the capacity to derive advantage from this knowledge (Dunwoody & Griffin, 1993; Hertog & McLeod, 2001; Ihlen & Allern, 2008). This entails actors’ capacity to highlight how their interpretations resonate with prevailing ideas, values, and norms; to exploit media conventions; and to present their interpretations as serving society and the public interest (see Dan & Ihlen, 2011).

Thus, framers exhibiting high levels of framing expertise are able to delineate frames that are rooted in ideas, values, and norms that are prevalent in the underlying culture (Dan & Ihlen, 2011). They select those cultural elements that are compatible with their interpretations (see the lower third of Figure 7.1), and employ them strategically in communication. The act of construction inherent to framing is thus obscured and the frames advanced appear to be the natural interpretation of the issue at hand. This increases the chances that frames achieve *cultural resonance* and become “socially shared” and “persistent over time” (Reese, 2001, p. 11; see also Dan & Raupp, 2018). For example, in Norway seasoned practitioners working for pro-asylum NGOs achieved cultural resonance for their framing of asylum seekers as worthy, innocent, and deserving sympathy and support. Their strategy was to recount the stories of individuals who were unambiguously innocent—e.g., children—or particularly worthy—e.g., outspoken and well-integrated women (Ihlen, Figenschou, & Larsen, 2015; Ihlen & Thorbjørnsrud, 2014a). By selecting these individuals over others, they made use of the hierarchy of innocence in place in many Western cultures, in which children and women are perceived to be more innocent, and thus worthier and more relatable, than boys and men (see Moeller, 2002).

A second characteristic of framing experts is that they *exploit media conventions*. They draft frames that are compelling, unambiguous, appeal to emotions, use engaging (audio-)visuals, a familiar narrative, allow the use of a dramatic or conflict-laden storyline, and are easily applicable to the issue at hand (Busby et al., 2018; Chong & Druckman, 2007a, 2007b; Geiß et al., 2017; Ihlen, 2015; Ihlen & Thorbjørnsrud, 2014b). Framing experts, as “careful students of journalistic news values”¹ (Price & Tewksbury, 1997, p. 174), know when to “dumb down” complex matters and boil them down to catchy slogans to achieve unambiguousness. In a recent environmental conflict, activists’ rejection of gas-fired power plants was featured in news when they compared carbon dioxide emissions with those from cars (the plants would “pollute like 600,000 cars”; Ihlen & Allern, 2008, p. 238). Framing experts also know how to craft (audio-)visuals in ways that are both aesthetically pleasing and “promote desired qualities and favorite themes” (Grabe & Bucy, 2009, p. 85). For instance, juxtaposition with children or depictions against a backdrop of cheering veterans would accomplish this. A subtler way to communicate issue standpoints and ideology is through the consistent use of subtle backdrop cues in publicly distributed images (e.g., a cross hanging on the wall)—this practice can be considered a visual extension of what is known as dog-whistle politics (see Haney-López, 2018).

Finally, experts enhance the legitimacy of their interpretations by aligning their self-centered frames with what is generally perceived to be the interest of society and serving the *public interest* (Oberman, 2017). Lobbyists were shown to use this strategy to pave the way for political

decisions beneficial to their respective employers. This was revealed, for instance, in a recent four-country study on issues as varied as the privatization of railroads, the use of palm oil, tax-free arrangements, and non-disclosure policies of emission data (Ihlen, et al., 2018).

Framing Contests and Framing Coalitions

Framing Contests

When political actors identify their discursive enemies and work against them, they engage in a process called a frame competition (Chong & Druckman, 2007c; Geiß et al., 2017; Guggenheim, Jang, Bae, & Neuman, 2015) or, as we prefer, a *framing contest* (Dan & Ihlen, 2011; Ihlen & Allern, 2008; Ihlen & Thorbjørnsrud, 2014b). Framing contests occur when a strategic frame encounters other frames that present other problem definitions, causal interpretations, moral evaluations, and/or recommendations. For instance, a mass shooting could be framed as a pointless loss of life suggesting the need for more restrictive firearm regulations; as a direct consequence of violent video games; or as an unforeseeable tragedy caused by mental illness (Guggenheim et al., 2015).

As political actors routinely engage in in framing contests (Gamson & Modigliani, 1989; Pan & Kosicki, 2001; Sniderman & Theriault, 2004), their analysis is very informative to those interested in the way power is acquired and maintained in the political realm (Carragee & Roefs, 2004; Vliegenthart & van Zoonen, 2011). Yet, framing contests have not been the focus of much research (Chong & Druckman, 2007a), and our understanding remains limited (for a notable exception, see Detenber, Ho, Ong, & Lim, 2018). Previous research suggests that winners of framing contests tend to be framing experts. Frames designed in accordance with the advice reviewed in the section above stand good chances of becoming “strong frames” able to prevail in the framing contest (Chong & Druckman, 2007a, 2007b). Yet, this is by no means guaranteed, as many have failed despite following similar pieces of advice (see Allern, 2001; Ihlen & Allern, 2008; Ihlen & Nitz, 2008). Actor-related factors such as credibility, status, and resources also play a major role (see above). Furthermore, winning actors are skilled in increasing the frequency to which their frames are featured in communication and thus the chances that they become more salient—i.e., more noticeable—than alternative views (see Entman, 1993).

Framing Coalitions

When it suits their needs, political actors might choose to join forces either tacitly or explicitly. This is what Pan and Kosicki (2001) and Ryan (1991) referred to as strategic alliances. In newer publications, similar efforts are labelled *framing coalitions* (Croteau & Hicks, 2003; Mayer, Brown, &

Morello-Frosch, 2010). Building framing coalitions is a logical extension of the mentioned insight about the need to frame issues as being in the public interest: If something is “truly” in the public interest, it should be possible for the political actor to form a coalition. Coalitions give actors a competitive edge by adding weight to their political demands and increasing the legitimacy of those demands (Baumgartner et al., 2009; Rommetvedt, 2003, 2005). Accomplishing a major (discursive) breakthrough single-handedly is far less likely and far more difficult (Baumgartner et al., 2009). The literature abounds in recounts of instances in which actors were able to reach their goals by joining forces with others. In Norway, for instance, bureaucratic decisions were overturned as the result of pro-asylum NGOs forming coalitions with local communities, editors, politicians, public persons, and celebrities (Ihlen & Thorbjørnsrud, 2014a).

These advantages of building coalitions notwithstanding, it is important to understand how difficult it can be for political actors to find compatible and reliable partners. As different actors are likely to have different ideologies and interests, willingness and ability to compromise are key. The task thus consists of finding commonalities between their individual interests and thus something to bond over. For instance, Mayer et al., (2010) described how labor unions and environmental organizations were equally concerned about health matters, and were able to delineate a collective action frame based on this. Such an approach is reminiscent of Croteau and Hicks’s (2003) call to develop a “consonant frame pyramid” to align the frames of the involved individuals and organizations.

The Consequences of Strategic Framing

Strategic framing can impact audiences (media effects or direct effects), the media coverage (frame building), and political decision makers (policy effects). This section reviews these main areas in which the consequences of strategic framing have been studied.

Frame Building: The Impact on News Coverage

Frame-building research denotes attempts to uncover the factors that influence the frames used by journalists in their news stories—such as organizational pressures, ideology, and advocacy frames (Hänggeli, 2012; Lengauer & Höller, 2013; see for a review Dan, 2018a). The ultimate success in media relations is when the media adopts an advocacy frame that helps further the organization’s interests (Ihlen & Nitz, 2008). To date, researchers have largely neglected the building actions behind news frames, so that our knowledge about the extent to which news frames stem from journalists’ views (as opposed to being pilot-operated by strategic actors) remains limited (see also Brüggemann, 2014; Reese, 2007).

Despite the limited scholarship available, two main findings can be regarded as established. First, a strong association between journalists' reliance on news sources and their use of both verbal (Dimitrova & Strömbäck, 2012) and visual frames (Dan, 2018a) exists. For instance, Dimitrova and Strömbäck (2012) found that, in election news in Sweden and the U.S., the strategic game frame was associated with the use of campaign operatives and media analysts as news sources. By contrast, issue framing was related with the use of ordinary citizens, while conflict framing was linked to domestic political actors.

A second key take-away from frame-building research stems from the work of scholars who compared advocacy frames to news frames in the same study. They generally found a high degree of overlap—once again both in the verbal (Callaghan & Schnell, 2001) and the visual (Grabe & Bucy, 2009) stream of information. To illustrate, Grabe and Bucy (2009) contrasted the strategically crafted images of politicians with their news coverage and found many similarities between the “visual frames orchestrated by image handlers” and visual news frames (Grabe & Bucy, 2009, p. 128). Similarly, Fröhlich and Rüdiger (2006) found that frames in the German news coverage of immigration were associated with those advanced by political actors. Yet, just like Callaghan and Schnell (2001), the findings of Fröhlich and Rüdiger (2006) suggest that journalists actively co-constructed the frames transmitted to audiences.

The building processes behind news frames are also illustrated in Figure 7.1 using arrows running from the left-hand side of the figure to its center (see frames 3 and 4). They illustrate advocacy frames picked up by journalists. At the center of Figure 7.1, we also accounted for factors influencing news frames other than advocacy frames and news sources, including journalists' views (frame 6) and views in newsrooms (frame 5).² Finally, given the possibility to build news frames through words and visuals, we accounted for the possibility that news texts convey different frames than news visuals (see frames 4 and 7). This is quite characteristic for views often reprimanded when verbally stated that may remain under the radar when expressed visually (e.g., racism).

Media Effects and Direct Effects: The Impact on Audiences

Framing-effects research seeks to unveil how differences in what aspects of an issue are selected for presentation and emphasized impact the way people think, feel, and (intend to) behave. In Figure 7.1, audience frames, also known as individual frames, are located on the right-hand side. The figure illustrates not just the process by which frames flow from political actors to the media (frame building, discussed above), but also how, from there on, they are passed on to the public. This two-step process was also illustrated in Entman's (2003, 2004) cascading activation model. In Figure 7.1, we expand this model to include not just audience

effects caused by strategic communication detouring through news (frames 3 and 4), but also effects that stem directly from strategic communication (frame 2) and news, respectively (frames 6 and 7). The frames citizens accept likely referenced ideas, values, and norms that resonated with them. Furthermore, for the sake of completeness, Figure 7.1 illustrates that audience frames may be independent of advocacy and news frames. This is the case with effects caused by interpersonal communication, which may differ by group characteristics (frames 8, 9, and 10).

Framing effects are distinct from those yielded by agendas and primes (for a more detailed account see Price & Tewksbury, 1997). As already discussed, framers attempt to link certain ideas, values, and norms with a specific issue. When a framing effect occurs, audiences accept these cultural references as applicable to that issue, and use them to sort their thoughts and feelings. For instance, they could deem xenophobia or rather humanitarianism as applicable to the issue of irregular migration. For this reason, a framing effect can be understood as an *applicability effect*. By contrast, an agenda-setting effect deals with a transfer of importance of topics and/or topics' attributes from the media to the public (McCombs & Shaw, 1972; Weaver, 2008). Hence, this effect is best described as an *accessibility effect*: By increasing the frequency and the number of stories on certain (aspects of) issues, the media bring the issues/aspects to the top of one's head (i.e., makes them more accessible) and increase the chances that they are considered in subsequent processing. Finally, a priming effect occurs when the fact that certain considerations are presented causes citizens to take them into account when processing a piece of information; as such, a priming effect is also an accessibility effect. It is thought to precede a framing effect, and may be prepared by an agenda-setting effect (Entman, 2007; Scheufele & Iyengar, 2017).

At least in the political realm, a framing effect is caused both by differences in how the same piece of information is presented (e.g., 70 survived vs. 30 died; *equivalence framing*) and by differences in the specific considerations presented (e.g., cost vs. humanitarianism; *emphasis framing*). While we appreciate some scholars' efforts to bring clarity to framing-effects research by suggesting a sole focus on equivalence framing (Cacciatore, Scheufele, & Iyengar, 2015; Scheufele & Iyengar, 2017), we deem this as too reductionist and instead embrace scholars' tendency to concentrate their efforts on emphasis framing.

Effects studies strongly suggest that framing effects exist. They have been found on a number of issues including war (Allen, O'Loughlin, Jasperson, & Sullivan, 1994; Brantner, Lobinger, & Wetzstein, 2011; Powell, Boomgaarden, De Swert, & de Vreese, 2015) and financial matters (Abdel-Raheem, 2017; Jasperson, Shah, Watts, Faber, & Fan, 1998; Price, Tewksbury, & Powers, 1997), using mostly verbal, but also verbal-and-visual stimuli.

Framing effects include effects on thoughts, feelings, and behavior/behavioral intentions such as voting decisions. Despite this clear tendency, it would be superficial to assume that frames necessarily yield the desired effects. Citizens are not blank slates waiting to be scribbled on. They may well mix-and-match components of the frames they are exposed to and form their own opinions (Edy & Meirick, 2007). Exposure to framing contests can lead framing effects to be overruled by whatever frame was presented last (Lecheler & de Vreese, 2016) and/or bring people to dismiss the frames sent their way and stick to their initial beliefs (Druckman & Nelson, 2003; Sniderman & Theriault, 2004). Furthermore, framing effects are often diminished by higher levels of political knowledge (Chong & Druckman, 2007a; Lecheler & de Vreese, 2010), higher issue salience (Lecheler & de Vreese, 2016), and the existence of strong opinions prior to exposure to the message (Brewer, 2003; Price, Nir, & Capella, 2005). Notwithstanding these restrictions, scholars have found that—when they occur—framing effects tend to persist in time,³ especially for frames that are negatively valenced (Lecheler & de Vreese, 2016).

Policy Effects: The Impact on Political Decision Making

Lobbyists operating for a certain organization can engage in the act of framing either individually or together with fellow lobbyists from other organizations sharing a common goal. Alternatively, lobbyists can work against each other (see above section on framing contests and framing coalitions). Combined with politicians' media use, this leads to a situation where decision makers are exposed to competing frames on many of the issues they deal with. While this characterization of framing in political decision making seems plausible to us, only a little empirical evidence is available (see Baumgartner & Mahoney, 2008).

Scholars are only rarely given the opportunity to look into the black box of lobbying efforts. Only very few studies to date investigate how lobbyists choose and articulate their frames; our knowledge about processes of coalition building and frame contestation in the lobbying sector is equally limited (Boräng, et al., 2014; Klüver, Mahoney, & Opper, 2015). Even though some studies could show which frames are typically used under specific conditions, we still have little knowledge about “which frames are successful advocacy tools and which frames are more influential than others” (De Bruycker, 2017, p. 780). Furthermore, linking framing strategies of individual groups to the macro-level of policy debates has proved to be very difficult (Baumgartner & Mahoney, 2008; De Bruycker, 2017).

Despite these limitations, interest group research has made progress in an area in which framing research generally falls short: that of measuring success. We are now one step closer to understanding how successful interest groups are “in attempting to redefine debates, and how their own

opponents react when they see a rival's efforts to reframe the debate" (Baumgartner et al., 2009, p. 122), and answering Reese's (2018) call to find "a way of keeping score in framing 'contests'" (p. xv). In interest group research, this is accomplished by comparing the congruence between lobbyists' frames with those conveyed by politicians (Boräng & Naurin, 2015; see also Helboe Pedersen, 2013; Klüver & Mahoney, 2015). This is reminiscent of some scholars' approach to frame building research, where advocacy frames are compared to news frames, as described above.

Existing scholarship suggests that policy effects are minimal and seldom. Baumgartner, et al. (2009), for instance, found that lobbyists had "little if any control over the definition of the problem at hand" (p. 185) and that only four of the 98 issues they studied had undergone some degree of reframing over the course of four years. This suggests that "limits to individual efforts in reframing debates successfully" exist (Baumgartner & Mahoney, 2008, p. 444). First, competing frames can arise from events and circumstances outside the field of influence of lobbyists—such as in the aftermath of "stochastic events, crises, scientific advance and new discoveries" or be caused by "social cascade effects within policy communities" (Baumgartner & Mahoney, 2008, p. 436). Second, in order to prevent appearing manipulative or too strategic, most lobbyists employ framing sparingly in the sense that they tend to pick a frame and stick to it for any given issue (Baumgartner & Mahoney, 2008). In the end, lobbyists argue, this strategy pays off, or more so than jeopardizing one's credibility by using different frames for different politicians/targets. The implication is that "some debates are actually highly structured with little room for framing" (Baumgartner & Mahoney, 2008, p. 443). However, reframing or winning framing contests is not necessarily a precondition for lobbying success, as matters on which lobbyists work are not always salient and part of a vibrant public debate. Thus, identifying framing effects in areas belonging to "silent politics" may not be possible. In these instances, case studies and process tracing might be the best way "to shed light on the mechanisms that contribute to policy change" (Voltolini & Eising, 2017, p. 354).

Conclusion

In this chapter, we offered a review and critical assessment of strategic framing in the political realm. We began by introducing readers to framing theory in general and strategic framing in particular. We defined frames in the emphasis–tradition—represented by the work of Entman and Reese—as differences in the considerations selected and emphasized in communication. Our definition of strategic framing—inspired by Hallahan, Strömbäck, and Esser—evolved around the deliberate articulation and use of frames in an attempt to influence the audience, the media, and ultimately policy to the interest of an organization.

Then, we reviewed the skills able to turn a political actor into a framing expert. In doing so, we cautioned that framing skills cannot fully compensate for actor-bound shortcomings—such as low credibility, low status, and low resources—at least not long term. We then reviewed the two main ways in which political actors interact with others when engaging in the act of framing (framing coalitions vs. framing contests), as well as the benefits and pitfalls associated with each of these options. Finally, we addressed the consequences of strategic framing on the audience, on the media, and on policy.

Here, we discuss avenues for future research and some practical implications. The research reviewed in this chapter clearly suggests that scholarly investigations of strategic framing can produce interesting results enabling a better understanding of the practice of political public relations, and of matters related to power and democracy. Moving forward, we would like to see a growing number of empirical studies on strategic framing. We would particularly welcome studies dissociating themselves from the media-centrism (Schlesinger, 1990) that has become so typical of current framing research. Limiting investigations of strategic framing to frames in the news means focusing on actors who have already won and potentially—without an analysis of the efforts of unsuccessful actors—drawing precipitate conclusions about what constitutes framing expertise and about its impact. Ideally then, future studies would choose input-output designs or, at the very least, record the sources associated with advocacy frames in the news. Relatedly, we would like to see experiments exposing study participants to realistic stimuli containing both framing contests and framing coalitions, as opposed to just one frame left unquestioned per experimental condition. Ideally, stimuli would be drawn from real-life situations, and experiments would be informed by content analyses. Progressively, research done in this spirit should get us closer to studying the framing process in full (see Figure 7.1). Furthermore, in content analyses and experiments, we would like to see an increased acknowledgment of verbal and visual means to articulate frames (Dan, 2018a; Scheufele & Iyengar, 2017). Lastly, we believe that the changed dynamic created by social media begs a reconsideration of strategic framing: To what extent do direct audience effects actually occur? And, is there any indication that Entman's cascading activation model is crumbling under the pressure of activists making strategic use of social media?

From a practical perspective, we hope that the insights gathered here will be deemed helpful by practitioners new to framing, and expect to see an increased proliferation of visuals in strategic framing and dog-whistle politics. We also hope that practitioners will use the advice given here responsibly, i.e. to persuade rather than to manipulate. The main take-away for political actors is that they should accompany their pursuits of framing expertise by attempts to increase their credibility, status, and resources—as the best skills will not be able to compensate deficits in these

areas. Finally, we hope that practitioners of political public relations will become more willing to grant access to scholars.

Notes

- 1 News values are criteria applied by journalists in deciding whether something is newsworthy or not. By observing news values, framing experts increase the chances that journalists pick up their frames (for comprehensive lists of news values, see Galtung & Ruge, 1965; Harcup & O'Neill, 2001; Harcup & O'Neill, 2017).
- 2 It is important to understand that audiences can exert influence on the way an issue is covered and the way strategic communicators craft their messages; also, the media coverage can impact actors' strategic framing. For clarity purposes, these processes are not illustrated in Figure 7.1. Still, such reverse influences may be responsible for frame changing in time (Chyi & McCombs, 2004).
- 3 From a theoretical perspective, this suggests that longitudinal studies are the appropriate design for recording framing as opposed to merely priming effects (Tewksbury & Scheufele, 2009) and acknowledging the relatively stable nature of frames (see Chyi & McCombs, 2004).

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8 Government Communication and Political Public Relations

Karen Sanders

A week may be a long time in politics, as British prime minister Harold Wilson observed in the 1960s. Eight years is an age for political public relations practice and research in the contemporary context of political turbulence and technological change. Revisiting an earlier overview and analysis of government communication and political public relations (Sanders, 2011), much has changed both in terms of practice and scholarship. Among other things, the triumph of populist leaders, causes and governments across the world, notably the 2016 election of Donald Trump and the victory of Brexit in the British referendum of the same year, point toward a deep citizen disengagement from mainstream politics and governments. And yet research shows that communication by governments is not only key for all kind of practical reasons but can also contribute to enhancing intangible values such as trust and legitimacy, which are necessary for healthy democracies (Kettl, 2017; Kim & Krishna, 2018). In this chapter, after defining government communication, I will bring up to date research in the field, examining how the topic has developed over time and across disciplines. I will also explore the main areas of development of 21st century government communication and point to key challenges and questions for research in the area.

Defining Government Communication

To discuss the relationship between political public relationship and government communication, a useful starting point is Strömbäck and Kiouisis' definition of political public relations. According to them, political public relations should be understood as

the management process by which an organization or individual for political purposes, through purposeful communication and action, seeks to influence and to establish, build, and maintain beneficial relationships and reputations with its key publics to help support its mission and achieve its goals.

(Strömbäck & Kiouisis, 2011, p. 25)

Government communication, in contrast, has been defined by Canel and Sanders (2012) as the

area of practice and study of that usually managed communication directed to key publics and pursuing both political and civic purposes, carried out by executive politicians and officials working for public institutions with a political rationale. These institutions are constituted on the basis of citizens indirect or direct consent and are charged to enact their will.

Compared to the Strömbäck and Kiouisis' definition of political public relations, this understanding of government communication is more narrowly drawn, focusing on executive communication, and more widely defined as seeking not only *political* but also what can be called *civic* purposes. In other words, there is a distinction between communication undertaken for political purposes and that which is primarily oriented to "overarching government obligations in relation to the common civic good" (Sanders, 2011, p. 266; Sanders & Canel, 2014). This idea of government obligations to the civic good is expressed, for example, in the explanation given by the British Government Communication Service of the key purposes of government communication as (2017, p. 10):

- Fulfilling legal requirements e.g. giving factual information about a referendum.
- Explaining government policy.
- Enabling effective operation of citizens' services e.g. reminders of the deadline for tax returns.
- Encouraging behavioral change for individual and social benefit e.g. Stop smoking campaigns.
- Communicating during crises for public information and well-being.
- Supporting government policy and aims with international stakeholders.
- Providing strategic advice to engage, inform and motivate staff.

In order to try to ensure that civic or public good rather than political interest is the main focus of government communication, the UK Civil Service's Propriety Guidance also states that all government communications should be (Government Communication Plan, 18/19, p. 8):

- Relevant to government responsibilities.
- Objective and explanatory.
- Conducted in an economic and appropriate way.
- Always a justifiable expenditure of public funds.
- Not liable to being misinterpreted as party political.

However, it would be naïve to believe that government communication can pursue civic goals in a way fully divorced from its specific structural

contingencies, which include the political environment in which it operates. We can point to at least four characteristics of these which distinguish government communication from communication in other sectors (see also Strömbäck & Kiouisis, 2013, for a discussion about how politics and political contexts differ from other domains and contexts in which public relations is practiced).

First, public sector communication and, in particular, government communication, operates in a political environment in which politicians allocate resources, determine goals and choose political communication personnel who interact with and influence their public servant peers. Heads of communication, for example, may be appointed on the basis of partisan rather than professional criteria. Communication budgets may grow as elections approach.

Second, compared to the private sector, the public sector in which government communication is located is characterized by greater complexity (see Graber, 2003, pp. 3–18). It is more constrained by legal and regulatory frameworks and there is more volatility in terms of goals, needs, audiences and resources.

Third, the organizational and/or institutional setting for most government communication is public in the sense that it is directed to external audiences and played out partly in the mediated space of appearance, with important implications for the operational conditions for communication (Liu & Horsley, 2007, p. 378). This means communicators are held to particularly demanding standards of public and media accountability, as compared to those from the private sector.

Fourth and finally, government communication is multilayered, taking place in political executive institutions at the international, national, regional and local levels to multiple stakeholders from multiple agencies engaged in activities as diverse as teacher recruitment campaigns to strategic public diplomacy employing soft power tactics.

Public sector workers in a more general sense are thus working in an environment which Van der Wal (2017) has characterized as volatile, uncertain, complex and ambiguous (known by the acronym “VUCA”). He points to a number of global trends which have created a highly dynamic operating environment for the public sector, including rapid technical advancement in digital technology and the development of social media and big data. These changes, in turn, reinforce and boost demands for transparency while also stoking concerns about Big Brother government. I will examine what this implies for government communicators, but first I will briefly summarize the approaches taken to the study of government communication in the early 21st century.

Multidisciplinary Perspectives for the Study and Understanding of Government Communication

Strömbäck’s and Kiouisis’ definition of political public relations draws on a review chiefly of the political communication and public relations literature,

contributing to the beginning of a conversation spanning communication and cognate disciplines (see Pfau, 2008). My earlier analysis on government communication management identified this as an area of research where little cross-fertilization of ideas had taken place (Sanders, 2011, p. 254). Key concepts, including that of government communication itself, had not been clearly defined, and there was a lack of empirical data and theoretical development. Government communication as such was rarely examined by communication disciplines, including political communication, public relations, marketing, organizational communication and public administration studies. As we shall see, there has since been some advance in government communication scholarship, but it still remains a somewhat undeveloped area of communication research.

Contributions from Political Communication Research

In terms of political communication research, scholars in this area interested in political actors' communication tend to focus on campaign communication and, when examining government communication, take what I have described as a "West Wing approach" (Sanders, 2011, p. 257 and see below). This approach is defined by three characteristics. First, government communication research in political communication has focused mainly on the chief executive (presidential/prime ministerial) communication strategies. Based on the premise that US presidential power, for example, lies chiefly in the power to persuade (Neustadt, 1960), scholars have examined the effectiveness of presidential communication in reaching and influencing target audiences as evidenced by speeches and organizational capacity (Edwards, 2009; Esbaugh-Soha, 2011). More recently, a focus on chief executive use of social media (Mazzoleni & Bracchiale, 2018) and particularly, Trump's use of Twitter (Ott, 2017), has fed into the burgeoning scholarly interest in populist communication (Aalberg et al., 2017), conceptualized by Moffitt, 2017, p. 7) as a particular "political style" understood as:

the repertoires of embodied, symbolically mediated performance made to audiences that are used to create and navigate the fields of power that comprise the political, stretching from the domain of government through to everyday life.

Second, much political communication research has emphasized government communication's strategic purpose, understood as ensuring that the incumbent party and leader influence target audiences to gain support with a view to future electoral success. Government is conceptualized as a permanent campaign. Third, and linked to this second characteristic, researchers have been concerned to understand government communication in the context of, and in response to, highly mediated environments

where governments seek to set agendas and frame messages (see Canel & Sanders, 2012). The mediatization of politics and government became a major theme of political communication from the 1980s onwards (Esser & Strömbäck, 2014), although the concept has come under critical scrutiny from media and political communication scholars (Deacon & Stanyer, 2014; Lunt & Livingstone, 2016). Previously, the focus had been placed on how governments and politicians use mass media for propaganda purposes, especially during times of war and crisis. Changes in political communication shifted interest to examining how the mass media themselves have become political actors and how their logic of simplification, personalization and sensationalism is allegedly changing the nature of politics (Mazzoleni, 2008). Klinger and Svensson (2015) have since nuanced this analysis to examine the impact of social media platforms on political communication.

Finally, political communication scholarship tends to highlight the normative purposes of government communication, concerned with how communication “performs its civic functions at the center of social and political life, and also to point the way toward shaping communication to better serve democratic processes” (Swanson, 2000, p. 200). It focuses on power: who has it; who doesn’t. The adversarial and competitive nature of communication relationships is stressed, particularly with respect to the media. In other words, in relation to the study of government communication, political communication research ensures that the issue of power is kept firmly in view, illuminating the *politics* of government communication, through addressing issues of structural, symbolic and institutional power and the charting of the development of strategic communication at the service of governments. The overwhelming emphasis on chief executives’ relations with the media has meant that governments’ key audience – the public(s) – has been under-researched, and political communication research has often seemed to reflect an intellectual pessimism about the possibility of creating the conditions for civic conversation in contemporary media democracies (Sanders, 2009, pp. 229–233). The advent of social media may be changing this view. Researching US local government, Avery and Graham (2013) find signs that social media are contributing to more transparent and participatory government. However, other research examining UK central government communication points to a “shift in the relationship between government, media and citizens whereby social media is enabling governments to become news providers, bypassing the ‘prism of the media’ and going direct to citizens” (Garland, Tambini & Couldry, 2018, p. 496), bringing with it possible risks for “government accountability, transparency and efficacy” (p. 508).

Contributions from Public Relations and Marketing

Research from the fields of public relations and marketing has been heavily oriented to the commercial sector, and this remains the case. Both fields

place the accent more on understanding communication's role in building beneficial, enduring relationships with diverse publics (see, for instance, Ledingham, 2011) and on creating organizational reputations to win competitive market advantage (see Van Riel & Fombrun, 2007). Relationship management theory places publics at the center of analytical frameworks in a way that is not always the case in political communication research. It allows government communication to be conceived of as the cultivation of long-term relationships oriented to developing specific relationship dimensions. This is the approach adopted, for instance, in public diplomacy's conceptualization of government communication (Signitzer & Wamser, 2006).

Relationship management theory is linked to a two-way model of communication, exemplified by the symmetrical/excellence model of public relations (Grunig & Hunt, 1984) that has provided one of the major theoretical frameworks for public relations scholarship over the last 40 years. It suggests that longer-term mutual understanding rather than just short-term electoral or strategic gain may be a helpful way of analyzing government communication management. Building long-term relationships, mutual understanding and citizen engagement become part of what is understood to be government communication. Understanding how they are helped or hindered part of the research agenda.

Until recently, as has been the case for political communication research, public relations and political marketing scholars have largely centered on election campaigns (Lees-Marshment, Strömbäck & Rudd, 2010), with some attention being paid to political parties (Strömbäck, Mitrook & Kioussis, 2010; Scammell, 2014). However, in the last 10 years, there has been a clear drive in governments across the world to professionalize communication services, leading to a greater engagement of communication academics with government communication practitioners (see Sanders & Canel, 2014). The Sharjah United Arab Emirates government, for example, in 2011 established the International Government Communication Forum to bring together researchers and practitioners. In 2018, the discussion agenda included the latest research regarding artificial intelligence (AI) as the key to the future of government communication, the role of open data in the light of private sector dominance, the issue of female leadership in government communication, and the need to build digital skills across the community.

In 2014, the UK Government Communication Service (GCS) was established, and communication was recognized as one of the four levers of government together with legislation, regulation and taxation. The GCS, and its predecessors, has worked intensively with British academics and the private sector to create a more professionalized approach to government communication training and practice, creating competence frameworks, clear career progression routes and bespoke university communication programs (Gregory, 2006, 2012). The purpose has been to

provide expertise in the field of insights (applied research), creativity, implementation and impact (Government Communication Service, April 2013). The GCS has also been in demand from overseas governments to provide advice on communication capacity and development. This led to the establishment of a unit tasked to advise countries considered to be strategically significant for the UK, such as Oman and Jordan (director of communication, UK ministerial department, personal communication, 20 June 2016; Muscatdaily.com, 23 November 2017).

Organizational and Public Administration Studies

In the field of organizational communication, Graber pointed to the need for communication to be brought into the management functions and processes of public sector organizations, calling for “major studies and experiments in public-sector organizational communication” as a research priority (2003, p. 276). This has yet to materialize in a systematic way. There are, however, areas of organizational research which are being mined for their insights into how to improve public sector communication. One such area is the applicability of the operating principles of high reliability organizations to public sector communication (Sanders & De la Viesca, 2020).

Public administration research, focused on public sector organizational issues, the analysis of public policy implementation and the building of public value (Moore, 1995), has produced very little work in the area of communication (but see Schillemans, 2012). However, this has begun to change with the publication of studies centered on the public sector which aim to explore a range of communication-related research topics, including the communication gaps between the public sector and citizens (see Hong, Park, Lee & Park, 2012; Canel & Luoma-aho, 2018).

One conclusion which can be drawn from this review of government communication research is that academics have not typically worked in a multidisciplinary, interdisciplinary – let alone transdisciplinary – way as has occurred in the best practice of their professional counterparts. Government communication research continues to be an area that is ill-served by the siloed nature of the communication sub-disciplines and the lack of collaboration with other disciplinary areas. Despite some advances (Canel & Luoma-aho, 2018), government communication research continues to be a fragmented area.

21st Century Government Communication

As Van der Wal has detailed (2017), public servants work in dynamic operating environments that are characterized by volatility, uncertainty, complexity and ambiguity (VUCA). These conditions demand new skillsets and approaches. In the case of public sector communicators, social media literacy, knowledge

about stakeholder engagement and data analytical skills are now key competences. Extreme connectivity and the exponential increase in data and information drive citizens' expectations which, in turn, produce greater demands for transparency, participation and responsiveness. Yet, at the same time, governments are faced by the challenges of getting the attention of stakeholders, who have so many other calls on their time (see Van der Wal, 2017, p. 79). They are also faced with the challenge of gaining a reputation for reliable and truthful communication (Aitken, 2018) in a context of clickbaits and so-called "fake news" and "alternative facts" (D'Ancona, 2016). In this section, I will examine the state of play in the following key areas for 21st century government communication, and see how practitioners are drawing on a wide range of disciplines to develop best practices:

- Digital and social media
- Listening and response
- Behavioural insights
- Measuring impact
- Professionalization and professionalism.

Digital and Social Media

The development of governments' digital capacity and expertise has been key for improving public services, allowing greater ease in, for example, filling out tax returns or applying for a driving license. Since 2001, the growth in e-government has been surveyed annually across the world by the United Nations, allowing them to establish the E-Government Development Index (EGDI), a weighted average of normalized scores relating to three dimensions. These dimensions are human capital, the scope and quality of online services, and the state of the telecommunication infrastructure (see UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs, 2018). The 2018 survey results chart a global trend to ever greater e-government development with Denmark, Australia and the Republic of Korea leading the world in providing government services and information through the internet, followed by the United Kingdom, Sweden, Finland, Singapore, New Zealand, France and Japan (UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs, 2018, p. xxv). However, the 2018 results also show the persistence of e-government and digital divides, with less developed countries featuring heavily in the Low-EDGI group.

The UN survey also provides an E-Participation Index (EPI) (see Table 8.1). There was progress in e-participation development in all regions. Comparing the results from 2016 and 2018, the number of countries with a very-high EPI level – implying provision of online information, consultation facilities and empowerment of citizen participation – doubled from 31 to 62, although citizen participation was the least developed dimension of the index (UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs, 2018, p. 125).

Table 8.1 The E-Participation Framework

- E-information: Enabling participation by providing citizens with public information and access to information without or upon demand
- E-consultation: Engaging citizens in contributions to and deliberation on public policies and services
- E-decision-making: Empowering citizens through co-design of policy options and co-production of service components and delivery modalities.

Source: UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs, 2018.

Digital and social media can, within the right institutional frameworks, improve transparency and accountability and allow governments to become more citizen-centric (UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs, 2018, p. 5). However, in order for this to take place, the authors of the 2018 UN survey argue for the need of a shift from “inward, disjointed and process-oriented organizational structures” that characterize government bureaucracies “to highly collaborative frameworks for seamless delivery of services and enhanced development impact” (p. 5).

Social media – defined as Web 2.0 internet applications, fueled by user content and anchored by user profiles that allow the creation of social networks (see Obar & Wildman, 2015) – can be facilitators of listening as well as collaborative and responsive government organizational cultures, with the potential to enhance all aspects of government communication (see Figure 8.1 below), thereby contributing to greater citizen trust

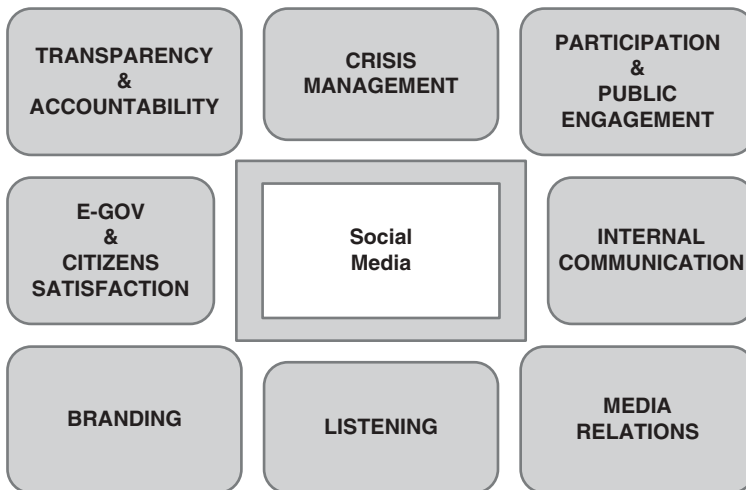


Figure 8.1 Social Media and Government Communication

Source: Valenti and Lovari (2020)

(Porumbescu, 2016). As Valentini and Lovari put it (2020), “social media offer PSOs [public sector organizations] a new environment for informing directly, being more transparent – within the limits of what it is possible to disclose – and accountable to public opinion and the media.” Social media can also be employed to develop government services through co-production between government and citizens (Mergel, 2015) and allow governments to supply citizens with accurate information in a timely manner. This is particularly important at times of crises and disasters (see Graham, Avery & Park, 2015).

The timeline and the nature of the adoption of social media for government communication depend on socio-economic, regulatory, cultural and political factors (Mergel, 2012, 2013), which means there is significant variance among countries, government departments, and agencies. Studies of social media use by embassies based in Madrid, for example, show huge variance between countries and ambassadors (Sanders, 16 April 2018). In 2016, only 75% of the 150 countries with delegations in Spain had a website, 36% had a Facebook profile and 23% a Twitter profile, up from 17% the previous year. Only 11 countries regularly updated online communication and communicated in a way that was interactive, going beyond pure information provision.

However, as the UK diplomat Tom Fletcher (2017) has pointed out, social media have changed the rules of the communication game for politicians and public servants. Citizens have become used to fast-moving, conversational and interactive modes of communication. When former British prime minister, David Cameron, announced the prime minister’s award for clarity, he stated (2015), “honesty, integrity and humanity need to be accompanied by effective communication,” necessary to provide excellent public service. He added: “All our communications with the public should be human, clear, simple, helpful and professional. This means explaining complexity in everyday terms and translating jargon into simple English. If we can’t do that, we won’t communicate.”

The advent of social media has disintermediated communication and contributed to a hybrid media landscape (Chadwick, 2013). The consequences are that any public servant or citizen can be a communicator with significant implications for communication expertise, capacity and protocols within government and for relationships with citizens. A qualitative survey and interviews (WPP, 2017, p. 3) with government communicators and leaders from 29 countries found that they considered digital and social media to have contributed to loosening “governments’ historical and collective ‘grip’ on trust.” Their role as information providers had been transformed, as social media flattened and democratized communication flows, providing more channels to engage citizens but at the same time, fragmenting audiences and “enabling misinformation to be corroborated by anonymous users and politicians alike, and at ever increasing speeds.”

Listening and Response

Managing and dealing with the world of interaction opened up by digital media can be quite an overwhelming prospect for communicators. Some government departments receive thousands of communications every year (Macnamara, 2016), while social media are changing public expectations as to what they consider to be acceptable response times.

Government responsiveness to complaints is a little researched area. The limited data available suggests that there is room for considerable improvement (Macnamara, 2016, p. 63). Looking at British data, for example, the Parliamentary and Health Service Ombudsman reported that 34% of upheld citizen complaints were about complaint handling and concluded “there is more public organisations need to do to improve people’s experience of making a complaint” (Parliamentary and Health Service Ombudsman, 2016, p. 2).

Macnamara’s work (2015) on organizational listening and responsiveness shows similar trends across the corporate and public sectors: around 80% of resource dedicated to communication activity is directed towards “speaking” and only 20% to listening. Listening, however, can bring clear benefits for better government, and Macnamara (2016) makes a strong case for organizations to adopt what he terms an “architecture of listening” made up of a) a culture of listening; b) policies for listening; c) addressing the politics of listening; d) structures and processes for listening; e) technologies for listening; f) resources for listening; g) skills for listening; and h) articulation of listening decision-making and policy making (2016, pp. 245–293). However, Macnamara also concludes that listening “does not appear in the job descriptions of senior corporate and government communication roles” (2016, p. 274), nor does it appear in the UK Government Communication Service’s list of the key purposes of government communication (see above).

Using Behavioral Insights

Based on research in the area of psychology and behavioral economics by scientists such as Daniel Kahneman and Amos Tversky, and harnessing the power of digital technology and big data, the “nudge” approach to communication and policy development was pioneered in the Obama administration by Thaler and Sunstein (2008) and later introduced into the UK. The Behavioural Insights Team, otherwise known as the “Nudge Unit,” was set up in 2010 by the UK coalition government and then part privatized in 2013 as a mutual joint venture with the government (Halpern, 2016). Its purpose is to apply insights from research in behavioral economics and psychology to the delivery of public services and government campaigns in areas as diverse as encouraging organ donations and signing up to pension plans.

The commercial world has long used market testing and consumer research to inform its approach to branding and product development. Care for details in packaging, design and choice architecture on websites is normal practice for marketers and communicators in the corporate sector. However, understanding the impact of small tweaks to communication – such as changing the wording of letters requesting overdue tax returns, or using a simplified graphic (a plate instead of a pyramid) to illustrate healthy eating (Halpern, 2016, p. 41) – has not been normal practice for government communicators. Behavioral science has brought to government communicators and policy makers knowledge about how people process information and how they make decisions, a more complex activity than rational choice economic theorists have classically maintained. Cognitive shortcuts or biases, how information is framed for example, significantly affect what choices we make (see Kahneman, 2012).

The introduction of behavioral science together with its use of experimental methods to test different approaches to what might work best in government campaigns have become increasingly integral to how governments go about their communication and policy work. Singapore and Australia, following the US and the UK, have developed capacity in this area and nudge units are also being developed across Europe and the Middle East.

Measuring Impact

Developing knowledge and practice of the behavioral sciences, together with the financial constraints post-2008 in many western governments, have contributed to an increased awareness that evaluation of outcomes (measurable changes in opinion, attitudes or behavior) rather than outputs (what is physically produced) is a key part of government communication practice (Government Communication Service, 2017). Effective evaluation starts with having very clear communication and, therefore, organizational objectives. Thus, it contributes to positioning communication at the heart of policy formation and management. Evaluation also allows government communicators to make credible arguments about return on investment in communication, a principal concern for all organizations but a critical one for public sector organizations who are having to juggle public spending priorities.

The Barcelona Principles (2.0) – updated in 2015 – represent the communication industry's own articulation of the professional standards that should be applied in communication evaluation as championed by the AMEC, the International Association for Measurement and Evaluation of Communication, the global trade body and professional institute for agencies and practitioners who provide media measurement, evaluation and communication research (AMEC, 2016). Since 2015, the AMEC has campaigned for the industry to end its use of the fundamentally flawed but

traditionally used evaluation tool known as “Advertising Value Equivalent” (AVE), a way of measuring the value of media coverage by calculating how much it would be worth as paid advertising. Devising more rigorous methods of measuring communication value is challenging, but key to establishing government communication’s legitimacy at the heart of government work.

Professionalization and Professional Communication

One enduring theme in the communication literature is that of the “professionalization” of communication. From the political communication perspective, professionalization has sometimes (Hamelink, 2007), albeit far from always (Negrine, 2008), been cast in a negative light. For critics, the role of expert communicators and the introduction of the marketing concept into political communication have impacted negatively on democratic politics, creating manipulated, bystander publics.

However, considering government communication from a management approach, as public relations scholars have done using the strategic planning and quality management literature (Gregory, 2006; Vos, 2006),¹ can help in the development of an analytical framework and set of indicators for measuring professionalization, or rather “professionalism,” in a way that allows greater conceptual precision, rigorous operationalization, and normative clarity.

Looking at the practice of government communication, studies show (Sanders & Canel, 2014) that governments across the world are, on the whole, moving towards greater professionalization: there is more planning, research and measurement and development of digital capacity being built into departmental structures. Knowledge, skills and training are becoming more systematized. However, there is still considerable work to be done. The WPP report on the future of government communication (2017, p. 3) found that there was a shared perception by government communicators that “communication is poorly understood and under-utilised within government,” and that “sharing of best practice and expertise across countries is largely absent.” Basic data about what defines a government communicator and what constitutes communication spending were absent in many countries, and there continue to be diverse understandings of what professionalism means in government communication (Sanders & Canel, 2014).

Professional government communication requires the identification of a knowledge domain and of appropriate competences and skills. Truly “professional” communication also entails the establishment of normative standards, which raises the question of what we mean by *good* government communication. Scammell (2014) asks this same question with regard to what constitutes a good political election campaign. She suggests that it could be assessed by examining what she describes as its “civic dimensions,”

including whether it increases political knowledge and mobilization, improves the quality of the information provided and promotes a sense of political efficacy. Looking at some of these dimensions, it can be argued that there are campaigns, such as the 2016 campaign leading to the referendum on Scottish independence, which are good campaigns in a civic sense, and those that are not. The UK 2016 Brexit referendum campaign might be considered an example of the latter.

In a similar way, professional government communication would require an understanding of the normative dimensions and criteria that should be fulfilled. Basic requirements might include the provision of information that is reliable, clear and accurate in the context of institutional norms of public service. Understanding what this means for government communicators is a key challenge in an environment where research shows that intense mediatization can work against public sector norms such as impartiality (Garland, Tambini & Couldry, 2018), producing what Salomonsen, Frandsen and Johansen (2016) have described as functional politicization.

Challenges for Government Communication Research and Practice

This review of scholarship and practice in the area of government communication suggests that there are a number of key challenges for the future. I will focus on three.

Nailing the Data

In a previous analysis, one of my arguments was that “A major challenge for researchers, policy makers and government officials is to define and collect relevant data related to government communication” (Sanders & Canel, 2014, p. 308). The WPP study (2017) confirms that the challenge remains current. Without basic, comparable data about government communication management across the world, how it is organized, its institutional and regulatory contexts, resources and content, we will continue to have difficulties in creating adequate theoretical frameworks for government communication research. Therefore, there is still work to be done to chart the diverse levels at which government communication takes place, including national or federal, regional and local levels; to examine the relationships between these levels, taking into account variables such as legal contexts and electoral and political systems. We also need data to examine the diverse communication functions found in government communication including chief executive, policy and organizational communication which comprises, for example, internal or crisis communication (Vos, 2006; Gelders & Ihlen, 2010; Gelders & Øyvind, 2010; Graham, Avery & Park, 2015).

Theory and Methods

In 2011, I highlighted useful approaches to be found in the communication literature for illuminating the study of government communication. These included using relationship theory and its distinctive conceptualization of the public (see Ledingham, 2011); the application of management theory to the communication function, and fresh ideas about performance and its evaluation through applying the concept of reputation to governments. These approaches continue to have value, but I would now argue that we need a more radical re-orientating of the theoretical and methodological focus for government communication research to be a more productive area of work.

In 2008, Pfau pointed to the fragmentation and specialization of the communication sub-disciplines. He also suggested (2008, pp. 599–600) that communication scholars principally address what he calls “peripheral” issues, those focused on specific niches such as communication content (economic or health communication, for instance), the structure of communication transactions (for example, interpersonal or political communication) or classes of people (women or ethnic minorities, for example). While interesting and important, the knowledge they produce might, however, be of less wide relevance. Pfau thus argued for research that tackles what he calls “functional issues,” defined as “questions about communication processes or end states” (2008, p. 600), providing knowledge across disciplines.

This discussion points to the need for adopting the practitioners own approach to driving forward professional practice, which involves problem focused, transdisciplinary work. Transdisciplinarity has been defined “as a practice that transgresses and transcends disciplinary boundaries, ... and seems to have the most potential to respond to new demands and imperatives” (Russell, Wickson & Carew, 2008, p. 461). The characteristic features of transdisciplinarity include:

problem focus (research originates from and is contextualized in “real-world” problems), evolving methodology (the research involves iterative, reflective processes that are responsive to the particular questions, settings, and research groupings) and collaboration (including collaboration between transdisciplinary researchers, disciplinary researchers and external actors with interests in the research).

Macnamara’s work on listening (2016) is an excellent example of this kind of research. It focuses attention on performance, and it provides concrete evidence and suggestions for the development of indicators and standards related to key government goals. It is also underlain by a concern with organizational values, and points to the need for more work to be done to understand the role played by training, promotion, recruitment and leadership practices in upholding core values.

Normative Issues

The topic of governments and their policy and communication wrangles has been a notable box office success since the first screening of *The West Wing* in 1999 to its final season in 2006. *The West Wing* brilliantly showed the “rhetorical presidency” (Tulis, 1987) in action and presented a largely heroic view of the aims and practice of the media and of the White House press spokeswoman. Series such as *The Thick of It* (2005–2012), with its Department of Social Affairs and Citizenship, and *House of Cards* (2013–present) show a darker side to political communication, while *Borgen* (2010–2013) sets the familiar entanglements of media and politics in an unfamiliar Danish setting.

A common thread running through all the series are the profound moral issues raised by the exercise of power in a mediatized world. The temptations to manipulate, to deceive and to control citizens are laid bare. These temptations become particularly acute in an environment where big data, AI and digital capacity provide substantial power to governments. The Facebook user–data transfers to Cambridge Analytica, a political data firm hired to provide services during the 2016 US presidential campaign, demonstrated the potential for the manipulation of ordinary citizens who use social media platforms. It also highlighted the risk for government in using platforms such as Twitter and Facebook as engagement tools: there are no guarantees for stakeholders’ privacy or that they will not be deceived or manipulated by misinformation. The “nudge” agenda is also one that is rife with moral hazard, requiring strong mechanisms of accountability, as the founder of the Nudge Unit acknowledges (Halpern, 2016).

Examining the normative issues that necessarily accompany government communication is an attractive and necessary task, and goes to the deeper question of the ultimate purpose of government communication. Research examining, for example, government communication’s contribution to transparent and accountable politics in ways that enhance civic life could be part of the answer to this question, and translate into recommendations about structures, resources, processes and outcomes that are not driven only by managerial imperatives but by normative concerns about the quality of civic life.

Conclusion

In the early part of the 21st century, management of intangibles and, more particularly, of corporate reputation increasingly has become the guiding philosophy of communication departments and public relations research (Van Riel & Fombrun, 2007). Reputation management divorced from a concern with the connection to underlying values is, however, part of the problem perceived by political communication scholars with the

professionalization of government communication. They have instead warned about government communication subverting citizenship through the practice of spin (Barnett & Gaber, 2001). This is a valid and pressing concern in our present context. Without a commitment to certain underlying values, government communication will not serve well citizens and the larger society, however efficiently it is performed. One good example of this might be the Trump administration which, even though fact-checkers repeatedly have found to have made false or misleading statements (see, for example, Politifact, 2018), nevertheless has been successful in securing support from affiliated media and key target groups.

One approach to thinking about the values that could and should underpin the practice of government communication is to take the template of good conversation (Sanders, 2009). Conversation is characterized by four features. First, it is enabled by the principle of cooperation. Conversation is constituted by engaged speakers and listeners who do not simply direct messages to each other in megaphone fashion. A good conversationalist does not use language in a purely instrumental way to achieve her immediate goals. She introduces her counterparts into her world of meaning and listens to them. Understanding this principle in government communication means examining how governments listen and respond to citizens. Expanding Macnamara's work (2016), governments could examine what resources and methods they have for listening and responding and how they train staff and leaders to do so, ensuring that organizational culture is aligned to these goals.

In second place, conversations require distribution of speakers' rights. In good conversations, no one is excluded from the conversation nor does any one speaker dominate. All are given their chance to contribute even if they do not wish to take it. Government communicators could examine who they listen to and whether they are listening to all the relevant stakeholders. This includes their own staff, who can be too often forgotten in communication departments. Thirdly, respect, courtesy even, is the climate of those who converse. The anonymity of social media platforms can be an excuse for unacceptable behavior, and governments should have very clear policies about the boundaries of acceptable communication content for all stakeholders. Finally, conversations require a minimum of trust for interaction to occur at all, and this can be achieved by trust-building practices and policies related to achieving:

- **Transparency:** governments should seek to be open in their communication about past, present and future actions and goals.
- **Reliability:** governments should provide accurate, clear and timely communication.
- **Accessibility:** governments should ensure that all stakeholders have access to communication.

- **Accountability:** governments should ensure that all those engaged in communication respond and are held responsible for what they communicate.

Examining practice and policies in these areas provides fertile ground for researchers. It also contributes to understanding how to enhance the quality of democratic life, one of the most significant challenges facing scholars, citizens, politicians, public servants and leaders in our time.

Note

- 1 The strategic planning approach was used in the establishment of a training and development framework for UK government communicators known as EVOLVE (see Gregory, 2006) and Dutch researchers have formulated instruments inspired by Kaplan and Norton's "balanced scorecard" or the European Foundation for Quality Control to help government organizations to communicate more effectively with their citizens (Vos, 2006, 250).

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9 Political Public Relations and Election Campaigning

Darren Lilleker

Despite an estimated 500 disparate definitions of public relations (Duhé, 2015), theory and research on political public relations lacks similar debate. In fact, thus far there only seem to be two definitions of political public relations. According to the neat and fairly inclusive definition by Jackson (2012, p. 272), “political public relations presents the views of political actors to other political publics in a positive light through the communicative processes of raising awareness, engaging in dialogue and building relationships.” That can be compared to the definition offered by Strömbäck and Kiouisis (2011a, p. 8), according to whom

political public relations is the management process by which an organization or individual actor for political purposes, through purposeful communication and action, seeks to influence and to establish, build, and maintain beneficial relationships and reputations with its key publics to help support its mission and goals.

Comparing these, Jackson’s definition offers a narrower scope, while at the same time highlighting the dual and perhaps bifurcated role public relations plays in politics. On the one hand, the overarching function of political public relations is designed to raise awareness and persuade, while on the other, it is to interact in order to build relationships with stakeholders.

It is around this dichotomy that election campaigning is located within the public relations framework in this chapter. Election campaigns largely focus on political marketing and promotional public relations, while borrowing aspects from the relational paradigm. The chapter firstly sets out Jackson’s public relations functions and their applications, and then aligns these functions to the strategic objectives of election campaigning. The following sections discuss how key concepts and practices identified in the election campaigning literature can be situated and problematized using public relations theory.

Public Relations Functions

Jackson's (2012) schematic charts the core public relations functions and maps them to political communication, a framework in which we can situate election campaigning. Jackson identifies eight core public relations functions. First, *relations with publics*, which includes the identification of key stakeholders and maintenance of relationships through research-led communication. Second, *symmetrical two-way communication*, which includes the location of a win-win zone between an organization and its stakeholders based on the Grunigian paradigm (Grunig, 2009). Third, *hype*, which means gaining attention through media relations or online public relations activities. Fourth, *persuasion*, in essence the crafting and dissemination of messages in order to inform or change attitudes and behavior. Fifth, *relational*, which includes creating combinations of communication and behavior that are intended to build relationships with key influencers. Sixth, *reputation management*, here understood as protecting the image of the brand as both a long and a short-term strategy. Seventh, *relations in public*, which includes taking part in and framing conversations about the brand and encouraging a free-flow of information into the public sphere. Eighth, *community building*, that is, adopting a communitarian approach between the organization and key publics through open dialogue and inclusivity.

Jackson (2012) suggests that the dominant functions for political public relations are persuasion and hype, that is communication from political organizations aiming at gaining attention and influencing attitudes. Some organizations, he acknowledges, also develop relations with publics, engage in reputation management and two-way symmetrical communication. Hence political organizations approach elections by conducting research to inform their communication, targeting key stakeholders, rebutting criticism while framing their policies as having societal benefits and, occasionally, responding to questions and discussing their programs with publics. Jackson posits however that the relational functions, and how corporate organizations use relations in public tools for community building, are under-used. Politics generally, and electioneering specifically, seems to be locked in a marketing public relations paradigm focused on the promotional aspects of communication. This is particularly true of political public relations in the United States and the United Kingdom, as highlighted by Baines (2011). However, both Jackson (2012) and Baines (2011) draw their conclusions based on data gathered in fairly unique electoral systems dominated by a winner takes all, majoritarian paradigm. Casting a wider view of the nature of election campaigning it is clear that electoral systems and other systemic factors matters (Esser & Strömbäck, 2012), and that political public relations functions are used in more diverse ways during election campaigns depending on the political system in which they are deployed.

Understanding Election Campaigns

Election campaigning is a fundamental part of representative democracy (Stoker, 2016), as it allows citizens to understand the choices available to them when deciding who to select to govern the nation, a constituent part of a nation, or to represent the nation at a supranational level, for a set future period. As free competitive elections are central to effective representative democracy, campaigns are equally fundamental for allowing citizens to make an informed choice (Huckfeldt & Sprague, 1995). Election campaigns consist of three important communication functions: parties, their leaders and candidates can (1) defend their own record, (2) criticize the records and proposal of their opponents, and (3) present their own platforms and policies for public consideration.

It is common to view election campaigns as the actions of political parties and candidates who purely focus on securing sufficient votes in order to win executive power. There are, however, myriad parties and candidates who stand with little chance of forming a government. For many parties, the less ambitious aim might be to gain a greater share of power and influence, aiming to have a greater number of representatives elected to sit in the legislative chamber in order to be taken more seriously, and to gain earned media coverage. For many smaller parties across European and other parliamentary democracies, gaining greater numbers of representatives also enhances their chances of being approached to join a coalition, which can increase their proximity to government. Election campaigns can also be used to afford a party greater media attention, enhancing their chances to influence the public agenda and making them more credible in the eyes of citizens. At the most basic level, some candidates stand as independents, or form small parties, purely to gain attention and promote causes as part of a broader strategy for creating or raising awareness. The objectives set for an election contest will determine the use of the differing functions of political public relations.

Campaign Objectives and PR Functions

Public relations functions align in different ways to the objectives the parties have as they enter into an election contest. Below these objectives will first be elaborated upon, and then summarized in Table 9.1.

Securing Victory

Winning an election contest necessitates conducting research among key stakeholders, including but not restricted to sections of the electorate (key publics) whose support the party needs to secure victory (Jackson, 2012). It is then a matter for the party to disseminate key messages to key publics

using the most appropriate means and adhering to the persuasion and hype functions. An election campaign communication strategy designed to win a majority of the votes would normally engage with the whole hypermedia environment (Howard, 2006), encompassing television, newspapers, radio, websites, online news sites, weblogs and social media in order to reach as many citizens as possible. These parties would also have a rapid rebuttal strategy to counter the claims of their opponents and respond to negative arguments or stories generated by journalists. The pattern of behavior followed by parties seeking to win outright is also likely to be followed by parties seeking to secure greater influence in parliament but who are unlikely to be viable coalition partners; right-wing nationalist parties for example are often eschewed as potential coalition partners by more centrist parties. Parties seeking to secure victory or the opportunity to enter a coalition may also seek to secure attention and build credibility, but may lack the resources to conduct stakeholder research. They will hence rely more on holding events and orchestrating pseudo-events to attain media coverage. Trying to be controversial and thereby capture attention on mass and social media can for example be successful, not least for fringe, non-mainstream and populist candidates.

Securing a Coalition Partnership

The parties that seek to enter a coalition must consider their platforms in relation to the larger parties with whom they expect to have a chance of forging an alliance and forming a government. They hence need to understand what potential coalition partners may be looking for and, perhaps, building relationships with those stakeholders while also building relationships with their core support. Formal coalition agreements, as opposed to a supply and demand agreement to support key pieces of legislation, can, however, prove costly for junior partners, which the cases of Germany's Die Grünen after 2005 and the Freie Demokratische Partei after 2009 (Decker & Adorf, 2018) illustrate. Potential junior coalition partners must thus use relational public relations and reputation management tools in order to bridge the demands of their support base with those of potential coalition partners, as well as constantly maintain strong lines of communication.

Secure Influence, Attention, and Credibility

Parties that seek to increase their visibility during contests focus mainly on persuasive communication and the creation of hype around their campaigns. The latter involves media stunts or pseudo-events to grab the attention of journalists and thereby the public. Such tactics may also involve using social media to make controversial or eye-catching statements and circulate compelling visual memes (Bene, 2017). Parties or

actors seeking to influence the influencers (Chadwick, 2017), such as key journalists, must have a compelling and original argument, and their communication must be more targeted and draw on the relations in public toolkit, developing strategies for reaching out to and having dialogue with key actors.

Secure Representation for a Minority Group or Ideology

The parties that diverge most from the persuasion and hype model are those that seek to secure representation for minority groups or ideological positions. These parties tend to be grassroots organizations or parties created to promote the rights of a specific ethnic, religious or social minority, with the purpose being to empower that section of society that previously felt disenfranchised or its voice is threatened (Berry & Wilcox, 2018). Such groups have become increasingly empowered through digital communications, where activist networks can build followings, combine forces and transmute into being an electoral force. One example that demonstrates the potential effectiveness of such a strategy is the transition of Spain's leftist anti-austerity 15M movement to the Podemos party. Dialogue across the movement, conforming to the symmetrical communication paradigm, aids the development of a campaign platform, messages and strategies, and forges a community around the party (Castells, 2015). These public relations functions are prioritized over the more commonly used persuasion and hype functions employed by parties with more contest-specific goals.

Election Campaign and Public Relations Functions

While election campaigning may predominantly rely on the public relations functions of persuasion and hype, there is hence greater nuance in the mix of public relations functions deployed when one considers the objectives of different parties, their respective support bases and the political systems in which they operate. For more controversial populist parties, a reliance on persuasion and hype mixed with strategic rebuttal of criticism can for example be sufficient. Parties with a clear opportunity to secure victory or wishing to become the official opposition might add to this mix the relations with public functions and conduct stakeholder research to craft messages and dissemination strategies. Parties seeking to join coalitions, however, must negotiate relationship building in order to build a bridge between their support bases and the constraints of being a junior partner. The most complex election campaign strategies will be developed by parties whose focus is to provide representation for a group or ideology. These parties need to be open and transparent in communicating with their support base while expanding the public sphere. While hypermedia management may offer opportunities to set the agenda,

Table 9.1 Election campaign objectives and public relations functions

<i>Campaign Objectives</i>	<i>Dominant PR Function</i>	<i>Communication Strategies</i>
Secure victory	Relations with publics Persuasion Hype Reputation Management	Stakeholder research Media Management Online PR Rapid Rebuttal
Secure coalition partnership	Relations with publics Relational Reputation Management Persuasion Hype	Stakeholder research Coalition partner research Stakeholder relations Media Management Online PR Rapid Rebuttal
Secure influence	Relations with publics Persuasion Hype Reputation Management	Stakeholder research Media Management Online PR Rapid Rebuttal
Secure attention and credibility	Persuasion Hype Reputation Management	Media Management Online PR Rapid Rebuttal
Secure representation of a minority group/ideology	Two-way symmetrical communication Community building Relations in Public Persuasion Hype	Interactions with stakeholders Open forum communication Stakeholder relations Media Management Online PR Rapid Rebuttal

mobilizing an activist network may for these parties be of greater priority. Maintaining a strong relationship with a community of often disparate publics, including potential voters, donors and activists, may be the priority as they develop an election campaign strategy.

In Table 9.1, the campaign objectives discussed above are mapped to the different public relations functions and to the communication strategies most appropriate to meet the campaign objectives. Table 9.1 offers an overview of how election campaigning is situated within public relations theory.

Election Campaigning and Publics Theory

While public relations theory divides an organization's audiences into groups depending on their problem recognition, constraint recognition

and level of involvement (Grunig, 1997), research on election campaigns tends to focus on strategies and tactics designed to appeal to a mass citizenry, perhaps due to an emphasis on the largest parties which adhere to the notion of the catch-all (Kirchheimer, 1966) or electoral-professional (Panbianco, 1977) party. More recent work in the field of political marketing suggests the most successful parties are those that are market-oriented, meaning that their platform and communication is designed in response to mass public opinion in order to attract the support of a majority of voters at the ballot box (Lees-Marshment, 2001). The electoral rules within majoritarian systems, such as the United States and the United Kingdom, also tend to encourage parties to seek support of those referred to as the “median voter” (Arribillaga & Massó, 2016). However, even within these systems, as with systems that have proportionality embedded in the translation of votes to the composition of parliament, parties have to segment the electorate according to – among other things – issue preferences as well as media usage. The ideal is to target specific voters and voter blocs with specific messages using the media forms they access most (Burton & Shea, 2010; Hillygus & Shields, 2008).

Parties will tend to focus on voters they are most likely to be able to persuade and mobilize as well as voters who are strategically important, the latter being of particular importance in majoritarian systems where swing states and marginal seats determine the outcome of an election (Savigny, 2011). Building a platform and messages which have broad appeal requires understanding the demands of the aggregate or average voter, although research suggests there is no such thing as a program that “catches all” voters and that the median voter is a construct (Romer & Rosenthal, 1979). Therefore, more targeted messages are required to reach people according to their sociodemographic characteristics and associated political attitudes.

Targeted messaging is best understood using Grunig’s (1997) situational theory of publics. According to this theory, the mass public can be divided into being active, aware, latent, or requiring activation, as can the support base of each party. However, situational publics also exist around social issues. A small active network of campaigners might thus speak to an aware and supportive network while also attempting to reach out to the latent but potentially supportive mass to bring them into the network of the aware public. Thus, any party, independent of its goals within a specific election campaign, will need to use different public relations functions to engage with a range of different situational publics using narrowcasting and micro-targeting strategies (Rohrschneider, 2002). For example, the support base requires mobilization, and this involves relational strategies and two-way symmetrical communications. These tend to take place beyond the gaze of a wider public, employing email, intranet communications and private meetings as appropriate (Lilleker, 2015). Connecting to issue-specific

networks also requires the tools employed when pursuing objectives relating to securing representation for a minority group. Parties seeking the endorsement of a social movement or non-governmental organization must therefore demonstrate its commitment to the cause and goal around which the network formed; the challenge Podemos faces retaining support from 15M activists, to take one example (Jerez et al., 2015). It should only be when the campaign is aimed at less politically active and aware groups, some of whom may be active information seekers who wish to use their opportunity to vote wisely, that the functions of relations with publics, persuasion, hype and reputation management are utilized (see also Kioussis & Strömbäck, 2015, for a discussion about how stakeholder engagement might matter for the strategies employed). Hence, while the overt aspects of an election campaign may appear uniform and utilizing a narrow range of public relations functions, under the radar a range of other functions are strategically deployed. Campaign strategists thus must balance message control against the interactivity that can underpin relationship building (Chadwick & Stromer-Galley, 2016). The situational theory of public aids an understanding of why this might be the case and how these functions fit within a professionalized model of election campaigning.

Professionalization and Political Public Relations

While complex and multi-layered, fundamentally election campaigns remain focused on persuading, mobilizing and strategic management (Strömbäck & Kioussis, 2014). The former two elements focus to differing extents on the mass citizenry, although segmented into target publics, while also mobilizing supporters and directing them towards specific tasks involving co-ordination and management (Lilleker, 2015). The levels of sophistication in strategy and tactics has been explored in literature focusing on *campaign professionalization* comparing patterns over time as well as between countries (Asp & Esaiasson, 1996; Negrine et al., 2007; Norris, 2000; Scammell, 1995). Despite being used as a catch-all concept (Lilleker & Negrine, 2002), the development of professionalization research has provided frameworks for understanding the evolution of electioneering practices which can be mapped onto the core public relations functions.

The schematics developed for the measurement of professionalization (see for example Gibson & Römmele, 2001; Tenscher et al., 2012) have in particular contributed to mapping electioneering and drawing a distinction between the equally catch-all perspectives “Americanization” and “globalization,” which suggest a wholesale transplanting of practices from one system to another (Plasser & Plasser, 2002; Xifra, 2011). This distinction is crucial, as even imported consultants recognize the requirement to take the local context of a specific campaign as well as specific attributes of the candidates and parties standing into account (Lees-Marshment & Lilleker, 2012; Plasser & Plasser, 2002). Research

has identified three ages or phases aligned to communicative modes: a premodern (policy, party and organization-centered), modern (office-seeking and candidate-centered) and postmodern (vote seeking, message- and marketing-driven) phase (Blumler & Kavanagh, 1999; Norris, 2000, pp. 137–147; Strömbäck & Kioussis, 2014), at times supplanted by a fourth, digital or interactive age (Blumler, 2013). While simplified, the schematic offers a perspective of an evolutionary process through which parties can progress.

This foundational work in the field allows us to identify three parallel transformations in political campaign communication independent of the phase of professionalization. First, parties have made remarkable efforts to address the needs of the electorate, in what can be referred to as *marketization*: focusing on effectively meeting campaign objectives in order to enjoy electoral success (Lees-Marshment et al., 2010). Second, parties have, in recent years, broadened their focus from party to media logics; a process referred to as *mediatization* encompassing adaptation to digital technologies (Asp & Esaiasson, 1996; Klinger & Svensson, 2015; Strömbäck, 2008). Third, parties have striven for strategically planned and sustainable campaign management, and it is within this transformatory process we find “professionalization” (Gibson & Römmele, 2001; Strömbäck, 2009). Identification of these processes have directly informed measurement schematics. The CAMPROF-index introduced by Gibson and Römmele (2001) concentrates on the campaign structures (finances, personnel, infrastructure and communicative resources). The Professionalization index introduced by Tenscher (2007) identified two dimensions: campaign structures and strategies. The two approaches capture a range of indicators of professionalism identified in previous studies (Negrine et al., 2007; Norris, 2000; Plasser & Plasser, 2002; Scammell, 1995). The validation of the latter through a study of 20 EU member states (Lilleker et al., 2015; Tenscher et al., 2016) allows us to gain insights into the common components of a 21st century election campaign and its relationship to public relations tools.

Professionalization and Strategic Public Relations in Practice

The model of professional election campaigning that emerges (Tenscher et al., 2016) demonstrates four strategic priorities shared across all European parties. First, political parties set out their organizational priorities in terms of their intended goals over the course of the election campaign. Second, as strategic priorities are set out, key components necessary for meeting their overall goals are identified and measurement strategies developed. Third, and feeding into strategic priorities, parties conduct research and collect data in order to plan the campaign. Fourth, and the component most relevant for public relations, parties set out their communication strategy. However, public relations theory has relevance across party priorities (Strömbäck & Kioussis, 2014).

Over the course of setting organizational priorities, once the overall objectives are identified, parties see a large, mobilizable number of volunteers as crucial. Amassing members willing to be activists involves long-term relationship building (Johansen, 2012), which culminates during the election campaign. Towards this end, parties prioritize internal communication, demonstrating that public relations functions are central to defining and meeting organizational goals in order to ensure collaboration across all levels of the party in order to build a unified effort around objectives. Public relations is also central for negotiating with the key sources of finance, whether that be at the state level or in attracting donations from business leaders, partisan philanthropists, and the many small figure donors among the support network (Biezen & Kopecký, 2014). Hence public relations is central to all the top organizational level priorities alongside the more mundane tasks such as defining the roles of strategic actors, having a campaign hub, and factors beyond their control such as having sufficient notice to permit planning.

The main strategic priorities parties focus on equally highlight the importance of the public relations functions of persuasion. Of particular importance is speaking about the issues the public find to be important and framing messages so that they resonate with key target groups (Hallahan, 2011; Vergeer & Franses, 2016). While these areas are often suggested to fall under the remit of political marketing, they are central to any communication mix and indeed would be recognized as being part of the public relations toolkit as much as any other aspect of integrated marketing communication. Using the relational perspective, one might actually argue that issue selection and message framing is of particular relevance to public relations, as it is by having a relevant and salient message that a party or candidate can develop relationships through demonstrating they represent groups of citizens. This is crucial for building the support required to win a contest. Additional key priorities include selecting the right candidates, which can contribute to relationship building; running a clean and fair campaign, which aids image and reputation management; and a degree of personalization. Negativity and willingness to attack an opponent are lower priorities for most European parties, and are largely the preserve of the majoritarian UK system or far-right parties (Tenscher et al., 2016).

Research priorities are uniform and expectedly data collection on voter concerns is paramount. This chimes with the marketization of political campaigning, but also with the requirement of understanding target publics within the relational public relations function (Johansen, 2012). Due to a scarcity of resources for most parties, opinion polls are the most valuable source of data despite their limitations, though most parties source attitudinal data first and supplant that with more qualitative insights gained from focus groups. Larger parties in particular attempt to use big data, developing insights on public emotions and opinions from social media

data. Such insights provide the basis for a more in-depth understanding of citizens as well as aiding the crafting and framing of messages that can chime with current attitudes and manipulate emotions around issues to garner support (Vergeer & Franses, 2016). Mass media analysis and opposition research are uniformly lower priorities. Although most parties monitor their own media coverage, it is not a key priority and the argument from many is that opposition research is quite unnecessary as most campaigns prove predictable as they all access similar data (Tenscher et al., 2016). Media analysis, a core function of public relations, remains of interest when tracking variations in polls, while opposition research is seen as crucial mainly for parties seeking to enter a coalition and wanting to run a campaign that accommodates potential future partners. Hence, we find parties prioritize gaining insights about a range of stakeholders, mostly segments of the electorate, but for some there would be attention paid to building relations with other parties over the course of a campaign (Tenscher et al., 2016).

Professionalization, Persuasion, and Hype

The most overt aspect of any election campaign is political communication, hence the priorities parties have when designing an election communication strategy give important insights into the mix being employed (Lilleker et al., 2015; Tenscher et al., 2016). The researchers separated these into earned, paid or owned and direct, finding a fairly uniform pattern emerged. The priorities for paid media are first of all mentions or appearances on mainstream news, followed by non-paid public endorsements and appearances on talk shows or debates. The first priority highlights the consistent importance of media management and the creation of hype in order to maximize awareness, influence the agenda and try to get positive coverage (Tedesco, 2011). While audiences for news programs remain in decline, challenged by receiving news on demand via digital and mobile devices, the main news outlets are still seen as having an agenda-setting function (Iggers, 2018). Parties, therefore, believe that being on the news offers a reach that no other media can offer. But the challenge of social media is evident in the second priority. While endorsements from newspapers or celebrities are important, they are recognized as being difficult to attain or from predictable sources, and therefore unlikely to be noteworthy or persuasive. From that perspective, endorsements from ordinary citizens – for example, in the form of sharing and liking content on Twitter, Instagram or Facebook, WhatsApp or other peer-to-peer platforms, all extend reach and offer a fresh battleground for election campaigners as they seek their place in the attention economy (Marwick, 2015). Building relationships across networked situational publics, who interact over social media, is hence emerging as a key public relations function for election campaigns.

Turning to paid and owned media, all party strategists argue that an up-to-date, sophisticated online presence is as crucial, and far more important than advertisements on the Internet, on billboards or in the media. The main exception would be the United States, where the majority of candidate spending is on television advertising. Important though is that the United States is one of a minority of systems where television advertising is permitted (Maier et al., 2011). Elsewhere, when buying media, the communication functions of persuasion and the relational tools for mobilization enabled by digital technologies are seen to offer the highest return on investment (Lilleker, 2015).

Yet social media is deemed of lesser importance than face-to-face communication between the campaign and citizens, borne out by the importance awarded to having large numbers of volunteers for “getting out the vote” in both Europe (Lilleker et al., 2015) and the United States (Nielsen, 2012). Email, the second most important communication tool, allows a party to directly contact its supporters and is used to solicit donations, mobilize activists and deliver persuasive messages to firm up support (Nielsen, 2011; Svensson et al., 2015); again supporting key public relations functions. Telephone canvassing is used mainly for persuasion, as well as getting out the vote. Social media are the fourth priority, but each have a specific strategic public relations function. YouTube is important for persuasion, used to post content that is shareable; Twitter is often used as a broadcasting tool to manage relationships with journalists and supporters; while Facebook is used to provide information about campaign activities, posting shareable content as well as encouraging dialogue and mobilizing supporters (Lilleker et al., 2015; Svensson et al., 2015). The fact that these components of the professional model are increasing in prioritization, given key strategic functions, suggests that political public relations is moving into digital media management alongside the more traditional work with mass media.

Personalization and Populism

A key priority within the professionalization index is *personalization*: placing the party leader or main candidate at the heart of the campaign and for them to reveal aspects of their private life and character in order that citizens develop an interpersonal relationship with them. Personalization encompasses a range of public relations functions and feeds directly into media management. A strong central personality can create the hype that secures earned digital and mass media, and the more engaging the personality and the more positive associations they attain, the more they can use this to persuade and build relations with key publics. Personalization has been seen to increase in the last two decades (Karvonen, 2010), with political leaders increasingly willing to make political capital out of their private lives as well as their more professional experiences (Stanyer,

2013). While some scholars have argued that the accentuation of the private sphere diverts attention away from policy, leading elections to be determined by charisma, other studies have highlighted that self-presentation tactics are necessitated due to the need to build interpersonal relationships with myriad stakeholders as well as to gain coverage in an era of media ubiquity (Archetti, 2014). Hence, personalization might bridge the public relations functions of hype and relationship building, and is central to the relations with publics role a leader plays.

At the heart of debates on personalization in 21st century campaigning is the notion of authenticity. Corner and Pels' work (2003) employ the term *aesthetic representation* to highlight how outsiders, usually right-wing populists, construct an identity of being with the people against an establishment. The increased use of the populist style, presenting the party agenda and key figures as being "of the people" (Reinemann et al., 2016), and notable electoral successes of populist projects in the UK, USA, Italy and Austria, demonstrate how more extreme forms of personalized campaigning can impact mainstream politics. The reason for the rise of populism is twofold, both related to political public relations.

First, centrist parties have tended to focus too much on the hype and persuasion functions of communication during election campaigns as well as between campaigns. In eschewing the more interactive and relational functions of public relations, would-be catch-all parties have allowed a representational gap to emerge. Therefore, second, populists have found that they had space to build relations with publics who felt excluded from the representative processes (Rooduijn, 2014). The outsiders who filled the representational gap developed a pragmatic approach, focusing on known public concerns, and using their personalities as the vehicle for gaining awareness and attracting coverage. Media management is coupled with a more informal style, epitomized through media and public appearances, building an "of the people" image (Reinemann et al., 2016). As election campaigns have become more personalized, with ubiquitous media seeking stories and insights, populists have managed to construct aesthetically attractive identities that appeal to key publics by exploiting the political and media environment in order to win over sections of the electorate (Moffitt, 2016). The relationship many publics develop with a leader will be parasocial (Schiappa et al., 2007), at a distance and mediated through mass and digital media platforms, and based on perceptions gleaned from performances. This requires strategic consideration of not only the message and the means of gaining attention but also of the image that is projected.

Negativity and Rebuttal

Personalization, as well as the rise of *populism*, might lead to political discourse being more negative and for attacks becoming more personal

(Vliegenthart et al., 2011), which might create a problem in terms of reputation management. Given the increase in personalization, it seems no surprise that political campaigns are increasingly found to have taken a negative turn, especially in majoritarian systems (Soroka, 2014; Van Heerde-Hudson, 2011). While *negativity* is a more overt feature of US politics, Nai and Walter (2016) suggest that the use of negative messages as a persuasion tool is a widespread and global phenomenon. Where variations lie is how these align to party objectives. One Danish study found it was the frontrunner whose strategy, when faced with a largely hostile media, was to defend their status by going on the attack (Hansen & Pedersen, 2008), while a Swiss study found that attacks were responses to dips in popular support in a Swiss study (Nai & Sciarini, 2018). Meanwhile, research in the Netherlands found negativity to be the sole preserve of the populist right (Walter & Van der Brug, 2013). Hence, the decision to go negative seems context-dependent and linked to electoral conditions and dynamics.

Negative messages can take the form of direct personal attacks against an individual, political attacks against a party, its policies and program, or broad attacks against the political system and elite (Benoit, 2004). While the latter is the preserve of more populist outsider campaigns, combinations of attacks circulate during a campaign. Attacks can require instant rebuttals, a defensive response that questions the validity of the criticism or makes a counterattack. Negativity has a number of ramifications for political public relations, perhaps that is why most parties except for the minority of populists see this as a last resort (Tenscher et al., 2016). Attacks on opponents have proven to mobilize strong partisan supporters of a party, firming up support and providing incentives to actively campaign as well as vote (Martin, 2004). However, this intra-party relationship building function can operate counter to strategies that aim to build relationships with a broader range of publics. While an attack can lead to negative associations being attached to the individual or party under attack, they can also cause the same to be attached to the source of the attack. The latter is particularly the case if a personal attack is seen as unbelievable, unfair and made solely for electoral gain (Lau et al., 2007). In highly negative campaign environments, there is also the risk that non-partisan and undecided voters are turned off from politics due to the fact that all the major parties are seen as equally bad choices (Kahn & Kenney, 1999). Thus, while negativity can secure earned media, by creating hype and controversy, it can prove damaging to both the attacker and the individual or party under attack. For this reason, parties seeking to secure victory often devolve negative campaigning to third party actors. It might be so-called Political Action Committees (PACs), which in the United States commonly lead with attack messages, more or less independent campaign groups, or anonymous posts to social media. It might even be foreign state powers, who apparently are becoming more involved in the process of attempting to influence election outcomes using negative communication (Hansen & Lim,

2019). Digital technologies permit the circulation of material which can be official and unofficial with little differentiation (Boler & Davis, 2018). Within the hypermedia campaign environment, many messages hence circulate that can impact on official party campaign strategies.

Negative messages can inject the controversy into a campaign that mass media seek to sell copy; they can also circulate widely on social media. Campaigns then have the choice of whether to ignore or respond to an attack. Failing to respond might be a sound strategy, as it can take the heat out of the controversy, or can be spun as the attackee not stooping to the level of their opponents (Esser et al., 2000). Ignoring an attack can, however, also be seen as a sign of weakness or that no defense can be offered. Rebuttal requires responding to the substance of the attack and if possible offering an evidence-based response to the claim that is as newsworthy as the attack. Here political campaigning enters the public relations territory of reputation management and in some cases crisis communication (Coombs, 2011). Reputation management is a long-term activity that builds up positive brand associations among a range of publics and stakeholders. A positive reputation can provide a degree of protection from attack. Crisis communication tactics should only be required when the party or candidate becomes embroiled in a scandal where transgressive behavior is alleged, while also recognizing that some attacks can lead to citizens believing a candidate has transgressed even if untrue.

21st Century Election Campaigns and Public Relations

Studies of public relations in political contexts in general, and when it comes to election campaigns in particular, mainly focus on the public relations functions of hype and persuasion (but see Kiousis & Strömbäck, 2015; Strömbäck & Kiousis, 2011b), and these remain core elements of the public relations toolkit for electioneering. However, the political context and objectives of the respective parties mean that one can find a broader range of functions utilized encompassing the full gamut of public relations strategies and tools. Studying how the various functions align to party objectives when standing for election offers greater insights into election campaign management. Such insights are equally gained when considering how parties target different groups of stakeholders and publics and the forms of communication appropriate to meet the party's objectives when addressing each public. At a theoretical level, public relations hence offer significant insights for the study of election campaigns.

Studies of election campaigning also highlight how the tactical dimensions of public relations are utilized. Relationship building across all levels of a party is crucial for delivering an effective campaign, emphasizing the importance of communication designed to empower and mobilize while also coordinating the efforts of activists. While campaign communication relies on the more traditional public relations functions, this is more complex within a hypermedia

environment which may encourage greater focus on the relational aspects of public relations as opposed to purely focusing on creating hype and persuading publics. Hypermedia campaigning has developed alongside the increasing reliance on personalization. The placement of the leader as front and center of the campaign, even in party-centered systems, requires the ability to deliver an authentic performance and develop communicational tactics that facilitate parasocial relationship building. At the same time, personalization opens the door to populism and more character-based attack strategies. As campaigns resort to negativity and attacks, this might lead to further polarization between supporters and opponents of a candidate, party, or set of ideological values. Negativity can also damage relationships by undermining the positive associations the attacker and attackee have built up, and derail a campaign if rebuttal becomes the priority.

The trajectory demonstrated in the professionalization literature is one that suggests the greater diversity shown across the campaigns of differing parties may reduce as parties shop around and adopt the latest innovations (Strömbäck & Kiouisis, 2014). This is particularly true as parties embed hype and persuasion functions within a hypermedia management strategy, but there is an increasing requirement to invest in techniques that support stakeholder relations and interactions with stakeholders and publics and the use of open forum communication. Such developments will require underpinning with relations with publics tools of stakeholder research in order to craft a brand, message and persona that have specific appeal to situational publics. The growing importance of digital technology as a means by which campaign communication flows within society, produced by multiple official and unofficial sources, will mean greater attention needs to be paid to managing the brand within these environments. In particular, mainstream, more centrist parties, who rely largely on hype and persuasion to secure victory, need to compete with the more populist campaigns which project authenticity through parasocial and interpersonal interactions.

These shifts all suggest that parties and candidates might benefit from delving deeper into political public relations theory and the public relations toolkit. Parties need to learn what their diverse set of different publics want, not only in terms of the product but also in terms of campaigning style and mode of communication, and how to deliver it best for maximum impact. This requirement places public relations front and center of election campaigning.

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10 Political Public Relations and Crisis Communication

A Public Relations Perspective

W. Timothy Coombs

There is little doubt that public relations and political communication share an interest in crisis communication, and that crisis communication is highly relevant within both fields. One example from the political domain that illustrates this is that both the Trump presidential campaign in the U.S. and the Conservative Party in the U.K. have been linked to Cambridge Analytica and its questionable data gathering practices, while an example from the corporate domain is that the U.S.-based Wells Fargo bank faces the revelation that it created and charged customers for accounts they never knew existed. Following Strömbäck and Kiouisis (Chapter 1, this volume), political public relations can be defined as the “process by which an actor for political purposes, through communication and action, seeks to influence and to establish, build, and maintain beneficial relationships and reputations with key publics and stakeholders to help support its mission and achieve its goals” (see also Strömbäck & Kiouisis, 2011). This definition includes the importance of reputation for political public relations, a concern shared by traditional public relations. The emphasis on reputation is even more pronounced in organizational crisis communication as the main theories in this field feature reputation (e.g., Benoit, 1995; Coombs, 2007).

At times, political and corporate communication can look very similar, while at other times appear radically different because of their distinct domains and foci. One difference is that corporations focus on profit while politicians focus on power and ideas. Political public relations also encounters higher levels of conflict and more complex stakeholders than corporate public relations (Strömbäck & Kiouisis, 2013). This chapter will emphasize the general similarities between crisis communication in the corporate and political domains, while acknowledging the differences within their shared content. Ultimately, the chapter should reveal how the two areas of crisis communication might inform one another. The chapter will also offer a number of research propositions related to differences and similarities between crisis communication in the corporate and political domains. We start by discussing four dimensions of crises that are useful when comparing corporate and political crisis communication.

Then the focus shifts to five important similarities: (1) the shared rhetorical roots, (2) emphasis on framing, (3) the use of auto-communication, (4) interest in negative affect, (5) a need to cope with scandals.

Key Dimensions for Crisis Communication

Comprehensive literature reviews for corporate and political crises could fill entire volumes. Hence, the reviews here are abbreviated and limited to the key dimensions of crises. Crisis dimensions refer to how the terms crises and crisis communication are conceptualized rather than trying to establish an accepted definition for the terms. The four dimensions are (1) the focus of the crisis, (2) the external or internal origins of a crisis, (3) how managers perform during the crisis, and (4) the crisis type or nature of the crisis itself. The dimensions provide a foundation for comparing corporate and political crises.

Crisis can have an operational-focus or a symbolic-focus. Operational-focused crises involve a disruption to corporate or political operations. Symbolic-focused crises involve damage to the reputation of a corporation, individual, or political institution. The term “focused” is used because all crises inflict some reputational damage but not all crises threaten operational disruption. In fact, most symbolic-focused crises are likely to be paracrises. A paracrisis is when an organization is forced to manage a crisis risk in full view of its stakeholders (Coombs & Holladay, 2012). Operational crises demand assembling the crisis team while symbolic-focused crises (paracrises) can be managed by just a few members of the management team (Coombs, 2015). Symbolic-focused crises frequently involve a conflict over how the situation is being defined. Stakeholders might be trying to define the situation as a problem while an organization seeks to counter that definition (Coombs & Holladay, 2015). A crisis can belong to the organization or be externally driven. Crisis can be self-inflicted through poor management practices and action or be a result of external factors such as a terror attack or natural disaster.

Crisis communication can address both performance of the crisis response and the nature of the crisis itself. Crisis performance concerns how well or poorly the crisis manager responds to the crisis. Stakeholders are evaluating the crisis manager’s ability to handle the situation. The nature of the crisis or crisis type centers on the amount of crisis responsibility assigned to the crisis actor. Crisis responsibility is important because it is one of the predictors of the amount of reputational damage crisis will inflict upon the crisis actor (Coombs, 2007). These three dimensions (focus, performance, and crisis type) will be utilized to varying degrees in the ensuing examination of the similarities and differences between corporate and political crises.

Shared Rhetorical Roots

Rhetoric provides common roots for some approaches to corporate crisis communication and political crisis communication. Therefore, rhetoric is a valuable starting point for integrating corporate and political crisis communication.

Corporate Crisis Communication and Rhetoric

Corporate crisis communication has strong ties to apologia, the rhetoric of self-defense. Apologia was applied to political discourse well before the offshoot of corporate apologia developed in the late 1980s. Dionisopolous and Vibbert (1988) created the first arguments for corporate apologia. They held corporations have public personas that are subject to attack and in need of defense just as their individual counterparts. Ware and Linkugel's (1973) apologia strategies became the early foundation for corporate crisis response strategies. Later, Hearit (1994, 2006) elaborated on how apologia could be adapted and applied to the analysis of corporate crisis rhetoric. The key element remained the need to determine which strategy or combination of strategies would be most effective in protecting a public persona/organizational reputation. A crisis triggers questions of social legitimacy, which threatens the organizational reputation. Corporate crisis response strategies were then used to rebuild the social legitimacy and organizational reputation (Hearit, 1994).

Working from apologia in conjunction with Burke, and coupled with the notion of accounts from interpersonal communication, Benoit developed Image Repair Theory (IRT) (1995). Image repair or image restoration theory is later referred to as image repair discourse. Consistent with apologia, a crisis threatens an organization's reputation when the organization is held responsible for the crisis. IRT is a broad theory that originally was not limited just to organizations nor designed specifically for crisis communication. Image repair theory is applicable any time there is a threat to a public persona/reputation. In fact, image repair theory has been applied to politicians, as well as to corporations and celebrities (Benoit, 1995, 1997; Benoit & Brinson, 1994). The rhetor/crisis manager selects crisis response strategies (image restoration strategies) that can afford the greatest reputational protection. Table 10.1 lists the various crisis response strategies developed by Benoit.

Political Crisis Communication and Rhetoric

Political crisis communication is rooted in rhetoric as well as through its links to the crisis rhetoric of leaders. Windt (1973) pioneered the study of leader crisis rhetoric with his examination of presidential crisis rhetoric. His belief was that presidents defined situations as crises, and that political crises did not just emerge save for violent confrontations: "Situations do not create crises. Rather, the president's perceptions of the situation and the rhetoric he used

Table 10.1 Benoit's (1995) Image Restoration Strategies

Denial	Simple denial: claim there is no crisis
	Shifting the blame: blame someone or something else for the crisis
Evading Responsibility	Provocation: react to someone else's actions
	Defeasibility: lack of control over the situation or lack of information
	Accident: did not mean for the event to occur
	Good intentions: expected the outcome to be positive not negative
Reducing Offensiveness of Event	Bolstering: remind people of past good acts
	Minimization: argue the event created little damage
	Differentiation: make act look better by comparing it to similar acts
	Transcendence: place the act in a new, more favorable context
	Attack accuser: attack those who say there is a crisis
	Compensation: offer people goods or money
	Corrective action: promise to change and not repeat the act and/or return the situation to its pre-event status
	Mortification: admit guilt, express regret, and ask for forgiveness

to describe it mark an event as a crisis" (Windt, 1973, p. 7). In essence, the term "crisis" can be used as a political weapon. Terming a situation as a crisis frames the situation and allows presidents, and other political leaders, to pursue political objectives. As Bostdorff (1994, p. 5) observed, "Because a crisis terminology has particular implications, rhetors can use it to their persuasive advantage." At its base, a crisis can create fear and the need for policies. Crises create advantages, including: (1) people attend to a threat, (2) urgency legitimizes need for swift action, (3) crises encourage people to unite in response to the crisis, and (4) crises create recognition of the need for short-term sacrifice. Hence, political leaders might engage in crisis promotion in order to achieve a political victory. Crisis promotion illustrates Strömbäck and Kiouisis' (2013) point that power is a distinct element of political public relations. Political leaders do have an advantage when trying to promote international situations as crises. Successful crisis promotion can build personal credibility, create a reserve of power, justify enacting or winning support for policies, divert attention from another problem, or make a president appear presidential. However, there is no guarantee of success with crisis promotion. The political leader's rhetorical skills are one of the key elements in crisis promotion (Bostdorff, 1994).

Summary

Corporate and political crisis communication share common roots in rhetorical approaches derived from political communication. Corporate apologia has been applied to corporations and to corporate executives and

is a variation of apologia developed to examine political rhetoric. IRT has been used to examine both corporate crisis communication (e.g., Benoit & Czerwinski, 1997) and a wide range of cases using image repair theory, including Kenneth Starr, President Clinton, President Reagan, Clarence Thomas, and Gary Condit (Benoit & Anderson, 1996; Benoit, Gullifor & Panici, 1991; Benoit & McHale, 1999; Benoit & Nill, 1998; Benoit & Wells, 1998; Len-Rios & Benoit, 2004). Obviously, there are also crisis communication and political crisis communication approaches that are not heavily rooted in rhetoric. However, rhetoric is a strong link between crisis communication in these two domains. Rhetoric does focus on the role of meaning and often the contestation of meaning (Heath, 1993). Hence, there is a natural link between rhetoric and the next point of similarity, framing.

Contestation over crisis meaning is more likely to occur in symbolic-focused crises than in operational-focused crises. There is simply greater latitude to dispute the key factors such as crisis responsibility in symbolic-focused compared to operational-focused crises (Coombs, 2018). Moreover, corporate crisis managers face more operational-focused crises than do political crisis managers. This difference in contestation leads to the first proposition:

Proposition 1: Political crisis managers are more likely to contest the crisis responsibility attributed to a crisis than corporate crisis managers.

Framing and Crisis Communication

Frames are a means to shape how people define a situation. Crisis managers can use frames strategically in attempts to influence how people define a crisis situation (Hallahan, 2011). In this context, there can be contestation over how to define the crisis—or even whether there is a crisis (Coombs, 2018).

Corporate Crisis Communication and Framing

The corporate crisis communication research does use frames, but does not always reference the concept of frames. One exception is Situational Crisis Communication Theory (SCCT) which holds crisis types to be a form of framing (Coombs, 2007). Both corporate apologia and IRT feature contestation over crisis definitions, which is a form of framing. For instance, denial strategies seek to frame the situation as not a crisis. If there is no crisis, there is no threat and no need for further crisis communication efforts. Strategies such as excuse, justification, transcendence, and differentiation all seek to frame the crisis as less of a problem by establishing limited crisis responsibility for the situation (Benoit, 1995; Coombs, 2007). Crisis managers can attempt to frame the crisis in such a manner as to limit the threat the crisis poses to the crisis managers—a contestation of frames.

The most overt use of frames in corporate crises can be found in the Dutch research led by van Der Meer (e.g., van der Meer, 2016a, 2016b). This research uses computerized semantic network analysis to examine large sets of verbal crisis data. Through computerized analysis, the scholars use the frequency of individual words and the co-occurrence of words to determine the frames being used to describe the crisis. The research can even compare how various crisis actors (organizations, the news media, and stakeholders) are framing the crisis (van der Meer & Verhoeven, 2013; van der Meer et al., 2014). The Dutch researchers follow Entman's (1993) conceptualization of frames, noting that "to frame is to select some aspects of a perceived reality and make them more salient in the communicating text" (p. 52). Obviously, there is hitherto unused potential for the framing methods developed by van der Meer (2016a) to be applied fruitfully to political crisis communication.

Fishman (1999), drawing upon the work of Birkland (1997), emphasizes the focusing event as a framing force in corporate crisis communication. A focusing event occurs when the situation is "sudden and unpredictable" and becomes widely known very rapidly. Here, a distinction can be made between *type one* and *type two* focusing events. Type one focusing events include natural disasters and are considered "normal." Type two focusing events result when a novel event violates expectations, thereby creating uncertainty and public attention. Fishman's (1999) premise is that some crises rise to the level of a type two focusing event when they become widely known during a short time frame. The unique nature of focusing events permits them to help shape the public agenda and possibly even the policy agenda. Crisis communication becomes a part of issues management because the crisis triggers and can influence a policy discussion (Fishman, 1999). Framing a crisis as a focusing event has serious ramifications for how the crisis affects the organization and its stakeholders.

The discourse of renewal attempts to frame a crisis by placing the focus on the future. Crisis managers talk about how things will be better in the future rather than trying to parse blame and dwell on the crisis (Ulmer, Seeger & Sellnow, 2010). Stakeholders begin to feel better when they hear about the positive future and forget about the problems created by the current crisis. Hope and a bright future are common themes found in political rhetoric as well. For example, president Reagan's economic rhetoric drew heavily on the bright future (Johannesen, 1986). The focus on the bright future frame for a crisis is something shared by corporate and political crisis communication.

Political Crisis Communication and Framing

The initial discussion of political crisis communication and rhetoric implied the use of frames. Kuypers (1997) develops more directly the idea of presidential

crisis rhetoric as framing. Working from Entman (1993, p. 53), a frame makes certain elements of reality more salient “in such a way as to promote a particular problem, definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and/or treatment recommendations for the item described.” Clearly, political crisis communication does include crisis frames designed to define the problem and how best to resolve the problem. When political leaders evoke the crisis frame, decisive action is required and people should support, not debate, it. Crises create a sense of immediacy and urgency (Kiewe, 1994). The crisis rhetoric is thus composed of a statement of fact, a melodrama with the political leader or home country as the hero against some villain, and a policy that is framed as a moral act. Leader crisis rhetoric then becomes a means of advancing policy changes. However, some crises are event driven. In those situations, leaders can only try to shape interpretation of the events (Dow, 1989). Framing is easiest when a crisis develops slowly and is ambiguous. People will then seek clarification and the crisis frame can provide clarity. Crises that develop quickly are more difficult to frame (Young & Launer, 1988). It could be argued that the fast-moving crises are the ones where the situation defines the crisis—people will perceive a crisis before the leader has an opportunity to craft and to present a frame.

Framing has emerged as the central feature of political crisis communication in general. Strömbäck and Nord (2006) used frames in their examination of perceived crisis management. They posited that political fortunes can be tied to how politicians are perceived to manage the crisis and stated: “perceptions are more important than reality with regard to how public confidence is affected” (Strömbäck & Nord, 2006, p. 795). Their research examined a fast-moving crisis involving the Swedish government’s reaction to the 2004 tsunami. The results found that even though political confidence was low, people still expected an effective response. Effective was being evaluated in terms of the speed of the response and recognition that the crisis was serious. The media analysis showed the government was viewed as slow and that governmental efforts to shift the blame created a backlash (Strömbäck & Nord, 2006). Once more we see corporate and political crisis communication sharing a common theory.

Another relevant example is Boin, McConnell and t’Hart (2008, 2009), who drew upon the earlier political crisis communication research to build their theory of crisis exploitation. Currently, the theory of crisis exploitation is the most detailed articulation of political crisis communication. The theory was born from the question of why some crises create political change while others do not. Agenda building has for example long recognized that crises can trigger policy changes (Cobb, Ross & Ross, 1976). In fact, Birkland (1997) built his concept of focusing events around the belief that crises draw attention to issues/concern and can facilitate policy changes. The theory of crisis exploitation examines “the purposeful utilization of crisis-type rhetoric to significantly alter levels of political

support for public office-holders and public policies” (Boin, t’Hart & McConnell, 2009, p. 83).

Framing remains an important element in the theory of crisis exploitation. Crisis exploitation is a contest between competing frames. The competition is between incumbents/status quo and their opposition. Three crisis frames were identified: (1) denial, claims there is no crisis, (2) threat, crisis does exist and is a threat, and (3) opportunity, crisis exists and is a chance for change. The three frames have different effects on the political stance and policy stance. Table 10.2 summarizes those effects.

Crisis framing involves both significance and causality. The denial frame tries to minimize the significance of the crisis, the threat frame recognizes the event is significant, and the opportunity frame seeks to maximize the event’s significance. Strategies for framing causality for a crisis can be (1) to endogenize, i.e., the blame rests with particular politicians or policies, or (2) to exogenize, i.e., outside forces (nature or human) were the causes making the event uncontrollable. The threat frame favors the strategy to exogenize causality while the opportunity frame favors the strategy to endogenize causality. In reality, it is only natural for there to be multiple, competing frames, because politics is marked by multiple interests. The prevailing frame is the one that becomes widely accepted. The nature of the frame will have political and policy implications (Boin, t’Hart & McConnell, 2009).

Crisis framing contests encompass two political spheres: (1) policy game and (2) political game. The policy game is a struggle between those wanting policy change and those wanting the status quo. The political game is the struggle between government officials and their opposition. In the policy game, change advocates can seek a paradigm shift or incremental change. The status quo (incumbents) resists any change or attempt to contain the policy change (incremental). Incremental change is the most likely result (Boin, t’Hart & McConnell, 2009) and often results in symbolic actions designed to create quiescence among irate publics (Coombs & Holladay, 2011). The political game involves the opposition trying to blame incumbents or just to tarnish their reputations. Incumbents choose among deflecting, diffusing, or accepting responsibility. Accepting responsibility is unlikely if opponents are bent on attacking over the crisis.

Table 10.2 Crisis Frames: Political and Policy Stance Effects

<i>Crisis Frame</i>	<i>Political Stance</i>	<i>Policy Stance</i>
No crisis	No blame	Business as usual
Crisis as threat	Diffuse blame	Defend status quo
Crisis as opportunity	Focus Blame	Attack status quo

One advantage for incumbents is the ability to delay investigations (Boin, t'Hart & McConnell, 2009).

The policy implications are the degree of changes to the beliefs that generate policy. Those changes range from deep core beliefs to secondary aspects. Deep core beliefs represent fundamental normative and ontological beliefs. These can include the nature of man, power, freedom, and justice. Core beliefs emerge from the deep core and are the policy positions and ways to achieve those positions. The secondary aspects are instrumental decisions that seek to implement specific policies. The political implications can be: (1) elite damage, careers and reputations decline; (2) elite reinvigoration, politicians benefits from the crisis; and (3) elite escape, blame is avoided or diffused across a number of actors (Boin, t'Hart & McConnell, 2009). Crisis exploitation is, however, not simply a matter of frames and actions by politicians. Crisis exploitation can be affected by the mass media, commission inquiries, situational factors, and temporal factors. The mass media can present its own frame that competes with those forwarded by political actors. Commission inquiries can be political or expert-led. In some situations, blame is obvious, thus making other frames irrelevant. In addition, crises are more damaging the nearer they are to an election.

In general, incumbents can be expected to fair best when they: (1) have a reserve of pre-crisis political capital, (2) effectively communicate their frames, (3) have been in office a short time, and (4) an expert-led commission investigates. Opposition can likewise be expected to fair best when (1) there is an endogenous cause for the crisis, (2) incumbents have been in office a long time, (3) incumbents had recent bad press, and (4) the commission is political-led. Efforts to exploit crises do matter. "Skillful office-holders can manage to politically 'contain' crises and thereby insulate themselves and their colleagues from sanctions and reputation losses" (Boin, McConnell & t'Hart, 2008, p. 100). The contestation of frames reflects Strömbäck and Kiouisis' (2013) point that political public relations involves a high level of conflict.

Summary

Frames are a critical aspect of political crisis communication and part of corporate crisis communication as well. Moreover, Heath (2004) treats crisis communication as narratives, another form of framing. Political crisis communication emphasizes the ambiguity that creates a battle for crisis frames. Situational factors that serve to define the crises are viewed as a constraint (Boin, t'Hart & McConnell, 2009). Corporate crisis communication focuses more on the way situational factors define the crisis. Situational factors (data about the event) tend to dominate the framing of operational crisis (Coombs, 2015). Crises that are more symbolic in nature because only reputational assets are at risk have frames that are open to

debate (Hearit, 2006). We can place views of crisis frames on a continuum from emergent to interpretation. Figure 10.1 visually depicts the crisis frame continuum. Corporate crisis communication leans toward emergent while political crisis communication favors interpretation. For an emergent crisis frame, a crisis exists and is driven by stakeholder perceptions, not crisis manager frames. For an interpretation crisis frame, crisis managers can shape how stakeholders perceive the situation.

To take one example from the corporate sphere, when the emission scandal broke out, showing that Volkswagen cars had more emissions than the company officially had stated, VW unsuccessfully tried to manage the crisis. At first, the Volkswagen management claimed that a few rogue engineers were responsible for the problematic emission software. News media outlets and politicians around the world rejected this frame. Instead, the crisis was framed as the Volkswagen management purposely seeking to hide the problem. Similarly, the U.S. government initially framed the murder of Jamal Khashoggi at the Saudi Arabian Embassy in Turkey as done by rogue killers. That frame was, however, rejected by others in favor of the Saudi Arabian state murder frame. Beyond these examples, the contestation of frames in crisis leads to the second proposition:

Proposition 2: Political crisis managers are much more likely to engage in framing battles than corporate crisis managers.

Conceptually, there is a link between frames and crisis responsibility. For instance, exogenized crises are beyond the control of the crisis manager, thereby mitigating crisis responsibility. Endogenized crises are linked to the crisis managers—something that was done or not done precipitated the crisis (Boin, McConnell & t'Hart, 2008). Crisis responsibility is *one* of the factors to consider for the theory of crisis exploitation while it is *the* driving factor in SCCT. Again, the two crisis communication literatures utilize the same concept but differ in the importance it plays in theory development and practice. This suggests that political crisis managers can gain insight into the factors that shape perceptions of crisis responsibility while corporate crisis managers can learn strategies for attempting to frame crises and what factors influence the ability to frame a crisis.

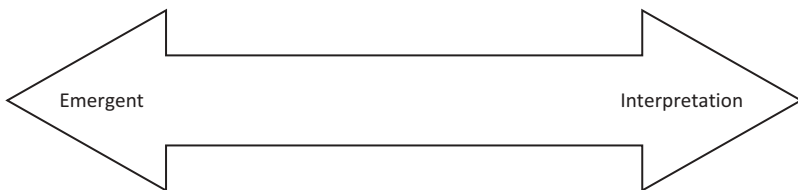


Figure 10.1 Crisis Frame Continuum

Crisis Manager Performance

Political crises are frequently external situations that politicians seek to manage. Clearly, there is some connection between the politician and the crisis, but the origins are oftentimes, albeit not always, external. Oftentimes, the politician is expected to be the “hero” that enters to rescue people. Examples would be government involvement in cases of dangerous pharmaceuticals or food poisoning outbreaks. Crisis responsibility is not an issue, rather, the politicians are judged on their ability to manage the crisis—a focus on performance. Internal political crises do occur and include scandals and poor job performance. In such crises, responsibility is an important factor. In general, internal crises pose a much greater threat to politicians and institutions. Congressman Hunter’s indictment for the personal use of campaign funds is an example of an internal/endogenous crisis. The Swedish government taking action on a tsunami crisis half-way around the world is an example of an external crisis (Strömbäck & Nord, 2006).

It is rare for corporations to be placed in the hero role during a crisis. Natural disasters may, however, create the opportunity for a corporate hero. Organizations that provide vital services, such as utilities, have a responsibility to return operations to normal as quickly as possible after a crisis. Stakeholders may have expectations for how quickly the vital services are restored. In such cases, the perceived crisis management skill found in political crisis communication is relevant. However, corporations as heroes seem to be a very limited occurrence. This discussion of crisis performance leads to the third proposition:

Proposition 3: Political crisis managers are much more likely to manage “outside” crises and to attempt the hero role in crisis management than corporate crisis managers.

This is not to imply that crisis manager performance is unimportant in corporate crisis communication. Rather, the assessment of crisis manager performance differs. Corporate crisis managers are not heroes because most often they are managing a crisis for which their organization bears responsibility. Corporate crisis managers are judged by their ability to demonstrate concern for victims and to address their needs (Coombs, 2015). The idea of failing to meet expectations for crisis responses will be extended upon in the upcoming section on scandals. The concern of meeting expectations with crisis communication leads to the fourth proposition:

Proposition 4: Corporate crisis managers more than political crisis managers risk intensifying damage from a crisis if their crisis response does not meet stakeholder expectations.

Conceptual Overlap: Crisis Promotion

Promotion of a crisis offers an even greater contrast. Politicians, especially political leaders, might exploit a crisis for political advantage. For instance,

a politician might engage in crisis exploitation in hopes of winning passage of particular legislation or an election. The politician might then seek to label a situation a “crisis,” knowing the term has power and potential political utility. In contrast, corporate leaders actively shun the term “crisis.” In external discourse you may hear the terms situation and incident, but rarely is there a public discussion of a crisis. In corporations, the term crisis has power because it means resources will be mobilized and employed. But the term crisis is largely reserved for internal use. Managers do not go looking for a crisis to help validate or to win support for new policies.

However, in the corporate realm, stakeholders often engage in crisis exploitation as a means of forcing an organization to change policies and practices. Challenge crises can be viewed as crisis exploitation. If stakeholders can prove a crisis exists, or that the organization operates in an immoral or dangerous manner, the organization may be forced to change. Challenges are won by stakeholders when organizations fear the reputational damage the challenge may inflict upon them. If it appears other stakeholders will support a challenge, managers are likely to change policies and practices in order to preserve their reputational assets. For example, over the past seven years, Greenpeace has used the promotion of concerns about toxic chemicals in the production of clothing to change the sourcing behaviors of major garment companies around the world, including La Ning, H&M, Zara, Puma, and Nike. Challenges are threatening when they have legitimacy, stakeholders pursue the challenge with a sense of urgency, and stakeholders can muster power resources such as the ability to communicate the challenge to others (Coombs & Holladay, 2007, 2015). In challenge crises, corporate managers play the role of incumbents trying to protect the status quo.

A common point in the crisis management literatures is a crisis having the potential to shape public policy. There is a recognized link between corporate crisis management and issues management. Poorly managed crises can trigger issues management and the application of new policies for corporations to follow. Effective crisis management reassures people the situation is fine and requires no further action (Fredriksson, 2014). In other words, effective crisis management can diffuse an issue. As noted earlier, Birkland’s (1997) focusing event is a common reference for corporate and political crisis management. A focusing event brings attention to some problem or deficiency in society. Natural disasters are common focusing events, but Fishman (1999) argued that some corporate crises are focusing events. The attention creates the opportunity for policy action. An issue is thrust into the media spotlight and potentially catapulted onto the policy agenda. Once on the policy agenda, the issue may even produce policy change. However, as in crisis exploitation, there is no guarantee that a focusing event will produce new public policy (Fishman, 1999). Moreover, the policy change may only be symbolic and designed

to reassure a nervous populace (Coombs & Holladay, 2011). There is a strong match between how corporate crisis communication uses issues management and political crisis communication utilizes crisis exploitation. This suggests that corporate crisis managers can gain insight into how stakeholders might exploit crises to create change, and that political crisis managers can gain insights into how to derail political change efforts.

There are however times when corporate managers will purposefully create a crisis in order to change public policy—engage in crisis exploitation. Relevant here is the idea of catalytic defiance, developed by Dennis (1993). Catalytic defiance occurs when a corporation knowingly violates a law or regulation to stimulate discussion and reform of the policy (Dennis et al., 1994). Only a few corporations have, however, been documented to have used catalytic defiance (Dennis et al., 1994; Wear, 2015; Yehya & Coombs, 2017). The differences in crisis exploitation result in the fifth and sixth propositions:

Proposition 5: Corporate managers are more likely to use crisis communication to create reassurance than to engage in crisis exploitation.

Proposition 6: Political crisis managers are much more likely to use crisis exploitation than corporate crisis managers.

Preaching to the Choir

There are times when crisis managers are not contesting meaning or frames but rather sending messages intended for their supporters. The messages then seek to reaffirm the bond between the crisis manager and the stakeholders. The targeting of messages to reinforce support is often called preaching to the choir. I would argue that preaching to the choir is a form of auto-communication. Auto-communication posits that organizational messages targeting external audiences also serve to enhance the self-esteem of people within the organization—typically defined as employees (Christensen, 1997; Morsing, 2006). “Auto-communication takes whenever a message is interpreted by its sender in accordance with his or her own code” (Christensen, 1997, p. 201). In other words, external organizational messages both market a product to consumers while reinforcing employee identification by helping employees to feel better about their organization.

We can extend the idea of organizational members beyond employees to any stakeholders that strongly identify with the organization. In the corporate domain, a variety of names are used to denote supporters, including brand community (Muniz & O’Guinn, 2001) and faith holders (Johansen, Johansen & Weckesser, 2016). In politics, the loyal party members have a strong identification with the organization. Crisis auto-communication simply seeks to reassure the faithful that all is well. For example, when the Pride & Joy Dairy was cited for selling contaminated raw (unpasteurized) milk in 2018, managers responded by declining to

recall the product and restating the value of raw milk. Managers were bolstering supporters with this atypical response to a product harm crisis.

In politics, the so-called echo chamber effect (Dubois & Blank, 2018) supports the idea of crisis auto-communication. It is a well-established fact that people tend to expose themselves to, believe, and repeat political messages that reflect their own ideology (Kunda, 1990; Taber & Lodge, 2006). For instance, people are more likely to retweet a message consistent with their own views (Barberá et al., 2015). The echo chamber is not an absolute and can be moderated by a number of factors, including personality, political culture, and type of network (social versus news) (Colleoni, Rozza & Arvidsson, 2014). However, crisis managers can find receptive crowds for their crisis auto-communication among stakeholders that strongly identify with their organization. Consider, for example, how Republicans defended then Supreme Court nominee Brett Kavanaugh against accusations of sexual assault rather than withdraw his nomination or confront the issue. The political domain provides a larger and easier to identify base of supports than the corporate domain. The need to reinforce supporters during a crisis results in the seventh proposition:

Proposition 7: Political crisis managers are more likely to engage in crisis auto-communication than corporate crisis managers.

Negative Affect

Political and corporate crisis communication research share an interest in the negative affect generated by crises as well. Politicians frequently attempt to use the fear and anxiety evoked by a crisis to pursue political objectives. In contrast, corporate crisis managers generally try to reduce the anxiety and anger generated by a crisis (Coombs & Holladay, 2005; Jin, 2009; Jin & Pang, 2010). The negative affect experienced by stakeholders can result in negative behaviors toward an organization, such as reduced purchase intentions. Moreover, affect may be a barrier to effective corporate crisis communication. This suggests that corporate crisis managers might learn how to harness the benefits of negative affect while political crisis managers could understand how negative affect might hinder the pursuit of political objectives. This difference in the role of negative affect in crisis communication leads to the creation of the eighth proposition:

Proposition 8: Political crisis managers are more likely to seek to stoke crisis anxiety while corporate crisis managers are more likely to seek to reduce crisis anxiety.

Scandals

Both political and corporate crisis communication literatures identify scandals as problems and as a variant of crisis. The scandal literature is far more developed in political communication than in corporate crisis communication (Coombs,

Holladay & Tachkova, 2018). The news media embrace stories about politicians involved in sexual or financial misconduct (Tumber & Waisbord, 2004). The key elements to scandals are a transgression of norms (a legal or moral violation) and media coverage of the situation (Ekström & Johansson, 2008). In fact, Entman (2012) argues that media coverage is essential to creating a political scandal and that scandals are socially constructed. For instance, Entman (2012) demonstrates politicians can engage in identical actions but only those with media coverage become scandals. The strong media interest in political scandals leads to the following proposition:

Proposition 9: Political scandals should be more prevalent than corporate scandals because of the media's greater appetite for political versus corporate news.

Ekström and Johansson (2008) have identified three types of political scandals: (1) first-order transgressions, (2) second-order transgressions, and (3) dramatization of scandals. First-order transgressions are where the act itself is a transgression. Republicans linked to Russians during the 2016 Presidential election is an example of a first-order transgression. A second-order transgression occurs when statements made about the transgression become the scandal. The Trump Administration's initial defense of the Saudis during the Khoshoggi murder is an example of a second-order transgression. Dramatization of a scandal is a form of crisis exploitation where opponents attempt to use the scandal to erode an opponent's power. Republicans using the failure to secure the Mexican border with the U.S. as a scandal to win votes in the 2018 midterm elections is an example of the dramatization of a scandal.

There is an emerging but less developed scandal literature for corporations. Corporate scandals are poorly defined, and erroneously many crisis types are said to be scandals. To overcome this lack of clarity, the term *scansis* has been used to denote when a crisis becomes a scandal (Coombs, Holladay & Tachkova, 2018). A *scansis* can be an event itself (a first-order transgression) or an ineffective response to a crisis (second-order transgression) (De Maria, 2010; Frandsen & Johansen, 2017). Wells Fargo charging customers for new accounts the customers never opened is an example of a *scansis* while Volkswagen blaming a few rogue engineers is an example of a *scansis* created by an inappropriate crisis response. As noted earlier, stakeholders can challenge corporate behavior as irresponsible. While challenges have the potential to become scandals, this is rare and there are no recent examples of a challenge escalating into a *scansis*. This difference in dramatization of scandals results in the following proposition:

Proposition 10: There should be far more dramatization of scandals given the political realms focus on power as currency.

Conclusion

Corporate and political crisis communication research have had limited intermixing of ideas when looking at references. The separation is not unusual for

crisis communication, as the topic draws researchers from many different fields. A scholarly Tower of Babel emerges, creating fragmentation in the crisis communication research. A focal point of this chapter is to build a more developed bridge between the corporate and political crisis communication research. Toward that end, the chapter has sought to identify the important conceptual overlaps while noting the differences that emerge even within these similarities.

The conceptual overlap provides an opportunity for political and corporation crisis communication researchers and practitioners to learn from one another. Lessons learned in political crisis communication can be adapted to corporate crisis communication and vice versa. The unique aspects of political and corporate crisis communication provide the opportunity to execute comparative research to determine the validity and extent of these unique aspects. Each of the ten propositions presented in this chapter offers an opportunity for comparative crisis communication research between the two domains. This chapter overviews the fertile ground for research designed specifically to address the unique aspects of political crisis communication and how that may differ from its corporate counterpart. Hopefully researchers will stake their claims and determine what insights can be gained by applying corporate crisis communication to political crisis communication, and vice versa.

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11 Presidential Public Relations in the United States

Matthew Eshbaugh-Soha

Public relations, which transverses all forms of governments and political institutions, is vital to political power (McKinnon, Tedesco & Lauder, 2001; Strömbäck & Kioussis, 2011a). Among other examples, it is through public relations that political parties advertise their policy agendas to voters (Spoon, 2011) and prime ministers communicate their policy goals to build support for them and their government (Grube, 2013). It is through public relations that all government officials (elected or otherwise) maintain and manage effective lines of communication between themselves and the public, lines of communication that are necessary to foster norms of democratic responsiveness and maintain an informed electorate.

Without question, the vast majority of research on political public relations fixates on American politics (see Hobolt & Klemmensen, 2007), and no office in the U.S. government better exemplifies the extent to which public relations are fundamental to democratic governance than the office of the US presidency. In the contemporary age, presidential power is more than bargaining with legislators (Neustadt, 1990). But rather, presidential power centers on managing a public message through public speaking and engaging in media relations to reach various target audiences to achieve goals (Kernell, 1997). Whether or not persuasive leadership is common for presidents (Edwards, 2016), the goal of public relations is persuasion (Miller, 1989). In many ways, this is a strategic enterprise, so that presidents and their staff target policies and publics to maximize their opportunities for success (Edwards, 2009).

Although the president is the face of presidential public relations, it is not the individual alone who promotes the office and its mission. The president's extensive organizational apparatus facilitates public relations and allows presidents to engage more fully in the public debate. After all, it is this interaction between the individual and institution that is vital to explaining individual performance and behavior. As Moe (1985, p. 236) writes, "the distinctive behavioral structures that define an institution derive from the choices of individuals, while the choices of individuals derive from incentives and resources that are shaped by the institutional context itself, as well as the surrounding environment." This is no different from the presidency,

its communications operations, and effectiveness. An aptly-constructed organization can mitigate the shortcomings of the individual, just as a poorly-crafted one can worsen them (Greenstein and Burke, 1989).

It is the purpose of this chapter to examine the development and effectiveness of presidential public relations in an organizational context, focusing on the United States. In other words, how has the contemporary White House communications organization affected the president's ability to "establish, build, and maintain beneficial relationships and reputations with key publics and stakeholders to help support its mission," to quote the definition by Strömbäck and Kiouisis (chapter 1, 2011b)? How does the White House attempt to reach its target publics, and how have changes in media technology and the media environment affected presidential public relations? How effective is the presidency in reaching various publics? And how do these publics influence the White House? Although speeches provide presidents with the clearest avenue to the public, advances in new media technology have allowed the president to move from behind the bully pulpit to engage directly with a fragmented American audience.

Types of Presidential Public Relations

The president has numerous opportunities to communicate publicly. Most commonly, presidents use public speeches to communicate their messages and to maintain and build a relationship with the public and news media. Presidential speeches have and continue to be central to the president's public relations operations, even though the delivery of these speeches has changed in considerable ways over the modern presidency. New media technologies now afford the president unique opportunities to relate to the public. Presidents may target audiences through greater reliance on soft news television programs, YouTube videos or interviews, and most recently and especially pronounced with the Trump Administration: to engage in public relations through Twitter.

The President's Speeches

A clear indicator of the president's public relations strategy—and the extent to which presidents work to establish and maintain lines of communication with the public and news media—is the sheer volume of presidential speeches. As Figure 11.1 shows, presidents engage frequently in public discourse, averaging over 300 speeches per year since 1953 (Ragsdale, 2014) and increasing over much of the time series. Close inspection reveals two eras of presidential speechmaking since 1953. The first period, which runs until 1972, shows an average annual number of speeches of 154. The more recent time period, from 1974 to 2012, produces a 379-speech yearly average, although both Presidents George W. Bush

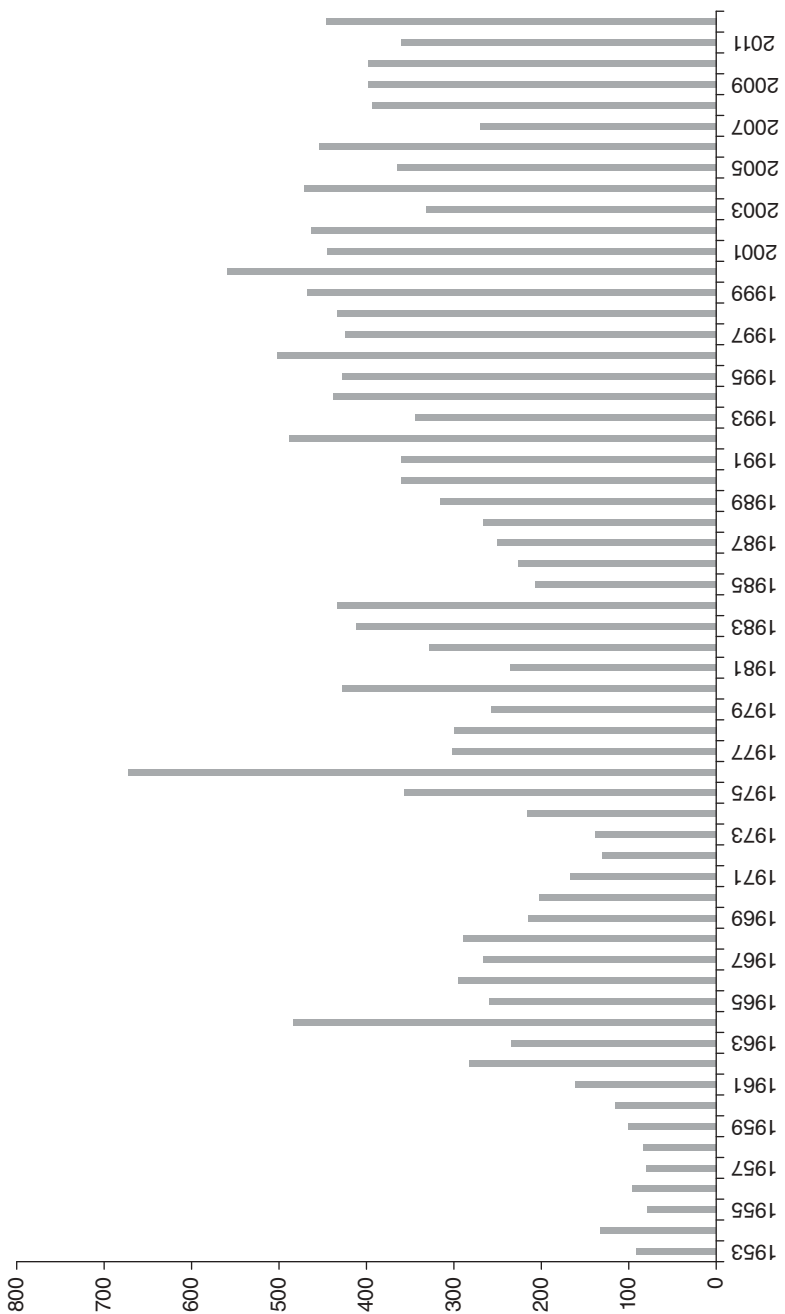


Figure 11.1 Total Number of Yearly Presidential Speeches, 1953–2012

Note: Data compiled from Ragsdale (2014). It is an additive measure of public appearances in Washington, DC and the United States, minor speeches, political appearances, press conferences, and major addresses.

(397 speeches) and Barack Obama's (400 speeches) yearly averages are down from a high of 449 yearly speeches during the Clinton Administration.

Presidents deliver several kinds of speeches to reach different audiences and to achieve a range of presidential goals. To promote their goal of good public policy, presidents deliver minor, policy-specific speeches, national addresses, and solo press conferences that may emphasize one or more of the president's policy priorities. The president's reelection incentive and role as party leader encourage the delivery of several hundred political speeches during reelection years, as well as delivering additional private speeches to donors throughout their terms (Doherty, 2012).

The bulk of the president's speeches are generally symbolic or ceremonial speeches and may be without specific policy content. Presidents deliver over 200 of these speeches throughout the domestic United States each year, affording presidents the opportunity to appear presidential, to play head of state without providing a clear angle for opponents to criticize policy or undermine the office. Some examples of ceremonial public events include congratulating successful sports teams in the Rose Garden or pardoning a turkey on Thanksgiving, a now annual tradition resumed by President George H. W. Bush. Even when symbolism is pronounced, such as during an Obama visit to Home Depot to promote do-it-yourself home weatherization,¹ the president's underlying goals are clear. Whether to build support for the president's policy record or reelection campaign, symbolism is another element of the president's public relations strategy.

The long-term increase in speeches since the 1950s is most simply attributable to advances in communications technologies, which provided presidents with more opportunities to communicate frequently to the American people (Hager & Sullivan, 1994; Lammers, 1982; Powell, 1999). With each technological advance, presidents have not only been able to deliver more speeches, they have also adjusted their communications strategy. With radio, President Franklin Roosevelt communicated directly with the American people through fireside chats, and answered questions from the news media in radio press conferences. With television, John F. Kennedy fostered an enduring image of being presidential, and cultivated the news media and public through televised press conferences and national addresses from the Oval Office. Even advances in presidential travel, from the railways to the airways, have fostered new means of public relations.

New media provide additional complications but also opportunities for presidential public relations. Although cable and online news platforms increase the amount of presidential news, over all, whether the president's own voice makes the news is relatively constant across new and traditional forms of media (Eshbaugh-Soha, 2016). Twitter appears to have enhanced President Trump's ability to dictate the daily news cycle, although it is too

early to tell whether this is accurate or whether Twitter has helped or hindered Trump's ability to build public support and achieve legislative success. Some research suggests that Twitter has had limited effects on campaign news coverage (Lawrence, 2016), even though political social media use (including blogs) increases political participation (Dimitrova, Shehata, Strömbäck & Nord, 2014). Initial study of President Trump's social media use mainly intended to describe the uncivil tone of Trump's tweets (Ott, 2017), supplemented by research demonstrating a consistent and negative tone to candidate Trump's tweets (Gross & Johnson, 2016).

Institutional changes to Congress coincided with a rise in public relations and a heightened reliance on going public. Kernell (1997) held that divided and decentralized Congresses encouraged presidents to speak more, so as to build public support necessary for achieving legislative victories. Although presidents are unlikely to move public opinion through public relations (Edwards, 2003), presidents may lead the public and media agendas (Eshbaugh-Soha & Peake, 2011) to increase the salience of issues already popular with the American people and increase their success in Congress (Canes-Wrone, 2006). The relationships among the president, the public, and Congress continue to evolve based on other political conditions, such as partisan polarization, which may make staying private and traditional bargaining more appealing under unified government (McGauvran & Eshbaugh-Soha, 2017).

Speeches are central to presidential public relations. Because of this, scholarship has explored extensively their causes and effects. Some key findings include the positive relationship between divided government and the number of speeches (Hart, 1987), the positive impact that approval ratings have on the likelihood of delivering a speech (Ragsdale, 1984) and the impact of delivering a national address on approval ratings (Brace & Hinckley, 1992, p. 56), with conflicting evidence about the impact of the economy on the number of speeches (Eshbaugh-Soha, 2010; Hager & Sullivan, 1994). Nevertheless, each of these studies exclude the underlying presidential communication organization, despite its clear necessity for effective and voluminous public relations efforts (Kumar, 2007). They are also unable to account for recent changes in media technology, partisan news reporting, and a fragmented media environment, each of which could affect the durability of their scholarly contributions.

Presidential Communications Organizations and Public Relations

Presidential speeches are numerous and vital to public outreach. Yet, the extent of the president's public relations operation—including the hundreds of speeches presidents deliver each year—would be impossible without an institution that organizes and coordinates presidential public relations. Indeed, as presidential responsibilities have increased over time,

the institutionalization of the presidency has led to the creation of more specialized offices to assist the president meet those responsibilities (Burke, 2000; Dickinson, 1996; Ragsdale & Theis, 1997), without diverging substantially from the president's own priorities and overall mission for the White House (Kumar, 2007). The White House is an institution, according to Ragsdale and Theis (1997), because it is autonomous, complex, coherent, and adaptable. Concerning public relations and presidential communications, we find three primary offices: The Office of Communications, Press Office, and Office of Public Liaison.

The Office of Communications

Prior to the 1970s, efforts to control the news were decided upon and organized in an individual and ad hoc fashion (Maltese, 1994, p. 7). Lacking sufficient formal structures for presidential communications, presidents used various means of communication to influence the news. Kennedy initiated live televised press conferences to embellish his public appeal, while Johnson attempted to control all media contacts through the White House Press Office (Maltese, 1994, p. 10). Thus, there was no consistent and enduring organizational structure to cultivate and perpetuate relations between the White House, media, and the public, aside from the press office, which still only structured public relations in an ad hoc manner (Walcott & Hult, 1995, p. 52), and was seldom consistent or effective (Maltese, 1994).

It was not until 1969 when President Nixon sought to manage formally the media and their growing importance to the presidency with the creation of the Office of Communications (OOC). The OOC equipped the presidency with an institutional mechanism to organize communications strategies and respond to public expectations through public outreach and speechmaking. It altered the president's basic approach to communicating with the media and public, which includes myriad speeches, of course, but also other efforts to control the president's messages, such as disseminating information about the president's priorities in a timely and strategic fashion. Although President Carter was initially resistant to institutionalizing his communications operation in the shadow of Watergate, the OOC has become an indispensable part of the presidency's public strategy (Kumar, 2007; Maltese, 1994). Now, the OOC includes speechwriting and media affairs operations, as well as staff who prioritize research and strategic planning efforts (Kumar, 2007, chapter 4).² The Obama and Trump communications offices have also added staff to coordinate social media and other online outreach.

The OOC manages three functions: a liaison with non-Washington-based media, coordinator of information flows from the White House, and "political tool for generating public support for administration initiatives" (Maltese, 1994, p. 118). Its goals are: "to set the public agenda, to make

sure that all parts of the presidential team ... are adhering to that public agenda, and to aggressively promote that agenda through a form of mass marketing” (Maltese, 1994, p. 2). As liaison, the OOC cultivates relationships with local and regional reporters and columnists, inviting them to White House events, providing coveted information, and granting interviews. Its staff advocates for the president, defends his actions, coordinates publicity, and explains the president’s decisions (Kumar, 2007, p. 32). The organization is charged with highlighting characteristics of the president (e.g., leadership, conviction, or flexibility) that the public approves of, learned by the White House through both private and public polling (Hult & Walcott, 2004, chapter 4). It then coordinates to emphasize these qualities in the president’s own speeches and through public outreach to the media to present the best possible presidency (Jacobs & Shapiro, 1995). Ultimately, the communications organization helps presidents manage public expectations, set the agenda, and build support for the president.

With its primary responsibility to help the president set the public and media agendas—to engage in “merchandising” the presidency (Hult & Walcott, 2004, p. 63)—the OOC attempts to influence what about the president the media will cover in the news and what the public thinks about the president and his policies. These efforts include “barnstorming” regional media and distributing fact sheets to editors and other “opinion leaders” to build public support for the president’s policies. Recent efforts by presidents to “go local” (Cohen, 2010), to target local news organizations and local publics with their policy messages are foray of the OOC, as well, with one of the best known and most extensive efforts to do this occurring in the George W. Bush Administration, and his “60 stops in 60 days” Social Security Reform tour (Eshbaugh-Soha & Peake, 2006). Presidents frequently hold symbolic events, such as Rose Garden bill signings, or hosting the Super Bowl victors, to play head of state and foster a favorable public image.

The president’s message—expressed mostly through speeches—is crucial to the success presidents may have in the legislative, public, or reelection arenas. As Kumar (2007) notes, when the president is unpopular or is struggling politically, the White House often concludes that this is the result of a communications problem. In turn, the White House hires new staff to enhance a struggling communications operation, or to refocus a message from domestic or foreign policy to reelection campaigns. This happens not only in terms of the White House hiring more individuals with previous communications experience, but also in terms of the number of staffers who work exclusively in the OOC. Aside from a brief leveling of staff size during the second term of the Clinton Administration (Figure 11.2), in which the Office of Media Affairs was a part of the Press Office (Kumar, 2007, p. 88), OOC staff has increased over time, hovering most recently around 45 individuals.³

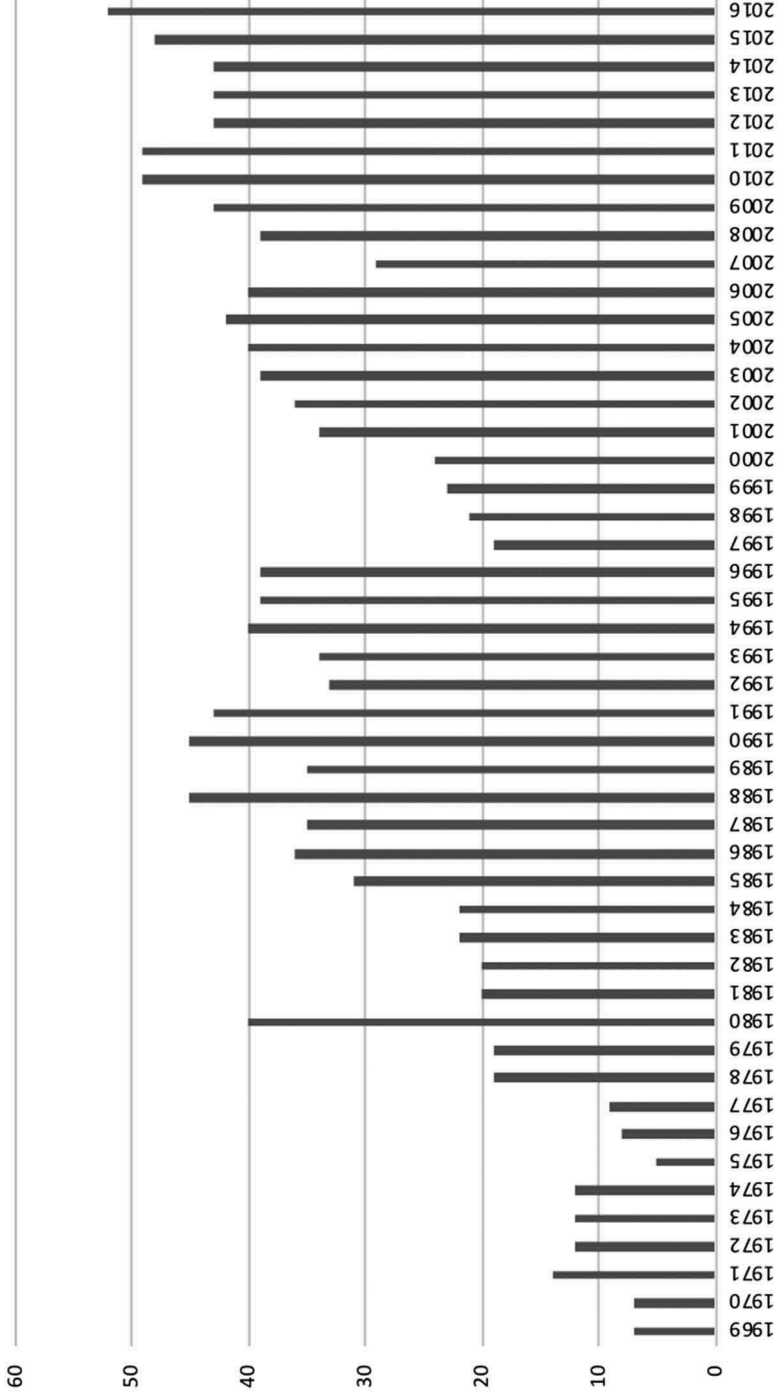


Figure 11.2 Approximate Staff Size for the Office of Communications, 1969–2016
 Sources: Maltese (1994); Kumar (2007); White House Transition Project (2017).

Although the number of speeches has not increased even as OOC staff size ticked upwards under the Obama Administration, the advance of new media technology has forced the OOC to continue to expand. A simple comparison of the job titles during the Clinton and Obama Administrations illustrates this. Whereas the Clinton OOC centered on traditional staff roles such as speech writers and directors of research, the Obama Office of Communications introduced us to the Director of Digital Strategy, Director of Online Engagement, and Director of Digital Content (White House Transition Project, 2017). Thus, although staff changes have not led to more speeches, these changes were needed to broaden the president's public outreach and take advantage of new media technologies. The advent of fragmented media, the need for presidents to reach out to multiple audiences "where they are," and the rise of electronic communications, such as social media, all require greater institutional expertise for effective public relations.

Press Office

The Press Office plays a vital role in presidential communication and, thus, public relations. In fact, it was this office that has shaped much of the communications operations of modern presidents, with the OOC entering the foray only recently. According to Walcott and Hult (1995), President Hoover employed the first press secretary, and Eisenhower, consistent with his own preferences for institutional structures, formalized many of the procedures and responsibilities of the press secretary. Although less formal and structured than during the Eisenhower years, both Kennedy and Johnson, who governed during the beginning of serious television exposure of the presidency, altered the office to address the growing importance television would play on presidential public relations and communications.

Whereas the larger communications operation that is housed primarily within the OOC (or its equivalent) has the broad task of communicating the president's message, the press secretary provides the official record of the president, and is geared toward influencing (or at least communicating with) the Washington Press Corps. Kumar (2007, p. 199) identifies three roles for the press secretary: information conduit, constituencies' representative, and manager of the Press Office. Obviously, representing the president's views credibly is vital to a successful press secretary. Yet, providing information to the news media about the president's agenda through gaggles and daily briefings provides an additional voice for the president and another opportunity for the president's policy positions to be expressed through news and, perhaps, affect the public's agenda. This relationship between the press secretary and Washington press is one of give-and-take, whereby the president needs the press corps to filter his message to the public and the media need the president as a reliable

political news source (Grossman & Kumar, 1981). Because news coverage of the presidency tends to be primarily negative (Cohen, 2008), this raises questions about the press office's ability to cultivate its relationship with the news media in a way that maximizes the president's policy success and a positive personal image.

The Office of Public Liaison

All modern presidents have attempted to maintain contact with interest groups and mobilize their support. But much like with the Office of Communications, concerted and institutionalized efforts to reach out to interest groups did not begin until the Nixon Administration (Hult & Walcott, 2004). The goal of this outreach is clear: to maintain relationships with key external groups while in office and use institutional resources to mobilize external supporters for both policy and electoral ends. Reaching out to other interest groups to expand the president's coalition of support is important, as well. Interest groups, in turn, can help presidents influence the press or even legislation before Congress. Groups may be an especially important source of support, given the inevitable rocky and contentious relationships presidents develop with the news media (Grossman & Kumar, 1981) and typically have with Congress. Whether or not these outreach efforts have proven successful or not, "the notion that diverse constituencies should have channels into the White House has come to be accepted" (Hult & Walcott, 2004, p. 103). Certainly, the institutionalization of this office allows presidential administrations to accommodate a wide range of organized interests (Pika, 1999).

Organizational Influences on Public Relations

The White House communications organization offers the president much opportunity to reach the public, media, and interest groups. There are examples a-plenty that the White House organization matters to effective public relations. These include George W. Bush's successful first term communications operation that set priorities and planned ahead, and Clinton's strong defensive operation, which was effective at dealing with scandal and distraction, including impeachment. Two features of these and other successful White House communications operations that have been essential to presidential public relations, generally, and to presidential speechmaking, more specifically, are organizational capacity and learning. Both help to illustrate how the OOC has facilitated an increase in the president's public outreach efforts over time, continuing with the rise of Twitter.

Organizational Capacity

Capacity to achieve goals and implement a mission is crucial to an organization's activity (Selznick, 1948). Capacity evolves over time as an organization

first establishes a mission, goals, and budget, and then, moves to achieve its goals or fails trying. If it achieves its initial goals, an organization may also increase its capacity and become better equipped to achieve existing and future goals (Yuchtman & Seashore, 1967). Simply, an organization needs capacity to function, achieve its goals, and be successful (Ponder, 2018, Chapter 6). Success breeds more capacity, allowing an organization to expand the resources available to achieve its goals. Capacity of the president's public relations organization has been defined as the organization's ability to use institutional arrangements effectively to achieve a desired outcome, often operationalized as an organization's staff or budgetary inertia (Eshbaugh-Soha, 2011). And, indeed, the number of OOC staff leads to more presidential public relations speeches, just as other factors, such as available communications technology similarly increase the number of speeches over time. Both of these factors provide the necessary foundation for staff resources to expand public relations and for staff to be positioned to learn how to use new public relations opportunities as they arise.

Organizational Learning

Just as capacity helps an organization do more of what it can to achieve its goals, an organization must learn to take advantage of new opportunities effectively. Learning permits an organization to "maintain and accumulate" routine "lessons of experience" (Levitt & March, 1990, p. 22; see also Feldman, 1993), while organizations learn by "encoding inferences from history into routines that guide behavior" (Levitt & March, 1990, pp. 15–16). As organizations understand the role of constraints and patterned fluctuations in their environment, furthermore, organizational uncertainty declines (Thompson, 1967, chapter 2). In short, organizational learning prepares an organization to respond more effectively, efficiently, and with greater certainty to its environment. Learning is necessary even if when an organization has sufficient capacity to function (Wilson, 1989).

Organizational learning also relates to organizational effectiveness. Related to presidential public relations, the White House, but specifically the Office of Communications, coordinates advocacy, defense, and explanation of the president's policies and actions (Kumar, 2007, p. 6). Yet, new media technologies require successful institutions to adapt and evolve, to move from reaching the public through three national networks to taking advantage of myriad outreach opportunities through soft news programs, the Internet, and social media. Indeed, because organizational learning should allow the OOC to maintain and accumulate knowledge about presidential public relations success and failures, mistakes made by past presidents should be reflected in successors' decisions on public relations. Surely, subsequent members of the OOC recognized staff failures during Watergate, and guided Reagan away from similar gaffes during the Iran-Contra scandal. The communication successes of the George

W. Bush's first term as president are often attributed to a communications organization comparable with Ronald Reagan's successful first term (Kumar, 2007). Maltese (1994) even shows how the OOC has evolved over time, culminating in the Reagan administration's effective use of the office to limit presidential mistakes, control information flows, and pitch policies for public support. Future presidents are bound to continue using Twitter to communicate with the public and news media, but they should learn from the mistakes of the Trump Administration. Ultimately, learning should reduce uncertainty about advances in public relations technology and increase the organization's understanding of which public outreach strategies may be most successful.

Communications Effectiveness

Building upon the concepts of capacity and learning in organizations, it is clear that presidential public relations have evolved over time, the White House has learned about effective communications strategies, and this institution has flexibility to change its public relations strategies alongside advances in media technologies and changes in media audiences. In other words, presidential public relations are organized and coordinated by the White House, but do they help the president reach the intended targets, the public, media, and interest groups? And do they help these targets reach the president and influence their agendas?

Presidential Public Relations and the News Media

The president's ability to affect news coverage of his administration is at the core of the White House public relations operation, and there is much reason to expect presidential leadership. The president devotes substantial resources to engaging the news media, including countless speeches, the press secretary's daily press briefings and gaggles with the Washington Press Corps, and outreach to interest groups. The White House helps to orchestrate news events, including press conferences that are easily accessible to reporters. Presidents make the news, much more than any other single individual or political institution. In many ways, this is not a surprise. The public is very interested in presidential news, after all, and the news media, being a business driven heavily by ratings, readers, and profits, want to give the public what they want by way of political news coverage (Eshbaugh-Soha & Peake, 2011).

Much of the political communications literature theorizes that presidents are able to influence news coverage and do so frequently. Reporters are likely to index—or report the official line—especially when it comes to the presidency. After all, the president (especially as it concerns foreign affairs) has: “the greatest perceived power to affect the situation or issue; greatest institutional capacity to engage government news; and the best

communications operations” (Bennett, Lawrence & Livingston, 2007, p. 63). Much research that examines the lead-up to the war in Iraq contends that indexing did indeed take place, and that presidents affected news coverage of the war in a favorable direction (Bennett, Lawrence & Livingston, 2007; Howell & Pevehouse, 2007). Effective communications undoubtedly contributed to the public’s initial support for the War in Iraq.

Despite these expectations, the evidence that the White House consistently affects news coverage is mixed. In one of the most comprehensive studies of presidential agenda-setting, Edwards and Wood (1999) show that presidential attention to foreign policy issues does not influence the news media’s coverage of those same issues. Although presidents appear to have some impact on the media’s domestic policy agenda (such as health care and education), the authors conclude that these are instances fostered by strategic action. That is, if presidents act entrepreneurially and prioritize an issue not previously in the news, then they are best situated to lead the media. Policy innovation, not necessarily effective communication, may thus be vital to generating news coverage (Graber, 2006). Indeed, President Clinton was able to focus congressional and media attention on health care reform early in his administration because it was not a policy priority of prior administrations (Edwards & Wood, 1999). Other research is less optimistic about the president’s ability to lead the news media through a nationally televised address (Peake & Eshbaugh-Soha, 2008), however, or even parlay their public speeches into coverage by national, prestige newspapers, leading Barrett (2007) to wonder that even when presidents speak, they may not necessarily make a sound.

The general profit motive that encourages news coverage of the presidency summarily undercuts it, too. Although the presidency is the best source of political news, a decreasing percentage of the population watches network television news or reads newspapers. Viewers are drawn to soft rather than policy-related hard news, encouraging news organizations to promote these, not stories on the president’s policy agenda (Bennett, 2009; Cohen, 2008). In the main, the media lack “staying power” to maintain their focus on policy issues over time (Downs, 1972; Kingdon, 1995, p. 62), and presidents have difficulty affecting what the media cover, in part because issues compete for limited agenda space (Jones & Baumgartner, 2005, pp. 20, 237; Wood & Peake, 1998). When the media cover issues that do not portray the president favorably, this primes the public to lower their evaluation of the president’s job performance (Krosnick & Kinder, 1990). When the media do not cover the president at all, then the president is constrained in being able to communicate with the American people. Although Twitter appears to have changed this for some followers of the president, it may be that the public’s interest in following a president on Twitter is driven by prior political engagement, which also dictates whether Americans use the Internet for political information (Boulianne, 2009).

Presidents prefer to be out in front of news coverage, but given the difficulties outlined above, the White House must be prepared to respond to news stories. As world events—often outside of the president's control—drive news stories, presidents tend to respond to, rather than lead news coverage, even in the area of foreign policy (Wood & Peake, 1998). Of greater political concern for the White House are times of crisis for the president and his administration. The White House has to be prepared to play defense when media air stories critical of the president or his policies. The Clinton Administration's ability to respond effectively to impeachment proceedings in 1998 illustrates how the White House public relations operation can succeed in response to negative circumstances. The Bush Administration's failed response to Hurricane Katrina in August 2005 is often blamed on the White House's ineffectiveness in anticipating the public outcry and not responding quickly to address public concerns through public relations. The Trump Administration has been plagued by many examples of ineffectual and uncoordinated responses to negative news stories or events. In short, the effectiveness of the White House public relations operation in responding appropriately to critical news coverage, as these examples help illustrate, may be even more important to a presidential administration than leading news coverage of their policy agendas.

Presidential Public Relations and the Public

According to much scholarship, the president *should* be able to lead the public, and especially its policy agenda (see Baumgartner & Jones, 1993; Kingdon, 1995). Because of the frequency of presidential public outreach, which increases the public's access to political information in a relatively costless manner (Zaller, 1992), it makes sense that the president would be effective cultivating public support. And there is evidence in favor of this expectation. Through their State of the Union Address, presidents have at least a short-term agenda-setting impact on the public's agenda (Cohen, 1995; see also Iyengar & Kinder, 1987). This impact, however, tends to be primarily symbolic, not substantive. Others find modest evidence of presidential leadership over public opinion, again in the short term, through nationally televised addresses (Rottinghaus, 2009) or leading opinions of co-partisans (Cavari, 2017). Wood (2007) links the tone of presidential rhetoric with public perceptions of the economy. Kiouisis and Strömbäck (2010) show that press conferences and major speeches correlate positively with the president's job approval rating.

The same theory of information processing that suggests that presidential public relations should be effective also reveals why presidents will have much difficulty engaging the public. Even if the president can regularly reach the public, political predispositions make it difficult for presidents to ensure that the public makes the president's priorities their

own. Individuals actively select and filter the information that they receive, screening political messages and discarding those that are inconsistent with their predispositions (Zaller, 1992, p. 44). Partisanship, especially, may undermine public support for the president's policy, even when they are predisposed to support the president's position (Edwards, 2016, p. 98). The public is generally disinterested in politics (Neuman, 1986), besides, limiting the president's captive audience. Indeed, the dominant view in political science is that presidents cannot use public relations to change public opinion—even with the massive communications institution at their disposal—but rather exploit opportunities of existing public support (Edwards, 2009).

Advances in communications technologies have further complicated the president's strategies and successes in reaching the public. There are two competing perspectives related to this point. On the one hand, new media provide presidents with opportunities to reach the public directly and, perhaps, to sidestep the national news media which often portrays the presidents more negatively than positively. Certainly, this is the initial expectation about Donald Trump's use of Twitter. In the absence of a definitive study, it certainly appears that President Trump has been able to communicate effectively to his supporters, a solid base that continues to approve of the president's job performance in spite of overwhelmingly negative news coverage. Presidents also receive more news coverage on cable and the internet than they receive on traditional network news and newspapers (Eshbaugh-Soha, 2016). Some contend that new media fostered through the Internet and social media create a more democratic environment facilitating communication between the people and their representatives (Sunstein, 2001).

On the other hand, a changing media environment has undermined presidential leadership, and the effectiveness of presidential outreach has diminished over time. Even as organizational tools to cultivate relationships have expanded, presidents were most effective setting the public's agenda during the golden age of presidential television, prior to 1986 that is, but not since then (Young & Perkins, 2005). The effectiveness of public opinion leadership through national addresses also appears to have waned, as research suggests that national addresses delivered by Presidents Carter through Clinton have had no positive impact on public opinion (Rottinghaus, 2009). In addition, although Brace and Hinckley (1992) show that national addresses increase presidential approval ratings from Eisenhower through Reagan's second term, Edwards (2003) illustrates no such relationship for Presidents Reagan, Bush, and Clinton. The same study that shows that there is more presidential news on cable and the internet than traditional news outlets reveals that most of that news coverage was not driven by the president's own agenda (Eshbaugh-Soha, 2016).

Without question, presidents must engage the public where they are, whether through YouTube, Twitter, or on *The View*. But the president's omnipresence is more about *having* to reach multiple audiences in a fragmented media environment. We simply have little evidence to suggest that presidents are better able to lead public opinion—or translate it into greater policy success—now that there are more ways to reach the public. The same factors that limit the president's outreach to the public—whether predispositions or lack of political engagement—will limit the president's success regardless of the president's chosen medium to engage in public relations. Despite the promise that it would be, the Internet may not be so democratic, after all (Hindman, 2009).

If presidents fail to lead the public through public outreach, they may still listen to public concerns and respond to them as part of a public relations strategy. Even though presidents' willingness to listen to public concerns and express them as part of their policy agenda is increasingly important, it is by no means pandering to public opinion. Instead, presidents respond to public opinion in a strategic manner. As Canes-Wrone (2006) illustrates, presidents are more likely to speak publicly about policies that are already popular with the public and are even more likely to take popular positions. Jacobs and Shapiro (2000) show, as well, how the White House communications operation is adept at polling the public to figure out not which policies to promote in public, but how to “craft” their message in a way that will play to popular support. Presidents also incorporate policy issues as part of their policy agendas when public concern is high enough (Eshbaugh-Soha & Peake, 2011), just as presidents speak about Supreme Court cases to demonstrate democratic responsiveness to the public on issues of national concern (Eshbaugh-Soha & Collins, 2015).

Presidential Public Relations and Interest Groups

Although interest groups play an important role in American politics, evidence concerning the effectiveness of presidential outreach to interest groups is limited. Peterson (1992) shows a partisan angle to this office, with the Reagan Administration's liaison strategy being driven extensively by groups that demonstrated Republican partisanship. The president's own speeches illustrate the extent of this outreach, as presidents have tended to “go narrow” (Cohen, 2008), targeting not the mass public, but more specialized groups in their outreach efforts. Twitter provides an additional avenue to target interest groups directly. Unfortunately, evidence that these efforts produce gains for the presidents in terms of increased lobbying efforts, voter mobilization, or membership expansion is lacking. Without clear evidence, it makes sense to conclude the same conditions that undermine the president's ability to call upon public support in general have similarly undermined the president's reliance on interest groups to

build public and legislative support for a policy proposal. This may be best illustrated by President Obama's reliance on "Organizing for America" to build support for his health care reform agenda; that support never materialized (Edwards, 2016 p. 179).

Even though public outreach may not translate into heightened legislative success, it certainly cannot hurt to foster positive relations to formulate policies that are likely to generate interest group support. In his failed attempt to reform health care during the first two years of his administration, for example, President Clinton ignored health insurance and pharmaceutical lobbies and did not incorporate their concerns into his health care bill. Perhaps learning from this mistake, the Obama Administration worked out agreements with these key groups prior to pushing his own health care reform legislation in Congress. All in all, it is logical that the Office of Public Liaison would work to respond to core pressure groups and bring their concerns to the attention of the president—who could then incorporate those ideas into their communications strategy—especially over policies central to the president's domestic policy agenda.

Conclusion

The White House communications organization is designed to facilitate presidential relations with target publics—the public, news media, and interest groups—to build support, prestige, and foster a positive message that helps presidents achieve their larger goals. Although the president has an institutional machine to cultivate these relationships, one that has evolved and adapted as informational technologies have advanced, the success of public relations campaigns is constrained by the very group that the president is mostly trying to reach: the public. Most evidence points to a weak correlation between public relations efforts and influence over target publics, influence that has also decreased over time. Nevertheless, presidents may be able to increase the salience of issues and demonstrate their concern for key issues by speaking about them.

Coincidentally, the president appears to have been more successful garnering at least the attention of the news media and the public at a time when the White House Communications operation was only evolving and learning how to engage these entities. The 1970s, coined the Golden Age of Presidential Television (Baum and Kernell, 1999), witnessed high viewership of presidential speeches and more news coverage of the presidency (Cohen, 2008). As the media environment has fragmented into partisan cable and online news outlets, even advances in public outreach (like social media) have not altered the difficult conditions that presidents continue to face when attempting to lead the public: a disinterested electorate in which a large portion are already predisposed to oppose presidents and reject their messages.

With each new administration comes new technology for presidents to utilize, but which administrations struggle to master. Just as the Reagan Administration governed when the 24-hour news cycle began, so too did the Clinton Administration contend with expanded cable news coverage (MSNBC and Fox News), and the Bush Administration grappled with Internet news programming, the continued decline of traditional media (network news broadcasts and newspapers), and increasingly partisan news outlets. These technological advances complicate the ability of the presidency to maintain and focus a consistent message to not only lead, but also to listen and respond to target publics. Once an administration learns about how to navigate one new medium, another arises, presenting additional possibilities and complications. This alone may help explain why the institutionalization of the presidential communications operation has not improved the effectiveness of the president's primary means for public outreach, his speeches, and why President Trump—while omnipresent on Twitter—does not appear to have been able to translate this presence into heightened public support or greater than expected legislative success. Surely, candidate Trump used social media effectively to win a surprise victory in the 2016 presidential election campaign. But it is not clear that social media were even the driving force behind that victory (Watts & Rothschild, 2017), whether campaign successes can be translated into effective governance, or if the White House is able to translate social media access to the public and traditional news media into public relations victories.

Scholarship has built an impressive array of findings concerning presidential public relations. Yet any viewer of the Trump Administration may be left wondering whether and to what extent the Trump Administration has altered our expectations for successful presidential public relations. It is clear, based on popular media accounts, that Donald Trump is a unique president who has changed many norms of the White House. For example, President Trump does not hold regular solo press conferences, is reluctant to give national addresses on important issues (save for delivering the obligatory State of the Union Address), and uses Twitter to attempt to drive the daily news cycle. Although it appears that Trump's public relations strategy has moved the presidency from one of institutionalized public relations identified in this essay to a new form of individualized public relations,⁴ we may have to wait for a 46th president to know whether President Trump's approach to public relations will endure. If the Trump presidency marks the beginning of a new and sustainable era in presidential public relations, then the conclusions summarized throughout the chapter may need to be revisited to reconsider the role of the Office of Communications in effective presidential public relations.

If President Trump is unique, then future presidents will continue to use their organizational resources to cultivate relationships with their target

publics. But the difficulties of adapting to and using new communications technologies to maximize public outreach may remain. To this point, scholars and White House staff may wish to move beyond the American context to explore presidents and political leaders in other nations to see what this may reveal about whether an individualized or institutionalized approach is more appropriate for effective public relations. Do the difficulties faced by American presidents also afflict leaders throughout the world? Might their experiences inform presidents of ways to improve public relations? Until future research uncovers more answers, it makes sense for the White House to use all available communications technology and expertise to build an effective public relations strategy. This is especially imperative, given the difficulties of reaching the mass public—most of whom lack political engagement—through an increasingly fragmented and decentralized news media. But cultivating the mass public to help presidents achieve their goals may require additional capacity, sufficient time, and a broader understanding of what works in comparable democracies so that the White House can learn to use the latest public relations tools to a productive end.

Notes

- 1 Barack Obama, “Remarks Following a Meeting with Members of the Business Community in Alexandria, Virginia,” December 15, 2009.
- 2 The Office of Communications has gone by different names. For example, George W. Bush centralized communications operations with the Counselor to the President. Although slightly different organizationally, the goals remain similar across administrations (see Kumar, 2007).
- 3 I compiled OOC staff (1969–1977) counts with data provided by John Maltese (1994), who collected them from the Nixon, Ford, and Carter libraries. Other data found before the Clinton years are available in Kumar (2007). The remaining years are available from the White House transitions project: <http://whitehousetransitionproject.org/transition-resources-2/office-briefs/#page-part>. When organizational charts were missing, I estimated staff size based on the previous year’s staff size.
- 4 Many thanks to the editors of this volume who made this observation and suggested these terms.

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12 Political Public Relations, Corporate Citizenship, and Corporate Issues Management

Damion Waymer and Robert L. Heath

On September 15, 2017, Kimberly-Clark Corporation, a Dallas, TX USA-based international corporation that manufactures flushable wipes for adults and babies, sued the District of Columbia (Washington, D.C., USA) over its new city ordinance that regulates the standards by which such wipes can be labeled “flushable” (Shaver, 2017). By implication, “flushable” in marketing communication terms implies more than the product will go down a bathroom stool. It implies that such products are not harmful to sewer systems. If customers knew of these products’ environmental impact, would the brand’s equity suffer? Is this potential crisis merely a matter of responsible marketing, or is it a case for studying political public relations as issues management? That question combines marketing and politics to establish marketing as inseparable from political public relations insofar as marketing affects public policy and public policy affects marketing and strategic management.

Marketing communication becomes political communication when interests collide over marketplace issues. That point is relevant not only to the discussion that follows but is a variation on the theme featured by Strömbäck and Kiouisis, (2011):

Similar to the relationships between public relations and public affairs, public relations and marketing theory and research tend to live largely separate lives with different bodies of knowledge, scholarly networks, professional associations, and journals.

(p. 11)

Relevant to that point, this chapter does not focus on political marketing, but the political public relations connections between marketing communication and political communication under the heading of political citizenship, public policy, and issues management.

In support of that theme, the chapter firmly connects marketing and political communication as the essential responsibility of corporate citizenship. Acts by companies become political when they generate issues in the public policy arena. Strömbäck and Kiouisis (2011) emphasized that point

as they addressed the McLeod, Kosicki, and McLeod (1994) definition of political communication: “the exchange of symbols and messages between political actors and institutions, the general public, and news media that are the products of or have consequences for the political system” (pp. 125–126). How marketing and management topics are discussed and adjudicated through issues management has substantial implications for political public relations.

A central marketing issue arose when Kimberly-Clark Corporation sued the District of Columbia over a new city ordinance that regulates the standards by which such wipes can responsibly be labeled “flushable.” D.C.’s new “flushable” ordinance, which went into effect on January 1, 2018, was in response to complaints from the District of Columbia Water and Sewer Authority (DC Water) and other sewer utilities across the nation. These entities claim that flushable wipes are a major contributor to the congestion of pumps, the obstruction of screens, and the clogging of expensive equipment at sewage treatment plants because they are marketed as flushable, which leads customers to assume they are biodegradable and otherwise not harmful to sewer and septic systems. Although this is an issue in the USA, it is also one around the globe.

Such political public relations by cities is needed to defend the interests of citizens. Dialogically, it forces political public relations reaction from relevant manufacturers and marketing teams. According to the National Association of Clean Water Agencies (NACWA, 2018) product-related problems cost U.S. utilities billions of dollars in maintenance and repair costs. From the financial standpoint alone, the political issue that corporate, nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), and governmental interests need to address arises when advantages gained by marketing come at a cost to the general public.

From the vantage point of the NACWA, civic action must prevent wet wipes from ending up in city sewers. So inspired, NACWA designed and launched an aggressive counter-marketing campaign, “Toilets are Not Trashcans Campaign” (NACWA, 2018). With a parallel purpose, city leaders of Washington, D.C. pursued far more aggressive actions to address the wet wipes issue by instituting new policy and regulations. Its new ordinance requires companies, such as Kimberly-Clark, to label such products “non-flushable.” The law specifies that wipes sold in the city may only be labeled “flushable” if they break apart “in a short period of time after flushing in the low-force conditions of a sewer system ...” Wipes that don’t meet that standard must be “clearly and conspicuously” labeled as something that “should not be flushed” (Shaver, 2017, para. 6).

From its vantage point, Kimberly-Clark has a lot to lose if such legislation is uncontested—for the personal care wipes market is lucrative. Kimberly-Clark is a global top producer of these wipes, and the flushable wipes market has grown significantly despite a slow growing global

economy (Nonwovens Industry, 2017). In fact, “in 2015, flushable wipes accounted for \$1.4 billion in sales, which is a significant increase from \$796 million in 2010. Projections are for sales to increase further to \$2.7 billion by 2020” (Smithers Pira, 2016, para. 1).

In response to imminent regulation that could affect one of its products negatively, Kimberly-Clark needed to devise a defense strategy that was plausible in the dialogue relevant to the appropriateness of the product and its labeling for a responsible role in communities’ sanitation systems. Of the many counter-strategic options available, Kimberly-Clark chose to challenge the constitutionality of the law; it filed a lawsuit against the District of Columbia. The company relied on its corporate personhood’s right to free speech to argue that the new law “violates the First Amendment because it could require companies that believe their wipes to be flushable to label their products as ‘do not flush’”—even though several persons were skeptical of the ethics, responsibility, and probity of such a claim (Shaver, 2017, para. 2). While corporate free speech might not exist in non-USA nations, Kimberly-Clark is still using its corporate voice globally to maintain its claim that “the product is biodegradable and meets voluntary industry guidelines for assessing the flushability of non-woven products” (Castles, 2015, para. 16).

Warning labels and even regulations are a routine part of risk communication and management, whether for personal safety or for environmental quality. In terms of the life cycle of issues, warning labels, however useful, are recurrent factors of life. Yet, Kimberly-Clark contests this regulation on the grounds of the First Amendment—which does not protect speech that is harmful, in and of itself, or by reasonable interpretation of the implications of and outcomes from relevant text.

Such is the nature of risk management and communication that issue relevant differences of opinion on matters of fact are not merely contestable issues but a failure to warn, fully inform and/or agree to facts relevant to the advantages and harms of some industrial process or product. For this reason, organizations are expected to support and enhance individuals and other organizations in the search for health, safety, fairness, and environmental quality (Heath & Palenchar, 2009). This principle would lead organizations to be expected to proactively engage to resolve differences, find and use facts relevant to the best public policy solutions, and be responsible to the public interest. Such reasoning has implications for the engineering and design of products as well as their marketing once they add costs to political economy that are not borne proportionately by the entity receiving the rewards of product sales.

Rather than adopting and acting on this encompassing intersection of marketing and politics, Bob Brand, Kimberly-Clark Director of External Communications, stated that by initiating this lawsuit, “Kimberly-Clark is fighting for our consumers and standing up for our brands ... The District

of Columbia has unfortunately passed a law that will severely restrict, if not eliminate, consumers' ability to purchase flushable wipes in Washington, D.C" (Shaver, 2017, para. 3).

As a result of Kimberly-Clark's advocacy, on December 22, 2017, Federal Judge James E. Boasberg of the U.S. District Court for the District of Columbia, temporarily barred the city from enforcing part of its law "requiring cautionary labels on 'flushable' wet wipes, saying the city's approach probably violates the First Amendment" (Jamison, 2017, para. 1). Specifically, Boasberg found that the law "likely treads impermissibly" on Kimberly-Clark's right to free speech.

Judge Boasberg's judgment was not rendered without scrutiny (Jamison, 2017). By dissecting the varied perspectives of this issue, we provide the reader with a clear, theoretically informed exemplar of corporate issues management and political public relations that reflects differences in issues management globally. Broadly, and fundamentally, the authors recognize that free speech rights in the USA are not without limit. The assumption of free speech is that ideas put into the public policy arena lead to best case decisions. In such matters, however, product safety labels must withstand judicial review when the harm of such products' use becomes a collective burden to individuals, communities, and societies. The literature on corporate social responsibility presumes that when corporate actions offend stakeholder expectations, adjustments of action and relationship are needed, if the company wants to avoid a gap in legitimacy. That is the rationale for strategic issues management (Heath & Palenchar, 2009).

This unfolding case is an excellent example of corporate issues management's global intersection with political public relations. This case highlights the complexity of how societies pragmatically deal with abstract constructs such as corporate personhood, (protected) corporate speech, consumer rights, and regulatory (over)reach and the related issues that emerge with each. To ground the discussion that follows, we revisit Strömbäck and Kiousis's updated (Chapter 1, this volume) definition of political public relations:

the management process by which an actor for political purposes, through communication and action, seeks to influence and to establish, build, and maintain beneficial relationships and reputations with key publics and stakeholders to help support its mission and achieve its goals.

Challenges of the Corporate Voice in Political Communication

This "flushable" case study is relevant for framing this chapter and allows the discussion of political communication and political public relations to expand in practice and theory. This discussion emphasizes how corporate voices, using public relations in socio-political contexts, presumes the

ability to gain business advantage and resist constraints imposed within the political arena. The essence of the political arena is a complex of intelligences by which societies in general and communities in specific can achieve self-governance. The question is whether the members of societies and communities cooperate, as relationship management, to collaboratively engage in ways that lead to mutual benefit (Strömbäck & Kioussis, 2011).

Politics is a means by which strategic change is accomplished in ways that benefit a complex array of interests, which often compete and sometimes diametrically oppose one another. Such struggles push and strain the concept of public interest. As much as public interest can be viewed as the resolution of all interests into one collective interest, that which is the public interest may also dramatically, and dialectically, constrain one interest (Heath & Waymer, 2018). The tension facing political communication efforts is the strain to generate sufficient concurrence so that government can prevent some interests from gaining more in evaluative (moral legitimacy) and cognitive/pragmatic (financial/material legitimacy) outcomes than is the preference of the political voices engaged in defining and implementing standards of stakeholder legitimacy through societally productive corporate social responsibility (Golant & Sillince, 2007).

A fundamental question is whether corporate interests bend relationships to serve them, or they bend, or are bent, to serve the interests of societies and communities. Thus, political public relations supplies the means by which rewards and costs are strategically balanced so that one entity's rewards are not gained at undue costs to other interests. In political discussions that address risks, their management, and communication, involved and concerned parties pose the eternal question, whose interest is at risk (Heath & McComas, 2015). Clogged sewer systems are a risk that is in various ways politically manageable, but how?

The Kimberly-Clark case elucidates the international challenges of *the corporate voice in political communication*. The issue of “flushability” of wet wipes is global in scope and magnitude, with contextual differences as to how politics play out. For example, in cities across the world, including London, Newcastle, Sydney, San Francisco, Miami, New York City, Toronto, Istanbul, and Washington, D.C., sewage authorities claim that wet wipes labeled as flushable do not break apart easily or at all and as a result, are damaging municipal sewer systems (Kessler, 2016). Cities across the globe are experiencing sewer breakdowns as flushed wet wipes cluster with congealed fat from food to form large obstructions known as fatbergs (Albert, 2018; Kessler, 2016; Shaver, 2017).

Wet wipes are a global issue to be managed, in New Zealand and Australia, for example. In New Zealand, repair costs are about \$500,000 per year, and in Australia, wet wipes have cost water services \$25 million to manage current sewer issues caused by wipes blockages and to develop

new infrastructure to deal with the increasing use of wipes (Castles, 2015). New Zealand is considering banning wet wipes (Gathey, 2018).

In 2016, a discharge of effluent flowed into the Mulaghi River, a tributary of the River Maine in Ireland; water service workers found that “flushable” wet wipes caused this environmental hazard (Lucey, 2016). Teams of researchers from across Eurasia—from Amsterdam (see Debczak, 2018) to Turkey (see Karadagli, 2015)—are studying the effects of these wipes on sewer systems and the natural environment.

Perhaps the United Kingdom presents the most iconic example denoting the problems “flushable” wet wipes are causing on sewer systems and the environment. In 2017, British engineers “waged war” against a giant, 250 yard-long, 143 metric ton blob in East London sewers. In another example, in 2015, a 10-metric ton lump of wipes was removed from the London sewer system at a cost of £400,000, and in 2013 a fatberg weighing 15 metric tons was found in Kingston, an area southwest of Greater London (CBS News, 2017; Ratcliffe, 2015). Water UK, which represents the country’s main water and wastewater companies, revealed in a 2017 study it conducted, that wipes composed 93 percent of the material that forms sewage blockages (CBS News, 2018). As a result of the damages these products are causing both to the sewers and to the rivers and wildlife, top nurseries in the UK have banned wet wipes in their facilities (Albert, 2018); and leading British political figures such as Prime Minister Theresa May have promised to eliminate all “avoidable plastic waste” by 2042 (CBS News, 2018, para. 10).

Reflecting the political resolve embedded in its political public relations, the UK government asserted that “wet wipes will be banished in the UK as part of the government’s crackdown on plastic—wipes are made from polyester and contain millions of microfibres impregnated with chemical—being thrown away and damaging ecosystems” (Dalton, 2018, para. 1). In terms of environmental damage caused by wipes, a recent study indicated that 70 percent of flounder caught in the Thames River had plastic inside of them (Skynews, 2018). Plastics kill fish in rivers and change the shapes of river beds (CBS News, 2018).

Thus, the flushability debate is not only relevant in and to the USA, but also to sewer services of municipalities across the globe and to multinational corporations that sell wipes in these cities and countries. The issue globally, however USA-centric, is not universally whether Kimberly-Clark’s First Amendment rights have been infringed, but whether its product design and marketing communication result in harmful environmental products that lead to additional costs to governmental entities required to protect public health and safety. Such issues are vital to understanding and critically assessing the practice and societal role of political public relations. Thus, this case highlights a global issues management challenge and implies the political public relations of any product that offends stakeholder expectations. Also, issues management is contextual, sensitive to the structures, functions, cultures, strategic

communication processes, and corporate social responsibility (CSR) legitimization norms unique to each city and country. One size of political public relations does not fit all issues in context.

The remainder of this chapter seeks to advance the scholarly discussion of corporate issues management and political public relations by problematizing corporate personhood and corporate speech and political public relations. This analysis is unique to the issue management conditions operating in the USA, and for that reason may be highly illustrative of that idiosyncratic decision making environment. In so doing, we interrogate one view of the many tensions associated with corporate voices and the ways that corporations use their voices to wield political power and influence to gain advantage, for some or for all. Before we engage the aforementioned tensions, we provide a brief discussion of what issues management is, how it emerged, and its role in enhancing civic relationships.

Foundations of Strategic Issues Management

Issues management (by some called issue management), as a working concept that blends communication and management strategic practices, acquired its name in the 1970s (Jacques, 2010) even though the practice of issues management extends back to the U.S. industrial revolution at the end of the 19th century (Heath & Palenchar, 2009). Issues management refers to the process of integrated, strategic business management and planning whereby corporations create, respond to, and engage in operations and discourse generally and political discourse specifically. Furthermore, corporate issues management entails the strategic use of issues analysis by corporate leaders to help organizations make adaptations needed both to foster mutual interests with the communities in which they operate and to help organizations lessen the threats public policy trends have on the legitimacy of their strategic business planning and implementation (Chase, 1984; Crable & Vibbert, 1985; Ewing, 1987; Heath, 1997, 1988; Heath & Cousino, 1990). In short, at the heart of issues management are concerns about public policy and how organizations deftly navigate public policy challenges that they encounter. The discipline of issues management, in that way, reasons that rather than corporations being able and encouraged to manage issues in ways that benefit their interests disproportionately, the discipline is intended to help corporations to manage their response to issues on the assumption that communities and societies where businesses operate necessarily work to balance interests and/or work to prevent businesses from shifting the costs of their operations, products, and services to others in ways that violate the public trust.

From a normative standpoint, scholars have argued that issues management, when practiced optimally, requires organizations to be proactive rather

than reactive (Crabbe & Vibbert, 1985; Heath & Palenchar, 2009). As such, organizations constantly should engage in the preemptive practices of issues scanning, issues monitoring, issues analyzing, and priority setting (Heath & Palenchar, 2009). In this way, these issues management concepts are similar to the theory of agenda building. Public relations practitioners apply the tenets of agenda building theory to help the organizations they represent craft their specialized interests in an attempt to have those interests become the priority interests of key public policymakers (Curtin, 1999; Kiouisis, Popescu & Mitrook, 2007). Therefore, best practices in issues management suggest that organization leaders should systematically scan, identify, monitor, and analyze issues that might have political and public policy consequences for their organizations, and then use this intelligence to readjust and reset management and public policy priorities. After such consideration is integrated with reflective management, organizations are encouraged to engage in strategic issue communication as appropriate and necessary.

The normative presumption is that dialogue benefits community and societal interests, the essence of political, democratic self-governance. This presumption aligns with the traditional definition of strategic communication which emphasizes the use of communication strategically to help an organization to fulfill its mission (Hallahan et al., 2007). Broadly, purposeful, strategic communication occurs in a political arena that is employed collectively to achieve outcomes, but if such outcomes are narrowly construed as those that help one interest to the disadvantage of others, the critics of such corporate behavior experience strain between what they find to be the case and what they prefer. Such offended stakeholder expectations become the motivation for strategic issue communication to understand problems, to determine the interests that are harmed—and benefited—and to decide whether such dialogue makes society appropriately functional. If certain definable interests of society are found to be irresponsible to the larger good of society, self-correcting mechanisms set in, as political communication dedicated to manage issues.

Thus, issues communication developed as one of those self-correcting mechanisms. Its recent popularity has resulted from the fact that traditional, protective public relations strategies and management approaches failed to protect corporate interests as a balance with other interests. Issues management advocates reasoned that to the extent that organizations, products, processes, and such suffer legitimacy challenges, issues communication is required to engage with audiences, stakeholders, and publics to examine key premises that are central to each corporation's position on particular issues as well as conclusions they want publics to consider that are relevant to public policy matters (Heath, 1997; Heath & Palenchar, 2009). Oftentimes, it is via issues communication that corporations flex their corporate voices in their attempts to create, challenge, shape, and influence politics, public opinion, and ultimately public policy. It is also by these strategic processes that stakeholders resist the efforts that corporations make to design, manufacture,

and market products, ostensibly to meet consumers' approval in the public interest. In some sense that is the essence of corporate personhood, as it is the personhood of all citizens who aspire to assure, in this sense, a fair and responsible commitment to environmental quality, one where "flushable" items do not lead to unintended consequences.

In the next section, we problematize corporate personhood and speech by interrogating the many tensions associated with corporate voice and the ways that corporations use their voices to wield political power and influence, especially if they fail to search for knowledge that opposes rather than supports the mission of the organization.

Corporate Personhood, Politics, and Issues Management

In the USA, the federal government officially recognizes corporations as "persons." As such, the federal government has granted corporations many of the same rights and privileges it extends to individual citizens including First Amendment protections (Logan, 2019; Manning, 1984; Thimsen, 2015). Corporate personhood and its associated protections for corporations have existed for about 150 years; however, if one traces the origins of corporate personhood one will find that corporate personhood begins with corporations attempting to influence politics and public policy for their advantage. Although corporations cannot vote, a sacred right of natural citizens, in the current political climate they can gather and spend unlimited amounts of money to influence the outcomes of political campaigns and ballot initiatives.

The genesis of "corporate personhood" is generally attributed to the infamous 1886 *Santa Clara County v. Southern Pacific Railroad* case whereby lawyers in defense of Southern Pacific Railroad argued that Santa Clara County, California was overtaxing the railroad company unjustly and unfairly. Santa Clara sued the Southern Pacific Railroad to recover unpaid taxes from the company; the company used the Fourteenth Amendment of the U.S. Constitution as a cornerstone for its defense. In a brief, an attorney argued in Southern Pacific Railroad's defense that:

The truth cannot be evaded that, for the purposes of protecting rights, the property of all business and trading corporations IS the property of the individual corporators. A State act depriving a business corporation of its property without due process of law, does in fact deprive the individual corporators of their property. In this sense, and within the scope of these grand safeguards of private rights, there is no real distinction between artificial persons or corporations, and natural persons.

(as cited in Horwitz, 1985, p. 178)

Advantageously for the Southern Pacific Railroad (and all other business corporations subsequently), the Supreme Court accepted the defense's conflation of person and property argument:

The court does not wish to hear argument on the question whether the provision in the Fourteenth Amendment to the Constitution, which forbids a State to deny to any person within its jurisdiction the equal protection of the laws, applies to these corporations. We are all of the opinion that it does.

(*Santa Clara*, 1886, p. 396)

This case became the first in the history of the United States that the Supreme Court ruled in favor of the Fourteenth Amendment and applied its protections to corporations, as citizens. By claiming these Fourteenth Amendment rights, corporations avoid paying certain taxes and are exempt from many types of government regulation (Logan, 2019; Thimsen, 2015). In the 20th century, social movement activists have tirelessly worked to constrain actions of these "citizens" as legitimate because of how they offend societal, community norms. Thus, *Santa Clara County v. Southern Pacific Railroad* was a seminal case that granted corporations, via their political advocacy in the courts, the legal right to continue to distort, and apply self-interestedly, constitutional protections that federal legislators, the president, and the requisite number of state governments ratified with the intent of protecting disenfranchised individuals. Secretly, quietly, and deceptively some who supported the amendments did so to leverage those constitutional protections for corporate political power and gain of increasingly powerful and plentiful corporations, resulting from the industrial revolution, who used issues management to frame laws and regulations favorable to their interests.

Corporate Speech, Politics, and Issues Management

Thimsen (2015) articulated the foundational logic used to justify corporate claims to personhood and the ways that courts and corporate entities have institutionalized these claims as legal "common sense":

First, persons are political subjects with a right to own property rather than being property. Second, persons are equal in the eyes of the law so that they cannot be discriminated against; the status of "person" indicates this formal equality. And finally, the expressive and political activities of persons are speech, which is protected as a political good in itself.

(p. 489)

Corporate entities use the benefits of personhood primarily by engaging in protected speech.

As indicated above, courts and legislatures have officially recognized corporate entities as “persons” in the eyes of the law; as such, the courts have granted these entities the rights, privileges, and responsibilities of being able to speak to the stakeholding public—just as any other individual may. Corporate speech can take several forms, including paid advertising, making financial contributions, or spending money “for or against public policy positions or political candidates” (Heath, 1997, p. 236). It is in this vein where we see the power of corporate issues management intersecting with political public relations.

Corporate speech can and often does influence political outcomes, and it is a primary reason why corporate entities have previously and continue to fight for the expansion of corporate speech. For example, in 1978, *First National Bank of Boston v. Bellotti*, a U.S. constitutional law case, made a defining decision for corporations’ free speech rights. In this case, the United States Supreme Court held that corporations have a First Amendment right to campaign for and against ballot initiatives. Additionally, in 2010, the Supreme Court ruled in the *Citizens United v. Federal Election Commission* case that the protective free speech clause found in the First Amendment prohibits the government from restricting independent expenditures by nonprofit corporations, for-profit corporations, labor unions, and other associations. The right to “spend” for political speech is a right to speak. Independent expenditures are a form of a political campaign communication; by these strategic communications, organizations can advocate for or against the election of a clearly identified candidate as long as this advocacy is not made in concert, cooperation, or consultation with or at the request or suggestion of a candidate, candidate’s authorized committee, or political party (FEC, n.d.). Such restrictions are more symbolic than enforceable. They are sort of “wink, wink” restrictions.

With this decision, the Supreme Court reinforced both the legal metaphor that “money is speech” and the familiar U.S. adage that “money talks.” Stated simply, corporate speech is protected speech, and corporations can speak to defend themselves or their practices; they can speak to markets, promote, and sell their products and services, and most importantly, they can speak to influence public opinion and government decisions (Heath & Waymer, 2011).

As previously mentioned, when corporations speak to influence public opinion they are engaged in issues communication. Via issues communication, corporations introduce facts, values, policy positions, and identifications that are favorable to their interests into the public, political dialogue in hopes that stakeholders will use these message elements to judge current and subsequent issues in the corporate interest. Some might consider this a form of political priming (Holbrook & Hill, 2005; Wang, 2007), at least and, for some, even political steamrolling.

As priming effect researchers have noted, the priming effect states that by making certain issues more salient than others a prime can influence (and

frame) the standards by which a particular issue is judged (Iyengar & Simon, 1993). Public relations as a discipline has long been associated with media relations strategies that can have the effect of changing political agendas, agenda building, and the meanings of key issue positions. As Heath and Waymer (2011) have noted, issues management is not only concerned about the standards by which issues are judged but the discipline is also concerned about the various platforms of argumentation used to both articulate and judge issues. This is why issues management research is concerned with the power, reach, and influence exerted by corporate voices (Boyd & Waymer, 2011) and the hidden interests served by this form of organizational discourse as used by corporate and political elites (Heath & Waymer, 2018; Waymer & Heath, 2016).

At the heart of corporate issues, management and political public relations are issues: issues are contestable questions of fact, value (evaluation), policy, and identity/identification (Heath, 1997; Heath & Palenchar, 2009). Issues are “contestable”; therefore, (competing) publics, stakeholders, and audiences often consider issues to be unsettled matters. Issues are unresolved matters. Because of the nature of recurrent political discourse, the issues management literature parses the molar types of issues to be those of fact, value/evaluation, policy, and identification. Going beyond the assumption of information theory that focuses on data flow and availability, this rhetorical, propositional approach to contestable fact emphasizes how political actors examine facts to determine whether they are true, and whether they are relevant to conclusions that are addressable by fact. Thus, such contests seek to expand and support with reasoning the knowledge a society uses to manage issues relevant to the public interest. Also relevant are evaluations (attitudes and values) which judge whether some issue leads to conclusions regarding what is good or bad, generically. Policy is contestable actions, voluntary and imposed, by which people in a polity assess what actions are deemed worthy of reward, and which are undesirable. Finally, matters of identification revolve around association and identities. People identify for many reasons, and in many ways—ways that are intersectional. They identify with one another by age, ideology, occupation, profession, region, race, religion, ethnicity, heritage, class, political perspectives, political party preferences, issue alignment, interest alignment, consumption patterns, lifestyles, affiliations, and interest in quality of life. How people behave, and the issue positions they prefer, often result from identities and identifications.

Companies use marketing activities, including communication, to court buyers to align their interests and build identification with those of the company via a product or service. The assumption is that the alignment is mutually beneficial, rather than favoring one interest, and even harming others. People’s identities result in and from their identifications. Relevant to marketing, corporate citizens begin the process of engineering and designing products by using scientific fact to define marketable product

attributes. But, as in the case of Bisphenol-A (BPA) and genetically modified organisms (GMOs), for instance, the science that drives design can undergo several stages of investigation and peer review that reveal unintended consequences, or consequences that were not well thought through and carefully considered by invoking appropriately high CSR standards (Heath, Palenchar, McComas, & Proutheau, 2012). Having spent money on product design and marketing/branding, companies become reluctant to change, even in the face of stakeholder opposition.

Thus, it is imperative that corporate, government, and stakeholder publics (including activists) use issue communication to create, shape, influence, or even challenge public policy and the principles and practices by which it is argued and implemented. Such contest is not merely academic, or an exercise of intellectual curiosity, but an examination of how public policy either supports corporate strategic management policy, or constrains it as a legitimacy gap. Traditionally, critics worry that corporations have the biggest voices, the deepest pockets, and most resources to influence the course an issue takes. If so, they can achieve favorable public policy through political public relations that can support unwise policies that violate known or knowable facts. Rather than merely seeking government support for marketing communication as protected speech, the responsibility of citizenship binds corporations to use their monetary resources and intellectual capital to serve socially responsible interests beyond their own. Only then can corporations truly achieve the sorts of relationships possible with political public relations that aligns stakeholders' interests with corporate interests.

Discussion: Wet Wipes Case Revisited

As we have seen in the USA for nearly 150 years, corporations have received constitutional protection and been able to shape and use public policy to their advantage. This is not certain, but achievable. Agencies such as the Surgeon General, Centers for Disease Control, Environmental Protection Agency, and Federal Drug Administration were created to serve the public interest. So too were municipal sewage departments created and granted powers to operate in the public interest. Their voices constitute political public relations, through government, on behalf of the people. But, as noted above, person is now any entity with political status, some natural and others artificial. With citizenship comes the right and responsibility to communicate in ways that make societies fully functional, good places to live and work. That citizenship responsibility is fundamental to societal worth of political public relations.

However, these dynamics become out of balance once some interests are given greater status and legitimacy than others. Corporations benefit from the government granting them personhood via the Fourteenth Amendment, and because of the status of personhood, First Amendment,

freedom of speech rights, protects corporations. We have witnessed the Supreme Court ruling that corporate speech is protected speech in the 2010 *Citizen United* case. Interestingly enough, in 2018 we are bearing witness to a lesser court ruling that asserts that the Kimberly-Clark Corporation does not have to comply with a Washington, D.C. rule that would force them to label their products as non-flushable because such a mandate violates the company's First Amendment rights. Kimberly-Clark "believes" that its products are flushable. Many scientists and consumers alike disagree. Here is where we see a contestable question of fact playing out before our eyes.

On May 9, 2018, the Ninth Court of the U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals ruled that its decision was correct when it ruled, in 2017, to reinstate a dismissed lawsuit against Kimberly-Clark for falsely advertising four of its cleansing wipes as "flushable" (Bellon, 2018). In *Davidson v. Kimberly-Clark Corp.*, a consumer, Jennifer Davidson said that she purchased one of the company's brand of wipes and she paid a higher price for the product because she thought they were "flushable," as advertised. Davidson alleges that Kimberly-Clark's wipes "takes hours to breakdown," unlike actual "flushable products, such as toilet paper, which disperse and disintegrate within seconds or minutes" (Metropolitan News-Enterprise, 2018, para. 3). Furthermore, in her state-court action, Davidson sued under California's Consumer Legal Remedies Act, False Advertising Law, and Unfair Competition Law; she is seeking restitution and a court order barring future false advertising of the wipes (Metropolitan News-Enterprise, 2018). This is the same legal framework that was used to find Nike legally responsible for assuring that its products were not being manufactured in a sweatshop, when in fact they were.

In this "flushable" case, we are witnessing the negative aspects of corporate personhood and speech that become decoupled from responsible citizenship. Consumer rights are being trampled; what appears to be sound legislation is being thwarted; and city sewer services and the natural environment are being damaged by these corporate by-products. Most evidence indicates that these wipes are not "flushable"; if the scientific community is providing compelling evidence that suggests these products are not flushable, one has to ask how is Kimberly-Clark successfully winning court cases granting them First Amendment protection to label their products as "flushable"?

From a definitional perspective, some might say the organization has found success because it is practicing sound political public relations. Kimberly-Clark is engaging in political public relations: the organization is trying to strategically support its mission and achieve its goals through purposeful communication for political purposes. However, from a critical, normative theoretical perspective, some might say while this company is practicing political public relations, its actions fall short of using public

relations in a beneficial way—i.e., to help society to become more fully functional (Heath, 2006), and a better place to live, work, and engage with “corporate” and non-corporate entities (Waymer, 2013; Waymer, Cannon, & Curry, 2012). Tobacco companies have had to create the Master Tobacco Settlement Agreement (1998). Regarding the health hazards of asbestos, that industry had to fund Asbestos Settlement Trusts; television ads inform those suffering from mesothelioma that they have legal rights to those funds. Pharmaceutical products are taken off the market, although pharmaceutical companies often dramatically influence favorably their regulatory environment. Warning labels are placed on products of all types. So, the question is not whether a manufacturer of a product “that is flushable” can be regulated, but as predicted in the issues management literature, when and how severely.

Relatedly, if the international scientific community and international environmental agencies and conservation societies such as the European Environment Agency and UK’s Marine Conservation Society are providing compelling evidence that suggests these products are not flushable, another question that one might ask is this: why is the corporation fighting these “labeling” battles at all? The political public relations definition offered above might indicate that the organization is practicing sound public relations because it is fighting, in the political arena, to influence public opinion for favorable organization outcomes. However, from a critical theoretical perspective, scholars have argued that organizations, including Kimberly-Clark strategically use resistance (in this case lawsuits) to counter resistance to their organizational practices (Heath & Waymer, 2018), and such actions are often self-serving. Heath and Waymer (2018) asserted as social construction, power includes the ability to resist resistance. The test is whether a legitimacy gap opens between what organizations, namely corporations, and stakeholders prefer as strategic, reflective management and communication.

As they pursue profits and orderly operations, corporations tend to resist change—or at the very least work to control the change with a bias to serving the organization’s interest even at some disadvantage to stakeholders (Heath & Waymer, 2018). Therefore, when corporations encounter resistance, the question is not whether they will successfully resist those voices that obstruct their business plans; rather, the question is how and when such resistance strategies will be employed and become effective (Heath & Waymer, 2018). We speculate that Kimberly-Clark is using the courts as a means to stall legislation that will negatively affect their enterprise. Doing so allows the company more time to update or modify its business and production practices, including product engineering and design, to lessen the financial damage the company might encounter otherwise. The company may use a victory in USA courts to bolster its claims that its products are protected speech, as “flushable,” in international contexts. However, that legitimacy principle may not prevail in

other countries because of their unique strategic socio-political decision-making processes. This case provides evidence that corporate issues management skills can be used to a corporation's narrow advantage, but the question is for how long. Different courts may prevail. City ordinances may be crafted differently. Such political public relations challenges raise the question of whether companies gain strategic advantage if they engage proactively, rather than opt for a defensive, reactionary strategy.

Conclusion

What is interesting about this flushability issue is that it is a truly global political, public policy concern; however, how this issue is discussed in various nations is directly related to what legal precedents and cultural narratives have been set regarding corporate voice, speech, and power—and public safety and public interest. For example, when you compare European cities and their response to this issue (political officials vowing to eliminate use of these materials in years to come) to some U.S. government responses to this issue (changing the labeling on these products violates the right to free speech for these corporations), clear differences are evident. One thing that this case highlights is the potential negative societal effects associated with granting corporations personhood.

As early as 1937, it was noted that while 50 percent of cases reaching the Supreme Court under the Fourteenth Amendment pertained to corporations, less than one-half of 1 percent of the cases reaching the Supreme Court under the Fourteenth Amendment pertained to blacks or freed slaves (Powell & Watt, 2010; Thimsen, 2015). This observation is telling, given the reason why many believe these amendments were instituted in the first place. The obvious fact is that corporations will practice corporate issues management differently in nations across the globe. However, as long as corporations enjoy constitutional protection in the United States and the United States remains as one of the global economic leaders, how corporate issues management is defined and operates in the U.S. will continue to influence how corporate communication is practiced in other nations. As such, corporate issues management will continue to be a controversial, complex topic of lay and scholarly discussion.

There is no separation between marketing communication and political communication when the latter empowers the former. Rothkopf (2012) has argued that instead of acting on behalf of people, increasingly government acts on behalf of industry. Problems that companies create can be health problems of individuals, and governments. Environmental problems can become a burden to political entities that are empowered to assure, in this case, useable sewer systems and clean drinking water. The challenge to scholars of political public relations and socially responsible acts is to correct the imbalance that can and does exist when businesses bend society

to serve corporate interests rather than bending themselves to serve public interests. As a political matter, democracy explicitly asks, which of many texts count most. Political public relations should aspire to help organizations to become “stewards for democracy” (Heath, Waymer, & Palenchar, 2013, p. 271). Corporate speak can become political public relations that serves some interests, but does it serve all?

The research implications of this chapter suggest that the more matters change, the more they may remain the same. It should not be lost on those who take a strategic issues management approach to political public relations that no matter how important facts and information is in public policy decision making, the argumentative value premises on which decisions are made by society cannot be underestimated for their influence on such matters. Given the dialectical, dialogic nature of political public relations, gains by one party necessarily inspire counter measures. Future research can examine how decision principles, based on competing views of public interest, necessarily suggest that the nature of legitimacy gaps and the dynamics for narrowing them is not a static, but a recurring and enduring intellectual pursuit.

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13 Political Public Relations and Lobbying

It's about Shaping Public Discourse

Kati Tusinski Berg and Sarah Bonewits Feldner

The current corporate and political landscape is uncertain and tumultuous. Within these increasingly uncertain times, people's distrust in institutions remains high.

The 2018 Edelman Trust Barometer reveals a world of seemingly stagnant distrust. People's trust in business, government, NGOs and media remained largely unchanged from 2017–20 of 28 markets surveyed now lie in distruster territory, up one from last year. Yet, dramatic shifts are taking place at the market level and within the institution of media.

(Edelman, 2018)

These market level shifts, led by a decline in trust in government, which is down 30 points among the informed public and 14 points among the general population, coupled with the expectation for CEOs to inform conversations and policy debates, have the potential to impact the practice of political public relations, specifically lobbying. These changing social contexts demand a new form of lobbying in which corporations, particularly CEOs, are expected "to fill the gap left by government to help effect social change" (Edelman, 2018).

Traditionally, the focus on lobbying has been on direct appeals by corporations to legislators. Corporations and other interest groups hire lobbyists to represent, educate, and advocate on their behalf. Mayhew (1997) describes lobbying as "a process of influence that travels along routes sustained by exchanges of information" in which "both parties have an opportunity to make their message influential as well as informative" (p. 218). In this scheme, issues are managed on Capitol Hill or its equivalents across the world where lobbyists develop various methods, strategies, and tactics to gain access, inform, influence, and pressure policymakers who make policy decisions that affect the wellbeing of their clients, the public, the local, national, and international communities, and present and future generations of citizens. Such strategies have become highly sophisticated and multidimensional, relying on a complex array of persuasive tactics. According to Dondero and Lunch (2005), lobbyists

perform several primary functions in the legislative arena to position themselves in various roles, serving as the eyes and ears of the public; information providers; representatives of their clients and constituents; shapers of the government agenda; movers of legislation; coalition builders; and campaign contributors. These functions include disseminating information needed to craft legislation, aggregating public opinion around major issues affecting their clients, and helping set the political agenda by creating coalitions to support or oppose specific bills. In this respect, lobbying is “a two-way communication process” where lobbyists serve as the liaisons between constituents and legislators (Dondero & Lunch, 2005, p. 87). Thus, lobbyists traditionally worked behind the scenes to influence public policy but given the changing communication environment coupled with higher expectations of the public, lobbying also takes place in a more public space.

As corporations now exist in a world of increased calls for transparency, greater stakeholder scrutiny and faster means of communication, the spaces in which issues management and lobbying occur have expanded. That is, a key argument of ours is that lobbying as a means of issues management and advocacy also occurs in the public sphere. In this way, lobbying might best be understood both as advocacy for positions directly with lawmakers, but also as advocacy on issues directly with publics. In making this shift, lobbying should take on a broader perspective that examines how corporate lobbying efforts include appeals to legitimize issues and change public opinion/social discourse about issues. This framework for analysis responds to Kioussis and Strömbäck’s (2011) invitation to explore how “corporate issues management in our understanding of political public relations offers additional interdisciplinary opportunities for scholars from business and related areas to add to its ongoing explication” (p. 320).

Therefore, this chapter tackles the blurred lines between political communication and political public relations while also discussing the ways in which our thinking about lobbying must change to adapt to the changing communication environment in which public relations professionals operate. We examine the relationship among political communication, public relations, and political public relations to illustrate that lobbying lies at this intersection. We then argue that this relationship might be productively understood through the lens of communicative constitution of organizations (CCO). In the end, we claim that using the CCO framework allows us to understand the connection between political public relations and lobbying as a process of managing issues by shaping public discourse.

Distinctions & Synergies: Political Communication, Public Relations, & Political Public Relations

Every subdiscipline of communication spends considerable effort defining itself, but a closer examination shows overlaps and crossover that can be

productive for expanding theoretical developments of such subdisciplines. We look to three areas – political communication, public relations, and political public relations – to identify distinctions and synergies.

Political Communication

McLeod, Kosicki, and McLeod (1994) define political communication as an “exchange of symbols and messages between political actors and institutions, the general public, and news media that are the products of or have consequences for the political system” (p. 125). According to Blumler (2016), “political communication is an exceptionally rich, complex, fluid, and important subfield among those that populate the overall field of communication studies” (p. 1). Jamieson (2015) defines it as a cross-disciplinary hybrid subject given its connections with other disciplines including, but not limited to, social psychology, political science, economics, rhetoric and cultural studies. Thus,

political communication can be studied at different levels, as emanating from different sources (organizational, mediated, and interpersonal), through the contributions of different actors, in different geographical settings, over different issues and bodies of media content, as situated in different sociopolitical and economic environments, with impacts on and relationships to different institutions, by means of different methodologies, and from different theoretical standpoints.

(Blumler, 2016, p. 3)

Political communication scholars research how information spreads and influences politics and policymakers, the news media and citizens. Denton and Woodward (1998) characterize it as the ways and intentions of message senders to influence the political environment.

Political communication scholars stress how ubiquitously embedded communication is in politics and are acutely attuned to questions of conflict and power (Strömbäck & Kioussis, 2011, pp. 5–6). Blumler (2016) explains:

If politics is about power, leading politicians’ quest for and readiness to exercise it will involve communication. If politics is about participation, this consists of the means by which the interests and demands of active citizens are conveyed to rulers and to each other. If politics is about the legitimation of authority, then the values and procedural norms of regimes must be symbolically expressed in convincing terms. And if politics is about choice, then information flows clarifying alternative policy options must circulate to those making and those wishing to influence the making of policy decisions.

(p. 1)

Scholarship in the field has been shaped by one or more of four perspectives: a power (or media effects) perspective; a systemic perspective; a dynamic (or change over time) perspective; and a normative perspective. The normative perspective, as defined by Christians et al. (2009) as “the reasoned explanation of how public discourse should be carried out in order for a community or nation to work out solutions to its problems” (p. 65), is most pertinent to our argument for lobbying as a process of managing issues by shaping public discourse. As Blumler (2016) suggests, “a new normative issue may be arising from the creation of a communication system that is split between institutionalized and grassroots channels and modes of political talk” (p. 13).

It is clear that the established field of political communication provides a foundation for public relations scholars “to build, extend, and differentiate” scholarship and theory for “today’s political public relations sphere” (Martinelli, 2011, p. 35).

Public Relations

While the formal practice of what is now considered public relations dates back to the early 20th century, accrediting organizations, academics, and practitioners agree that public relations has been defined in many different ways and has often evolved, given the changing roles and technological advances. Despite the debate and the shifting definition, in 2012, the Public Relations Society of America (PRSA) settled on a modern definition of public relations as the “strategic communication process that builds mutually beneficial relationships between organizations and their publics” (PRSA, 2012). This definition echoes the academy’s characterization as well, where the emphasis has become less focused on the managerial, corporate identity work but more inclusive to recognize the expanding role of public relations. Myers (2018) explained,

These definitional issues within public relations, both in industry and academia, are tied to the idea that PR practice can be found in various organizations and in diverse professions such as human resources, communication departments, public information offices, and a myriad of line and column mid-level management positions.

(p. 12)

It is also found in political communication, particularly in public affairs and lobbying. In fact, Zetter (2008) characterizes public affairs as “PR for grown-ups” (p. xiii). He writes, “It is constant crisis management, with potentially huge rewards for getting it right – and major consequences for getting it wrong” (p. xiii).

Political Public Relations

Strömbäck and Kiouisis (2011) noted that “despite the importance of political public relations, the general rule is that there is not much theorizing and research that manages or even attempts to bridge the gap between public relations, political communication, and political science theory and research” (p. 2). While similarities such as the emphasis on relationships, reputations, and the role of media can be found between the two, public relations scholars rarely focus on political actors, issues, or processes in political communication. Therefore, Strömbäck and Kiouisis (2011), proposed the following definition of political public relations (for the slightly updated definition, see Chapter 1, this volume):

Political public relations is the management process by which an organization or individual actor for political purposes, through purposeful communication and action, seeks to influence and to establish, build, and maintain beneficial relationships and reputations with its key publics to help support its mission and achieve its goals.

(p. 8)

Furthermore, Strömbäck and Kiouisis (2011) not only acknowledged that political public relations includes different public relations functions such as managing publicity, reputation management, public affairs, issues management, and relationship cultivation, they also suggested that this definition of political public relations “has the potential to integrate theory and research from different fields of research” (p. 9). Our analysis in this chapter illustrates the integrative nature of the theory and research in political public relations that Strömbäck and Kiouisis envision in which the origin of the theory and research matters less than its potential to

understand and investigate the management process by which organizations or individual actors, for political purposes and through purposeful communication and action, seek to influence and to establish, build and maintain beneficial relationships and reputations with their key publics to help support their mission and achieve their goals.

(2011, p. 13)

Lobbying at the Intersection

Lobbying in this scheme lies at the intersection of political communication and political public relations – yet it continues to be imagined in a narrow scheme and, therefore, overlooked by scholars.

In 1960, Lester Milbrath, the so-called “father of lobbying research,” first analyzed lobbying from a communication perspective (Koepl, 2000). Milbrath (1960) claims, “Communication is the only means of influencing

or changing a perception; the lobbying process, therefore, is totally a communication process” (p. 32). Forty-five years later, Dondero and Lunch (2005) assert, “Lobbying is a two-way communication process” (p. 87). They describe lobbyists as “great” communicators to legislators because they serve as liaisons between constituents and legislators. Lock, Seele, and Heath (2016) explain, “Lobbying is an inherent part of democratic (and even autocratic) political processes and represents a channel through which groups may bring their specific issues and interests to the attention of politicians” (p. 92).

Thus, it is no surprise that lobbying is often considered a specialization of public relations. In fact, Davidson (2015) considers public affairs and lobbying to be of high status and strategically vital public relations specializations. Undergraduate public relations textbooks, for example, tend to define lobbying as a function of public affairs that builds and maintains relations with government primarily for the purpose of influencing legislation and regulation.

Time and again, public relations scholars have been urged to “claim lobbying as their own and continue to develop research that addresses the theoretical, ethical and communication implications of this communications activity” (Berg, 2009a, 2009b). Likewise, “the transmission of information, advocacy for positions, and the relationship management necessary in today’s lobbying arena should be analyzed through a public relations lens” (Wise & Berg, 2015, p. 194). Most recently, Davidson (2015) endorsed the call for public relations scholars to claim lobbying as its own and to do so in a way that “more equitably balances organizational and societal concerns” to further develop research to address the ethical and communicative implications of lobbying activities (p. 625). After conducting a content analysis of academic journals (between 2000 and 2013) to provide insights into how public affairs and lobbying have been theorized and researched within public relations scholarship, Davidson (2015) concluded, “Despite the centrality of public affairs to both public relations scholarship and practice, the field has largely ignored public affairs and failed to address specific civic concerns in relation to lobbying” (p. 623). Thus, it seems Johnson (2005) was correct in stating that lobbying has received little attention from public relations scholars, and while there has been some improvement, more consideration is definitely needed.

While cursory descriptions constitute the extent of the public relations curriculum on lobbying, academic research in lobbying and public relations “seems to support the idea that lobbying is increasingly part of public relations practice” (Myers, 2018, p. 13). Terry (2001a, 2001b) and Wise (2007) provided greater insight into the communicative practice of lobbying from a public relations perspective. Berg’s research theoretically connects lobbying, advocacy and public relations by examining the ethical frameworks that guide the persuasive techniques lobbyists employ to effectively communicate with public policymakers (Berg, 2009a, 2009b,

2012). Lock, Seele, and Heath (2016) extended this line of research by examining the practice of Astroturf lobbying from an organizational–public relationship (OPR) and corporate social responsibility (CSR) perspective. They suggest integrating open discourse, participation, transparency, and accountability into theory building to shift CSR outcomes from advantaging individual organizations to adding value to society: “Thus, the legitimacy basis of strategic communication is widened, as it does not depend solely on pragmatic legitimacy any longer, but also relies on discursively established moral legitimacy along these claims” (Lock, Seele, & Heath, 2016, p. 97). This research by Lock, Seele, and Heath (2016) begins to address Davidson’s (2015) call for future research to address the ethical and communicative implications of lobbying activity “in a manner that more equitably balances organisational and societal concerns” (p. 625).

Like Kiousis and Strömbäck (2011), we too see “political public relations as a proactive and strategic endeavor rather than a reactive and merely technical one” (p. 315). Our research confirms Kiousis and Strömbäck’s (2011) suggestion that “even corporations to the extent that they attempt to influence political issues, processes, or public opinion related to political matters” (p. 315). Moreover, they recognize the porous relationship between organizations and their publics where each can have major effects on each other (Strömbäck & Kiousis, 2011, p. 4). Therefore, issues management is a central function of lobbying (Wise & Berg, 2015).

Lobbying, Issues Management, and Advocacy

Most discussions of lobbying have focused on advocacy that happens in Washington DC and in Brussels. Mahoney (2008) notes,

Lobbying is a thriving industry on both sides of the Atlantic. K Street is notorious in Washington as the locus of high-powered lobbyists, with the Hill as the primary object of their attention. Round Point Schuman and Avenue de Cortenbergh form the geographical center in Brussels, with lobbyists descending on Berlaymont and Parliament.

(p. 1)

Despite this emphasis, a few scholars have begun to acknowledge that successful lobbying campaigns are not always limited to actions within the Beltway or Brussels. In the United States, the fundamentals of lobbying are the same at the local, state, and federal levels, but to be effective, lobbyists must engage in face-to-face communication with local officials and understand the history, politics, and culture of the political arena. Therefore, companies, labor unions, and other organizations in the United States spend billions of dollars each year on lobbying Congress and federal agencies. According to the Center for Responsive Politics (2018), some

special interests retain lobbying firms while others have lobbyists working in-house. The center estimates that more than \$2.5 billion will be spent on lobbying in 2018 by 11,272 registered lobbyists.

In contrast to the U.S., Sweden, for example, has a much more informal structure for lobbying where the practice is not regulated nor are lobbyists required to be registered. Anna-Karin Hedlund, managing director at Diplomat Communications and PRECIS chairwoman, attributes this to a culture of openness in Sweden that she hoped the industry would continue to foster (Törnkvist, 2013). De Fouloy (2015) explains, “The low levels of perceived and experienced corruption in Sweden are linked to the long tradition of openness and transparency of Swedish society and institutions and strong respect for the rule of law” (para. 1). Unlike in the U.S., where many organizations hire outside lobbyists, it is more common for companies and organizations to employ lobbyists who are tasked with influencing and preventing political decisions at the government level. The Swedish political structure and its party focus presents a different avenue for lobbying than in the U.S. Hedlund suggests that targeting individual politicians as is traditional in the U.S. model of lobbying is not effective in the Swedish system, since lone politicians rarely act outside their party platform; therefore, “lobbyists spend more time on swaying public opinion and trying to exert influence over the parties as wholes” (Törnkvist, 2013, para. 14).

Sometimes it is necessary to reach out to the public to indirectly influence the policymaking process (Mahoney, 2008, p. 147). Schattschneider (1960) argued that “those that are successful in getting the audience involved win” (p. 4). Even in acknowledging the need to take influence campaigns to the public, the exemplars cited tend to be cases in which PR firms engage with trade associations and other related organizations. In this vein, political public relations is cast as advertising and statements on political issues are seen as something other than lobbying. That is, lobbying is seen as direct to government official advocacy and public persuasion is labeled as public relations activity. Our argument is instead that corporate efforts and public relations activities that focus on political issues should not be seen as different than lobbying: rather, it represents a new form of lobbying that is responsive to a changing social context.

Our rationale for this shift in thinking lies in the theoretical and conceptual compatibility of lobbying as advocacy and the public relations long-standing focus on issues management. What is central to the lobbying process is its end game of influencing political decision makers. Issues management in the public sphere has the same goal. In this case, the aim is to influence politicians by influencing broader public opinion. Expanding the view of lobbying allows for a clearer focus on the potential strategy behind corporate political activity and allows us to draw upon the robust theorizing that is a part of public relations scholarship.

Public relations scholars and practitioners have long considered issues management a key strategy for corporations to employ when seeking to exert influence. Beyond thinking of public relations as solely effort to respond to events (such as in crisis responses), Heath (2002) notes that organizations have been addressing the need to manage issues since the 1980s. While not a new issue, issues management is no less relevant today as the blurring of lines between public and private, corporate and political issues expands. Heath (2006) defines issues management as: “the management of organizational and community resources through the public policy process to advance organizational interests and rights by striking a mutual balance with those of stakeholders” (p. 79). In the context of public relations, an issue is a question or topic on which there are competing expectations and one in which there is a dispute over what the prevailing understanding on the issue might be (Heath, 2006; Hoffman & Ford, 2010). Issues in this regard are topics around which there is some tension and no clearly established social expectations. The aim of issues management then is to influence these expectations and to fix social meanings in ways that are conducive to corporate purposes. The process of issues management involves creating arguments and establishing positions that are favorable to corporate interests and that allow for successful corporate operations. Through issues management, organizations seek to understand those issues that are contested or that could impact the organization and seek to persuade publics of a particular viewpoint.

While issues management does not focus exclusively on political issues, these issues are clearly addressed by an issues management framework. Lobbying is an effort to advocate for political positions that benefit the corporation. We draw a logical extension from this process to issues management and suggest that lobbying might productively be understood as political issues management. Just as issues management often occurs in the public sphere, we argue that viewing lobbying through the lens of issues management points to the salience of considering lobbying within the public sphere.

Public Lobbying: Lobbying in the Public Sphere

Both political communication and lobbying would benefit from moving the theoretical discussion to a space that acknowledges lobbying as bona fide political public relations practice and not something else. Here we propose exploring what we call lobbying in the public sphere or public lobbying, where lobbying becomes understood as corporate efforts to influence political issues through public statements that seek to change social discourses.

We draw inspiration for this type of theorizing from scholars such as Heath and Waymer (2011), who argued that “corporations can speak to defend themselves or their practices in times of crisis; they can speak to

sell, market, or promote their products and services, but more importantly, they can speak to influence and shape public opinion” (p. 145). In this way, corporations infuse their values into public discourse. While Heath and Waymer identified a path for examining the public lobbying by corporations, research taking up this question is scant. This chapter seeks to fill this void by proposing a discursive framework that can be used to understand what public lobbying might mean and its implications.

Our framework draws from two specific threads of research on organizations. First, Alvesson and Kärreman’s (2000) distinctions between “d”iscourses and “D”iscourses helps identify ways in which organizations communicate on a macro level. Second, McPhee and Zaug’s (2008) work on the communicative constitution of meaning with its emphasis on the four flows of discourse provides a means by which we can focus on the ways in which organizations direct discursive efforts outward. Together, they provide a means by which one might view political lobbying as a strategy for influencing social discourses.

A discursive approach draws attention to the idea that discourses or language constitutes reality. Alvesson and Kärreman (2000) take this further by arguing that the constructed realities are not limited to organizational realities but they extend to creating social realities and shaping broader societal meaning. They draw distinctions between “d”iscourses, which are the micro level discourses or everyday communication that occurs within organizational settings, and “D”iscourses, which are macro-level discourses that exist at a societal level and represent enduring social structures and meanings. In the context of this discussion, these “D”iscourses serve as the basis of public opinion – an opinion that exerts influence on policymakers. As we look at organizational ability to shape macro discourse, we can begin to understand the strategy that undergirds political issue management in the public sphere.

McPhee and Zaug (2008) contribute to this line of thinking further in their work that differentiates four flows of discourse. They argue that organizations are complex and this complexity requires an understanding that organizational discourses exist at multiple levels. Of interest to us here is the fourth flow which is parallel to “D”iscourses. The fourth flow represents those discourses that allow institutional positioning by organizations to negotiate an identity as part of institutional positioning within a larger social context. Organizational scholars have long argued for a need to take the organization–society relationship seriously. The fourth flow underscores this point by identifying this as a legitimate space in which organizations exert influence. Attention to this fourth flow provides a means by which public relations practitioners and lobbyists can identify a path toward resolving political issues in the public sphere with the aim of achieving resolutions that will serve organizational interests.

Taken together, the perspectives create a framework in which organizations communicating in the public sphere contribute to the creation of social meanings that position them in ways that serve their purposes. Feldner and Fyke (2016) argue that organizations strategically use public messages to create social expectations. In their case, it was focused on shaping social definitions and legitimizing the work of an organization, but we believe this argument can be logically extended to issues management and political activity. That is, as organizations make statements on political statements they can be seen as operating in the fourth flow and seeking to shape “D”iscourses on these issues. Organizational statements and communications form social discourses and in so doing contribute to the constitution of the social context in which corporations operate (Feldner, 2017). Therefore, as corporations take up political topics and issues, they are actively participating in the process of forming public opinion on these issues. The importance of these processes is due to the increased call for public policy engagement and the movement of political debate to the public sphere. The ability to shape public opinion is a critical aspect of influencing policy decisions.

Considering corporate public lobbying points to a number of key issues. First is the basic question of what public lobbying looks like in practice and its implications. We have sketched out here a conceptual framework for how we might understand issues management as an avenue for shaping macro discourses. These macros discourses serve as a material resource for political actors to make policy decisions. Thus, political issues management warrants attention. Yet, corporations have long been reluctant to take public stances on political issues, choosing instead to focus attention on more private efforts. However, as the landscape changes and the political stakes have gotten higher, corporations are taking public stances on explicitly political issues. What remains to be seen is the form these types of efforts will take in practice. Beyond questions of what specific tactics corporations might use in public lobbying efforts, a second issue that scholars must consider is the public appetite for this type of direct public lobbying. Because the idea of corporations taking political issues to their external publics is relatively new, and because public trust in both corporations and government is low, it remains to be seen how tolerant publics will be of corporations seeking to shape prevailing political topics. To examine both questions, we will examine two specific cases as exemplars.

Our first case considers CEO communication efforts on political issues. With increasing frequency, CEOs actively use digital communication platforms to advocate for certain policies. For example, in September 2017, Oscar Munoz, CEO of United Airlines, published a story via LinkedIn titled, “Standing with America’s Dreamers,” in which he juxtaposed his role as the CEO of a major corporation with that of his experience as an immigrant. He wrote:

I am the CEO of United Airlines, a company that employs tens of thousands of Americans working here and abroad. We are as diverse as the communities we serve, and so are our opinions. My leadership role carries with it certain obligations to represent and reflect on all viewpoints. I respect everyone's opinion, especially on a matter as complicated as immigration, and I do not presume to speak for anyone else's beliefs except my own. I certainly have no monopoly on wisdom; I can only speak from my own experience. But, I am also an immigrant named Oscar Munoz, born and raised for a time in Mexico and someone who has been immensely blessed by this country. That, too, carries certain obligations to speak on behalf of those who cannot speak for themselves for fear of losing their homes, their families, their futures.

(para. 6)

Munoz used the statement to address his belief that DACA creates value for the American economy yet also explains it is about "being true to our values as a nation, one built on fairness, a sense of decency and equality of opportunity" (Munoz, 2017, para. 18). In this way, Munoz, in speaking on this issue, contributed to larger social discourse around a specific policy. The statement lent support and strength to a controversial policy decision enacted by the White House. The statement, while couched as merely the views of one lone voice, might simultaneously be seen as a strategic effort to influence policy. However, CEO statements are rarely understood as merely one person's opinion. Rather, unlike other employees lower in an organization's ranks, the CEO might be understood as the voice of the corporation. In his statement, Munoz directly takes on controversial government policy and suggests that he opposes this. In this, he seeks to persuade a broader public that the so-called Dreamer's Act should remain in place.

Munoz is not alone in his actions as more CEOs are making statements on a variety of issues. Such actions are warranted as public trust of government has dipped below corporations (Edelman Trust Barometer, Edelman, 2018). In response, publics, including consumers, look to corporate brands to fill the gap and take the lead in affecting large-scale change. According to a 2017 survey by Weber Shandwick, nearly half of millennials believe CEOs have a responsibility to speak up about issues important to society.

Clearly a single CEO or corporate statement alone cannot change a macro level discourse, rather it takes the impact of several corporate voices to exact such a change. And in the case of DACA, United was not alone. Several other corporations voiced concerns publically against the threat of ending DACA protection. For example, IKEA issued a direct public statement that echoed the sentiment of United. In its statement addressed to employees, IKEA (2017) expressed its support of human rights and made a direct call to government officials, "We ask Congress

to come up with a long-term solution that allows these hard working young people to remain in the United States and part of our families” (para. 4). One can imagine that in both cases, traditional lobbying efforts were also in play. However, we argue here that it is important to interrogate these public spaces and consider the ways in which they exert influence over policymaking in particularly powerful ways. As several corporations came forward on this issue, the “D”iscourse became one of an obligation to protect human rights and support hard working employees of major corporations. While we certainly do not claim causality, we note that as of this writing, the threat of ending DACA immediately has not come to pass.

Levi Strauss provides a second case to consider as the company has taken a public stance on gun violence. The company began with urging customers to not bring guns into their stores and posted blogs to the corporate website outlining the company’s stance.¹ Accompanying these statements, the CEO, Chip Bergh, wrote an op-ed for *Forbes* in which he argued, “we can take common-sense, measurable steps – like criminal background checks on all gun sales – that will save lives” (para. 11). In this way, the campaign as a whole links to a specific policy option long debated in the United States. Like the previous example, we see Levi’s working at the level of “D”iscourse and seeking to change public stance on the issue of guns. For some, the opinion piece might better be understood as CEO activism. We argue first that the idea of public lobbying and CEO activism are not mutually exclusive. Rather, here we focus attention on the aims of the statements. Direct arguments about gun policy is a means of shaping public opinion that has the means of benefiting the organization. Further, the op-ed piece was included on company websites and blogs. That is, Levi-Strauss as a corporation endorsed and amplified these statements through corporate communication channels.

While the majority of lobbying research has not focused on cases like those we have included here, we believe that understanding the ways in which corporations are seeking to influence macro-level discourses and as a result are shaping public opinion is of key importance and should be understood as lobbying. Taking up this stance adds an important element to conversations on lobbying. What may seem at face value as an element of corporate social responsibility or corporate activism can be viewed in a new light when understood as a particular form of public lobbying. Of importance here is expanding our focus and acknowledging the ways in which issues management on public policy issues serves the aims of lobbying. That is, public relations scholars need to expand their view of lobbying to include such activities in the public sphere. Rather than speaking generally on the good work done by a corporation, both cases illustrate corporate statements that have a direct line to policy action with specific policy goals. For United, the business case is clear as DACA

provides a valuable pipeline of employees and customers. For Levis, the link may be more indirect but rather positions the company as a leader on social issues which appeals to a socially-conscious millennial audience.

Conclusion

In the end, these cases and this conceptual framework point toward potential for practice as much as they highlight current practice. The cases show how corporations can discursively influence societal expectations. These expectations create “D”iscourses that serve as a material resource for future actions. That is, institutions draw upon macro discourses as they make decisions and plan operations. Among these institutions are government entities. The extent to which corporations are able to shape macro discourses becomes a significant element to their potential success to move political processes in ways favorable to their operation. We call this potential for practice because corporations are only beginning to make direct public statements. Given the rapidly expanding move to engage stakeholders openly and transparently, we imagine the number of these cases will grow in the coming years. Given this, it is critical that scholars and practitioners critically examine these processes and not take for granted the potential implications of this type of social influence. Chief among these is a need for a deep examination of the ethics surrounding these practices.

Beyond a need to think about these statements in this broader context, we argue that there is a need for corporations to understand the effort it might take to have a noticeable impact on public opinion. A single statement does not a “D”iscourse make. Rather, continued, repeated, and coordinated efforts are needed. In this way, scholars and practitioners alike would be well served to consider how corporations with common interests might coordinate efforts. Feldner and Fyke (2016) in their study take up these questions, and argue that at times macro-discourses are formed as entire sectors or industries strike the same chord, thus creating some common social expectations.

The cases cited here represent global companies speaking on United States policy issues. However, this process is not exclusive to the United States. Among the striking examples are ways in which corporations spoke publicly on Brexit as it was negotiated both within legislative circles and public policy. Among the companies who made statements was Airbus which threatened to remove operations during the negotiations (Hodgson, 2018). In this way, companies sought to influence policy by framing the issues in the public sphere.

Looking ahead, public relations scholars need to reframe their understanding of lobbying to include these public facing campaigns, because failure to do so will miss the important ways that corporations are influencing and indeed shaping larger social expectations and means on

public policy questions. Further study will allow for an in-depth look into public lobbying as a communication strategy. While public lobbying can prove to be a valuable tool for corporations, it is not a tool that is without its ethical concerns. Future research should also consider the ethical implications of the power of a corporate voice seeking to shape macro-level discourses.

Note

1 www.levistrauss.com/unzipped-blog/2018/09/04/ending-gun-violence/

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14 Public Relations and Public Diplomacy at a Crossroads

In Search of a Social Network Perspective

Jian Wang and Aimei Yang

This chapter seeks to further the exploration of the conceptual and practical connections between the fields of political public relations and public diplomacy. As a subset of public relations, political public relations is focused on the examination of public relations practices for political purposes and in political processes (Kiouisis & Strömbäck, 2014; Strömbäck & Kiouisis, 2011a, 2013). As for public diplomacy, the term was first defined by the distinguished American diplomat Edmund Gullion half a century ago to specifically denote coordinated governmental engagement with foreign publics in the service of foreign policy (USC Center Public Diplomacy, n.d.). The concept and practice have since broadened. Public diplomacy is no longer an activity unique to sovereign states, as it involves a multitude of actors and networks, both public and private. During the preparation of this chapter, we encountered the dilemma of delineating the conceptual boundaries for a productive discussion on how public relations, public diplomacy, and political public relations are interconnected and interrelated. While public diplomacy nowadays deals with an expanding and ever more complex web of politics, economy, and culture in the global system, political public relations sharpens on a particular setting of public relations practice. In many respects, public diplomacy can in fact be seen as a form of political public relations, as political public relations encompass how political and other organizations, “for political purposes, through communication and action, seek[s] to influence and to establish, build, and maintain beneficial relationships and reputations” with key publics (Chapter 1, this volume; Strömbäck & Kiouisis, 2011b, p. 8).

It is thus a challenge to properly scope the analysis to adequately reflect these domains. Nevertheless, a fruitful exploration requires an account for the existing literature and, from there, illuminating the path forward for research and analysis. In this chapter we will therefore pursue an examination of the broader linkages between public relations and public diplomacy, with some discussion under the rubric of political public relations.

More important, we explore this subject matter against the backdrop of the disruptive and influential changes under way in the wider society that

are upending the practices of public relations and public diplomacy, and by extension political public relations. The primary driving forces are technological advances, social change, and global tensions. By reviewing these transformative trends and the analytical progress concerning the linkages between public relations and public diplomacy, we consider future avenues of research that offer promising prospects for making better sense of the connection between the two fields.

For the purpose of this chapter, we settle on an expansive instead of a restrictive understanding of the fields of public relations and public diplomacy. Public relations is broadly defined as “a management function that establishes and maintains mutually beneficial relationships between an organization and the publics on whom its success or failure depends” (Cutlip, Center & Broom, 2006, p. 1). Public diplomacy refers to a nation’s engagement with its foreign publics, through official and/or private institutions and individuals, for better communication and desired relationship to advance policies and actions that affect global relations. At their core both practices are to engage public audiences through purposeful communication. Thus, they are inherently open, communicative, and calculated endeavors. And these are two relatively new but growing areas of practice and inquiry. As areas of study, both are eclectic disciplines drawing on scholarship in the broader (and mainly American) social sciences and humanities. The analytical formulations have focused on the connections and intersections between the two fields, both conceptually and practically. The most salient theme in this intersubjective structure is the relevance of public relations to public diplomacy, with parsimonious exploration of how public diplomacy might be valuable to public relations. Public diplomacy is often thought of as a form of international public relations intersecting specifically with political public relations. In this discussion, the boundaries of the two fields are set by the subject matter of engaging public audiences under the spatial rubric of “international.” Here we will focus on two meanings of the “international” domain: foreign audiences as the target of communication and the interaction between domestic concerns and international engagement as an integral part of the contemporary communicative process.

The first section of the essay captures the thematic orientations and analytical threads that delve into the relationship and dynamics between the two fields. Next, we will examine some of the fundamental shifts in social forces that are disrupting the two practices, leaving us in an uncertain and unsettled environment for conceptual and practical reconfiguration. The disruptions are so sweeping that there is essentially no playbook for what is on the horizon for the two practices. As the transformative impact continues to unfold, we venture into exploring future vistas for research and analysis through the example of a networked-approach as a potentially productive analytical path for bridging the two fields.

Looking Back: Where PR and PD Intersect

Public relations and public diplomacy are both practice-driven, communication-centric endeavors. They are generally viewed as sub-areas of the broader field of communication. As emergent areas of academic inquiry, both share parallel developments in seeking theoretical insights and orientations from other disciplines. Scholars in public relations draw on wide-ranging disciplines, such as management studies, media and public opinion, and rhetoric. And in the case of public diplomacy, the literature is informed by a variety of analytical traditions, including most notably the foundational concept of power in international relations, communication, and marketing and branding.

Signitzer and Coombs (1992) were probably the first to make a comprehensive academic argument that, with similar concepts, objectives and tools, public relations, and public diplomacy are “in a natural process of convergence” (p. 146). Signitzer and Wamser (2006) expanded this line of thinking through exploring the integration of the two practices. Over time, there has been growing academic interest and analysis into the intersections between these two subfields of communication. Here we identify four sites of discussion that exemplify the key thematic threads and their evolution.

The prevailing theme in the literature is based on the question whether public relations can teach us anything about public diplomacy and, if so, in what ways. The focal point of the discussion is how PR frameworks may be relevant and applicable to the analysis of public diplomacy. When looking at a set of activities and issues associated with these two practices, many view public diplomacy as a form of international public relations. As Signitzer and Coombs (1992, p. 145) pointed out, “modern nation-states find themselves more and more in the area of public relations as they attempt to influence the opinions of foreign publics.” The field of public diplomacy, as Grunig (1993, p. 143) noted, “consists essentially of the application of public relations to strategic relationships of organizations with international publics.”

A major framework in public relations studies is the four models of PR practices (Grunig & Grunig, 1992; Grunig & Hunt, 1984), which illustrates the multiple dimensions of public relations work and its evolution. For instance, Yun (2006) applied the four models in a survey of public diplomacy professionals in Washington, DC on their communication practices and behaviors. Wang (2007) provided examples in U.S. public diplomacy practices that are illustrative of the various models of PR and communication. In a review of the related research literature, Fitzpatrick (2007) sought to demonstrate the relevance and applicability of the concept of relationship management to the study of public diplomacy. She maintained,

The evolution of public diplomacy from a one-way communication model to a two-way dialogic model sounds surprisingly familiar to

public relations' scholars and professionals who have witnessed public relations' development from technical, journalistically inspired communication function to a relationship management function.

(p. 203)

A study by Fitzpatrick, Fullerton and Kendrick (2013) provides further empirical evidence on the conceptual and practical linkages between public relations and public diplomacy, through a survey of USIA alumni – former officers in the United States Information Agency (1953–1999). The study found similarities between the two practices in terms of knowledge and skills considered important to the public diplomacy profession and characteristics of effective practices. It “supports calls for integration of PR perspectives in public diplomacy planning and practices,” (p. 17) and suggests that public diplomacy in essence engages in international political PR to influence public opinion and policymaking (Strömbäck & Kioussis, 2011b).

Other recent examples of the application of public relations and communication frameworks in public diplomacy analysis include a look at perceptual congruence and gaps concerning exchange programs and experiences between program staff and participants (Kim, 2016) and a conceptualization of public diplomacy impact dimensions based on a range of theoretical orientations (Sevin, 2015).

Much of the academic analysis on the intersection between the two fields focuses on the functional aspect of the two practices. A departure from such an approach is applying the relationship management framework in public diplomacy analysis. For instance, Yang, Klyueva and Taylor (2012) employed semantic network analysis in examining public framing of an international event among three countries. The unit of reference goes beyond the individual nation-state to the relational network of states, with the assumption that such relational dynamics affect outcomes of public diplomacy strategies and activities in the global context. Such an analytical outlook manifests the relational turn in public diplomacy, which emphasizes relationship management and looks beyond dyadic relationships (Fitzpatrick, 2007; Zaharna, Fisher & Arsenault, 2013). We will expand on this line of work later in this essay.

As further evidence to the salient orientation of applying public relations concepts to the analysis of public diplomacy, in a meta-analysis of the public diplomacy research literature by public relations scholars over a two-decade period since the end of the Cold War, Vanc and Fitzpatrick (2016) found growing interest in public diplomacy, but also similar “philosophical and practical dimensions” between the two sub-fields; and especially there's substantial interest among PR scholars on “how nations engage and build relations with foreign publics” (p. 436).

On the other hand, there is scant academic analysis into whether public diplomacy is relevant to public relations, given the broad agreement on

their connections. L'Etang (2006) is among the few researchers to have explored this question with the belief that PR practitioners may learn from ideas and concepts of diplomacy and public diplomacy. She (2009) later examined the idea of "PR as a form of diplomacy in the context of globalization" (p. 609) and maintained,

The continued integration and scholastic exchanges among those in public diplomacy and PR can contribute to a nuanced understanding of these occupations and, most important, place the concept of power at the center of PR practice and scholarship, where it properly belongs.

(p. 620)

Riodan (2017) and Molleda (2011) put forth ideas of how (public) diplomacy can be not only relevant but also important to businesses as they manage geopolitical risks, engage with foreign governments and international organizations, and participate in multi-level regulatory frameworks. There is, however, little systematic analysis into this conception. As the private sector employs a variety of tools to engage foreign stakeholders, including lobbying, marketing, and public relations, public diplomacy's value in this context remains to be articulated and documented.

Their interconnectedness notwithstanding, little attention has been paid to what tensions might exist between the two fields; that is how general public relations analytical and practice frameworks may not easily apply in public diplomacy situations, and vice versa. Here, the distinction drawn between political public relations and general public relations is instructive for unpacking some of the divergences between the two practices. As Strömbäck and Kioussis (2013) argued, we cannot assume that "general public relations strategies and tactics apply equally well, or that public relations theories are equally valid, in political as in corporate settings." Among the ten aspects they explored concerning the differences between political and corporate settings, we can also see how public relations and public diplomacy differ conceptually and practically. For instance, while the purpose of political public relations in democratic societies is supposed to orient toward the common good, public diplomacy as practiced typically gives priority to national interest over the global common good. The currency in political public relations is ideas and power, whereas in public diplomacy it is specifically "soft power" in the conduct of international affairs (Nye, 2011). Moreover, Strömbäck and Kioussis (2013) noted that political public relations operates in an environment that is defined by zero-sum calculation, such as elections and policy processes. Some aspects of public diplomacy follow this same logic, while others are grounded in a "win-win" framework. For instance, one of the pillars of public diplomacy is cultural diplomacy (or cultural relations), wherein developing mutual respect and understanding is the primary goal. Or in situations

where public diplomacy seeks to achieve the objective of creating and strengthening alliances, the nature of the practice, as a measure of confidence building, is decidedly not zero-sum oriented. This also reflects the essence of diplomacy which is rooted in negotiation, compromise, and ultimately cooperation among states. Meanwhile, political public relations and public diplomacy share similarities in several respects, including less control over processes, especially in democratic societies, more transparency and accountability demanded of the key actors who are typically from the public sector, and fewer objective, short-term measures for success. All these demonstrate the need for layered analysis as we examine how the practices may intersect.

The fourth strand of discussion is focused more broadly on the nexus between businesses' international engagement and public diplomacy (Molleda, 2011). This is based on the premise that country image and corporate (or brand) image are strategic assets and that they are interrelated and at times interdependent in the global marketplace. For instance, does consumer perception of a country's policies and actions affect companies and brands from the said country, and vice versa? A case in point is that the iconic American brand McDonald's experienced a crisis of corporate legitimacy in the Russian market in light of the growing tension in the bilateral relationship (Grove, 2018). This line of work asserts that the nation-state remains a crucial form of social classification in global affairs. Communication between states and in the international arena is consequential for both countries and companies. Wang (2017) reviewed the main streams of research on the role of brand nationality in the consumption process and argued that, "while national identity is not always the defining element in consumers' relation with products and brands, it does from time to time serve as a sub-text of that relationship, and is often conflated with other concerns" (pp. 592–593). In this respect, the task of public diplomacy (i.e., managing a favorable international relational environment concerning a nation-state) is important for business as well (Molleda, 2011). While corporations should have the motivation to pursue efforts to enhance the image of the country they are associated with because it is in line with their enlightened self-interest, they typically don't as they try to avoid being entangled in international politics and its potential negative consequences for their brand (White & Fitzpatrick, 2018).

In practice, on the other hand, the real-world connection between public diplomacy and the private sector (and in this particular case public relations) has always been there. In the United States, as in many other countries, there is the government-industry revolving door. Industry professionals are enlisted to work in public diplomacy, whereas government officials join the private sector to work on policy advocacy and public affairs. The government's public diplomacy effort often taps

private-sector expertise by hiring communication and public relations consultancies to assist in planning and implementation.

Moreover, the societal role of companies is increasingly acknowledged and notable. Nowadays business leaders frequently speak out on social issues, given the expectations of their employees and customers for the company to take a stand on sometimes controversial matters (Gelles, 2017). And this extends to the international arena as well. The mounting geopolitical complexities, governance gaps in the digital economy and the expanding commerce among emerging economies have contributed to a call for companies to develop “private” foreign policy and to strengthen corporate diplomacy (Chipman, 2016; Molleda, 2011). In this instance, corporate diplomacy entails “enhancing a company’s general ability to operate internationally and to ensure its success in each particular country with which it is engaged” (p. 41). Beyond the instrumental benefits of corporate diplomacy, Westermann-Behaylo, Rehnein and Fort (2015) put forward a conceptual case for a wider role that companies can play in global governance by drawing on literatures in international relations, corporate social responsibility, diplomacy, and peace studies.

This overview of key themes and threads in the exploration of the connections between public relations and public diplomacy shows that the intersubjective structure between the two fields is characterized by a dominant discourse on public relations’ relevance and value to the analysis of public diplomacy. Growing academic analysis aside, there is a lack of well-documented studies in examining the intersection between these two sub-fields of communication: What are the forces shaping the conceptual and practical intersection? How does the intersection affect the fields of practice, their goals and capabilities? However, it is important to note that just as academic investigation begins to flourish, the two practices are now getting upended by broader societal developments, which compels a reconfiguration of analytical formulations as well. We next discuss some of the major trends that are transforming public relations, public diplomacy, and – in extension – political public relations.

Happening Now: PR and PD Disrupted

Like with other sectors of social life, public relations and public diplomacy are being disrupted by profound and rapid changes in global political economy and digital technology. Most germane to this discussion is that, now more than ever, public perception and opinion exert greater constraints on political and corporate actions; and even authoritarian governments rely more and more on seeking the public’s consent and legitimacy. This reflects an understanding of the changing state–society relationship in both domestic and transnational settings that impacts international relations. As Moravcsik (1997, p. 518) noted, “Between theoretical extremes of tyranny and democracy, many

representative institutions and practices exist, each of which privileges particular demands; hence the nature of state institutions, alongside societal interests themselves, is a key determinant of what states do internationally.” Against this backdrop, communication toward and with the public in the international arena is gaining new momentum and significance. In this fast-moving, fractured, and networked information environment, “there is great public demand for meaning-making and interpretive order” (Krebs, 2015, p. 278). But the fields of public relations and public diplomacy are in flux, and it is unclear how they will evolve through a thicket of issues and challenges. As we view both practices as communication-centric activities, we will highlight several overarching disruptive, interwoven trends on the global scene along every key aspect of communication, including context, audience, platform, player, and issue concern.

First, the global political-economic terrain is shifting. This is manifested in the growing geopolitical and geo-economic uncertainties as part of the evolution of the global order. On the one hand, the rise of China and other major emerging economies are engendering tectonic power shifts in world affairs. The post-World War II international order established and maintained by the United States is entering a new phase of increasing power diffusion and power sharing among major countries. Zakaria (2008) argued that these shifts are not necessarily a result of the decline of America or the West but rather the rise of the rest. Bremmer (2012) saw this period of transition as the G-Zero phase, where no single power is able to take on the challenges of global leadership. Others have framed the situation through the lens of geopolitical competition and rivalry between the incumbent power the U.S. and the emerging power China (Allison, 2017). In the meantime, there is sharpening domestic discord in the West on the nature and extent of a country’s global engagement in light of the sprawling complexity of world affairs. The resurgent populism and nationalism as a counter movement to globalism and globalization are spreading in much of the developed world (Aalberg, Esser, Reinmann, Strömbäck & de Vreese, 2017). Meanwhile, global economic growth opportunities in the coming decade will lie in regional markets, including India, China, Africa, and Southeast Asia (ICASA) (Greenberg, Hirt & Smit, 2017). Driven by the mobility of information, capital and people, international trade and economic relations are ever more active, as evidenced in the growing number of bilateral, multilateral, and regional trade pacts as well as ever-expanding cross-border e-commerce. In short, as the global political-economic context evolves, we confront the reality of a lack of a clear vision of what the next phase of the global system will look like, resulting in a dynamic yet uncertain environment in which communication with public audiences at home and abroad will take place.

Likewise, the audiences for public relations and public diplomacy are changing. The most fundamental shifts are demographic. For instance,

developed economies are experiencing population aging, while much of the developing world is seeing a youth bulge (National Intelligence Council, 2012). More than half the world's population now lives in urban cities, and this trend will continue and reach 68% by 2050 (UN Department of Social and Economic Affairs, 2018). With international migration, the population mix in many countries in the West is undergoing ethnic re-mapping. In the U.S., by 2050 non-Hispanic whites are expected to make up less than half of the population (47%), and Hispanics to grow to 29% of the population (from 14% in 2005) and Asians to 9% (from 5% in 2005) (Passel & Cohn, 2018). We now have more people than ever in human history joining the global middle class (Greenberg, Hirt & Smit, 2017). These mega trends point to the basic reality of a changing audience for public relations and public diplomacy alike, in terms of their backgrounds, expectations, and preferences for communication.

Third, advancements in digital technology have transformed platforms and tools for communication and engagement. Digitalization and advanced analytics are revolutionizing how people are connected. In both developed and emerging economies, many more people now turn to social networking sites for news and information, bringing about a platform-based media eco-system that is both fragmented and interlocking (Pew Global Attitudes, 2017). Virtual reality and augmented reality tools are poised to redefine how people experience their life worlds. AI and automation are set to reshape the future workforce and alter the meaning of work and leisure. This also includes automated communication placements with better targeting. Digitization and machine learning are redefining “what companies do and where industry boundaries lie” (Greenberg, Hirt & Smit, 2017, p. 2). According to a recent ANA and USC Center for Public Relations report (2017), digital is also driving public relations practice as social listening, digital storytelling and real-time marketing are defining the future of public relations, and the practice will become more and more aligned with marketing. Indeed, digital technology is posing existential threats to traditional advertising and PR industries, as Silicon Valley shakes up the marketing communication sector through its prowess in data collection and advanced analytics (Wilmot, 2018).

Another important aspect of the disruption is that the stakeholder communities for communication and engagement have broadened. In the international arena, nonstate actors and diverse institutions, such as cities, multinational businesses, and civil society organizations, are increasingly engaged in confronting global challenges. According to the National Intelligence Council (2012) report on global trends, we are seeing the emergence of a “nonstate world.” The decline of the “state-centric” paradigm in international affairs has been under way for the past several decades (e.g., Nye & Keohane, 1971). The main premise of this shift is

that the players with impact on international affairs have broadened beyond the nation-state government. As Slaughter (2017, p. 23) points out,

[t]hey (non-state actors) have the same identities they do in the domestic realm, as individuals, businesses, charities, civic organizations, criminal syndicates, universities and all the other actors we recognize in our national space. In the web world, they are all, like government officials and agencies, equally capable of creating networks and operating as nodes within those networks.

Not only have these stakeholder communities expanded, but they are also empowered by digital technology. In the business world, the customer is now in the driver's seat, as "they are able to communicate with companies directly in large numbers for the first time" (Greenberg, Hirt & Smit, 2017, p. 11). In the meantime, as Krebs (2015, p. 283) observes, on international affairs and any other issues for that matter,

there are today few costs to speaking out of turn. Shame is less easily produced in a society in which there is less consensus regarding social norms, in which audiences are varied and dispersed, and in which communications are distantiated. Alternative narrative seem to be everywhere, but also nowhere – advanced, yet ignored.

In a word, there has clearly been a power shift from producers to users, and audiences are now simultaneously communicators.

Last but not least, some of the core issues to be grappled with in contemporary times are global in nature and scope that embody complex interdependence. Given the anticipated substantial increase in demand for food, water, and energy in the coming decades, sustainable development is on the transnational agenda (National Intelligence Council, 2012). As Busby (2018, p. 49) contends, "The disruption to the earth's climate will ultimately command more attention and resources and have a greater influence on the global economy and international relations than other forces visible in the world today." Another case in point is digital innovation and its social and geopolitical consequences. There are no existing regulatory norms and tools for addressing the practices and implications of digital innovation, from the Internet of Things to the sharing economy to automation and future of work. Like climate change, to successfully navigate this fast-moving, ever more complicated, transnational policy arena requires unprecedented international cooperation and cross-sector collaboration. Indeed, as Drum (2018, p. 48) argues, the two most significant developments of the twenty-first century will be "AI-driven mass unemployment and fossil-fuel-driven climate change." Thus, the larger issue context for both public relations and public diplomacy on

the global stage has been altered. This set of issues and issue-frames is not divisible between domestic and international boundaries. It calls for a catalog of new engagement mechanisms and solutions, thus adding to the complexity in reconfiguring these two fields of practice.

We have underlined some of the notable disruptive developments pertaining to the international domain. Needless to say, the impact of changing political, economic, social, and technological forces on public relations and public diplomacy is unmistakable. It requires us to rethink the fundamental assumptions underlying the current and future practices. As these changes are poised to reshape the practices, they are also creating new openings for academic analysis and investigation into the unfolding phenomenon, including topics such as the nature of digital identity for both organizations and individuals, the complex communication journey one goes through and the accompanying influencing mechanisms that shape people's perceptions and behaviors concerning international matters, the changing drivers of trust and reputation in the new global communication landscape, to name a few. In this discussion, we will focus on the concept and practice of network analysis and its application to the two fields.

Moving Forward: PR and PD in a Network Society

While it is open to debate where public relations and public diplomacy are heading, there is broad agreement that nowadays individuals and organizations can easily develop horizontal or vertical networks of interactions, with the potential to reach a global audience. We currently live in a network society, which is built upon a global web of communication networks that constantly exchange interactive messages (Castells, 2004; Castells & Cardoso, 2006; Van Dijk, 2012). Taking a network view of the international realm, Slaughter (2017, p. 7) cogently argues, "To see the international system as a web is to see a world not of states but of networks, intersecting and closely overlapping in some places and more strung out in others."

In a network society, given the aforementioned challenges, both public relations and public diplomacy – and hence political public relations – are at a crossroads. Practitioners may either choose to continue the traditional practice, or they may be forced by changing realities to develop new approaches to communicate with and engage stakeholders. In this section, we identify the shared commonalities between public relations and public diplomacy, and propose a networked-centered approach, as an instrument of analysis, that may prepare both fields as well as political public relations for challenges and opportunities in the network society.

Relationship: The Common Bond

As reviewed earlier, public relations and public diplomacy are closely connected as both fields aim to foster a favorable environment for

organizations or states to advance their goals and interests (Bowen & Heath, 2005; Fitzpatrick, 2007). The two fields share an emphasis on relationship, and in its broader sense, networks.

So how does public relations approach relationship? Public relations practitioners and scholars have viewed relationship management as a critical component of public relations (Ledingham, 2011; Yang & Taylor, 2015). Relationship management refers to “the state which exists between an organization and its key publics in which the actions of either entity impact the economic, social, political and/or cultural well-being of the other entity” (Ledingham & Bruning, 1998, p. 62). Relationship management has been a major area of research and practice for over two decades (Ledingham, 2011).

In comparison, public diplomacy’s attention to relationship is a recent phenomenon (Fitzpatrick, 2007). Melissen (2005) proposed the concept of “New Public Diplomacy” to explain the relational turn in public diplomacy. The concept of new public diplomacy has several important features. First, it transcends the one-way communication and moves towards a two-way and collaborative engagement approach (Cowan & Arsenault, 2008; Fisher, 2013; Melissen, 2005). Second, new public diplomacy focuses more on mid-term and long-term objectives that go beyond message recalls and exposures. Practitioners need to “caution for too close nexus between foreign policy and public diplomacy,” as close association may lead to the failure of public diplomacy when a related foreign policy fails (Melissen, 2005, pp. 14–15). In other words, programs that foster long-term relationship and good will are prioritized. Third, new public diplomacy acknowledges that non-state actors may also use public diplomacy “when they engage in governance” (Gregory, 2006), thereby expanding the horizon for research and planning.

Along this line, public diplomacy scholars suggested that the relational approach stands for genuine cooperation and collaboration with foreign communities, and it “realizes that empowering and engaging with others is a more efficient path toward sustained change” (Zaharna, Fisher & Arsenault, 2013, p. 2). This approach shares considerable similarity with dialogic communication in public relations (Taylor & Kent, 2013) and reveals a clear emphasis on relationship over image cultivation.

In short, the field of public relations has always valued relationship and public diplomacy has recently witnessed a relational turn. With both fields embracing relationship and striving for more effective and long-term relationships, this important concept can serve as the common ground where the two fields intersect.

Moreover, relationships are basically units of social networks (Monge & Contractor, 2003). The difference is that when we study relationships as isolated entities, we emphasize one pair of actors and their relationships at a time; whereas network scholars tend to take a more holistic approach to look at multiple pairs of relationships simultaneously and also attend to

how relationships influence the formation and perishing of other relationships. When organizations or states deal with a relatively small number of stakeholders, it is possible to manage a relationship with one stakeholder/stakeholder group at a time, and consider such relationships as separate from each other. However, Yang and Taylor (2015) pointed out that this approach is inefficient and unrealistic when organizations and states need to deal with complex relationships and when stakeholders have relationships with one another. In other words, when we start to realize that organizations and states and their stakeholders are not isolated entities, but connected social actors carrying out operations and communication in social networks, the relational approach is likely to move forward, and evolve into a network approach (Yang & Bentley, 2017; Yang & Taylor, 2015).

Social Networks: The Future Direction

One important way to investigate the structural elements of these social connections is through conceptualizing them as social networks. A social network is a set of relationships among related social actors (Marin & Wellman, 2011, p.11). The social network perspective, as a theoretical approach, assumes social networks as the primary building blocks of society. To study these networks, network scholars examine the patterns of relationship structure and flow of resources (e.g., information, capital, etc.), and reveal how social structure constrains or enables the goals and activities of networked actors (Wasserman & Faust, 1994).

A group of scholars in public relations have recognized the value of the social network approach. Most of public relations research on social networks was published over the last decade. A number of recent studies have made important theoretical and methodological advances applying social network analysis to topics ranging from organization–public relations (Kent, Sommerfeldt & Saffer, 2015; Yang & Taylor, 2015), crisis communication (Podnar, Tuškej & Golob, 2012; Schultz, Kleinnijenhuis, Oegema, Utz & Van Atteveldt, 2012), public relations ethics (Yang, Taylor & Saffer, 2016), and activism public relations research (Uysal & Yang, 2013). Additionally, studies have applied semantic network analysis to illustrate major trends in media coverage and could provide an alternative approach to measure campaign effectiveness (Danowski, 2008; Murphy, 2010).

The keen interest in social networks is also shared by public diplomacy scholars. A recent development is the idea of “network public diplomacy” (Zaharna, Fisher & Arsenault, 2013), which emphasizes the importance of strategically identifying key alliances, recognizing the power of social connections and maintaining mutually beneficial relationships. Zaharna (2013) identified a network-based typology of public diplomacy tactics that

can range from creating awareness (e.g., raising public consciousness about a political or social issue), informing (e.g., circulating information on education, culture, science, or policy), influencing (e.g., shaping attitudes and behavioral preferences, cultivating shared norms or values), advocacy (e.g., calls to action around a policy agenda), collaboration (e.g., working together toward a shared outcome), or innovation (e.g., knowledge generation or problem solving).

(p. 176)

Additionally, Zaharna (2013) discussed the difference between network building and collaborative public diplomacy initiatives. The basic distinction lies in that network building underscores the creation of connections among social actors through sharing information. For instance, a nation's attempt to reach out to publics on Facebook creates a network structure. Collaborative public diplomacy, on the other hand, underscores the importance of working towards shared goals.

In the broader international relations research, there has also been increasing interest in applying network analysis to examining how networks shape and affect state behaviors in approaching and solving international and global problems (e.g., Hafner-Burton, Kahler & Montgomery, 2009; Kahler, 2009; Maoz, 2011). Slaughter has provided a systematic look at the concept from the perspectives of policy and practice. She (2009) argued,

The emerging networked world of the twenty-first century ... exists above the state, below the state, and through the state. In this world, the state with the most connections will be the central player, able to set the global agenda and unlock innovation and sustainable growth.

She (2017) later expanded on the idea to explore the strategies of connection by examining three specific types of networks in the international domain: resilience networks, task networks, and scale networks.

Moving forward, it is likely that a social network approach may provide a fertile ground for theoretical and practical innovations for both public relations and public diplomacy scholars. The two fields may join forces and benefit from the network approach in at least the following three main aspects.

First, a macro-level, holistic understanding of states/organizations' position in their operational environment. The social network approach is useful for taking a "bird's eye analysis" of relationships research, starting from dyadic relationships (individuals and organizations) to an inter-organizational network (populations of organizations), to entire populations of organizations (the community ecology). Such a holistic understanding can be valuable for both organizations and states. This

holistic understanding could also enable organizations and stakeholders to anticipate relationship changes, manage complex relationship networks among stakeholders, and better deal with conflicting relationships.

Second, the ability to identify key influencers both online and offline. Influencer is an important concept in the public relations and the social network literature. Taylor and Kent (2013) noted that organization–public relationships are often mediated by influencers. On social media, the power of influencers is even more prominent. For example, research found consumers' relationship with brands are often mediated by influential opinion leaders (Ngai, Tao & Moon, 2015). Studies found mediators influence social media users' perceptions of political candidates (Broersma & Graham, 2012) and natural crises (Smith, 2010). The social network literature provides a number of indicators to help identify influencers. For instance, Himelboim, Golan, Moon and Suto (2014) proposed the concept of influential mediators. They argued that influential mediators collaborate with organizations to form dialogic relationship with publics. Influential mediators are “entities that mediate the relations between an organization and its publics through social media” (p. 361). They are defined not by social media content production, but by actors' positions in social-mediated communication networks. Moreover, Himelboim et al. explained that there are two types of influential mediators on social media: formal and informal social mediators. The formal social mediators refer to entities associated with an organization or hold a societal role as information providers (e.g., news media). The informal social mediators are grassroots social actors, unaffiliated with the organization or with information providers. The ability to identify influencers can improve the effectiveness of both public relations and public diplomacy campaigns.

Third, improving practitioners' ability to understand large-scale digital data. One feature of the current digital age is the abundance of big data about stakeholders/publics' interactions patterns, attitudes, and behaviors. Many matrices and platforms are available to make sense of such big data and network provides a unique angle because all digital content and communication are networks. It is not an exaggeration to suggest that the big-data movement at its core is also a network movement, where information about publics, things, organizations, social institutions are shared, accumulated, distributed, and redistributed through complex social networks. Without knowledge about networks, one cannot reach a proper understanding of the current big-data era and related phenomena. Against this backdrop, perspectives such as “actor network theory” or “network of things” can offer efficient approaches to identify relevant stakeholder communities or issue publics, and as a result improve outreach and engagement effectiveness.

Conclusion

The fundamental impact of globalization, societal changes, and digital technology is reshaping the practices of public relations and public diplomacy, and by extension political public relations. We have outlined some of the key developments concerning the international realm that are affecting the practices. We have also identified the main, existing analytical threads about the two fields. As both fields are practice-driven disciplines and both are undergoing radical change in terms of their respective nature of work, structure, and identity, it is important that our analytical formulations reflect the speed and scope of change. And that is an immensely challenging task, especially given that the developments are still unfolding. Amidst the dizzying dynamics, we think that at least a social network approach offers a viable analytical path for connecting the two fields of practice. And there's already been some work done under the network framework in both areas. We underscore the value of social network as a theoretical construct as well as an instrument of analysis, and hope to inspire robust analyses, perspectives, and criticisms concerning the evolving intersection between the two areas of practice.

Specifically, we propose three areas in which network framework may extend both fields. First, a comprehensive mapping and reevaluation of public-organization/public-nation relationship. For decades the center of public-organization research in public relations has focused on an organizational-centric perspective and a similar condition can be said about public diplomacy. The network approach may allow us to reconsider who really are at the center and if there is a center at all. Questions such as who are the publics, what is the relationship between the publics and organization/nation, what is the relationship among the publics, and how such relationships reflect and shape organizations' reputation, and affect publics' relationships with organizations/nations can be remapped and reevaluated.

Second, an evolving and expanding understanding of what counts as evidence of campaign effectiveness. Practitioners in both public relations and public diplomacy have conventionally looked at metrics such as message recall, reputation, and message exposure to gauge campaign effectiveness. Looking forward, practitioners armed with a network approach may consider the expansion of networks, the bridging of critical networks, and the acceleration of information dissemination as new indicators of campaign effectiveness. More importantly, practitioners and scholars now may assess the changes in stakeholder and organizations' social capital to fully grasp the effect of long-term campaigns.

Third, the network approach may enhance organization/nation's ability to proactively anticipate and manage issues and crises. Current and future research has combined social network analysis with a range of big data analytics such as machine learning, natural language processing, and text

mining to enhance organization and a nation's ability to recognize influencers, identify relevant stakeholder and their communities, and provide early detections of issues and crises. The information age offers numerous opportunities and require practitioners and scholars to fast adapt to changing trends. We are confident that the network approach would play a key role in the process.

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15 Political Public Relations and Activist Network Strategies

The Influence of Framing and Institutionalization on Activist Issues Management

Erich J. Sommerfeldt and Aimei Yang

While political scientists and sociologists have studied activists and social movement organizations (SMOs)¹ for a half century or more, it is only in recent decades that public relations scholars have begun to examine the communication practices of activist groups with a mind to abet and encourage, rather than diffuse or diminish, such entities. Activist groups, like for-profit organizations, are strategic entities whose arsenal includes the application of various communication tactics as well as the conscious strategic management of issues—often with the aim of policy or political change.

As Coombs and Holladay (2012) forcefully noted, there is much to be gained in terms of advancing public relations theory through privileging the study of activist groups. Fortunately, in the last decade we have seen significant growth in scholarship on activist public relations and such groups' use of public relations techniques to influence politics. Contemporary treatments of activist political public relations are heavily influenced by issues management theory (Coombs & Holladay, 2012, 2018; Heath & Palenchar, 2009; Heath & Waymer, 2011; Sommerfeldt, 2013; Sommerfeldt & Yang, 2017). Issues management has been described as “the highest decision-making function of public relations” (Bowen, 2004, p. 65), and includes an organization's efforts to detect, analyze, monitor, and manage issues to an advantageous outcome. Issues management research emerged in the 1970s as a direct response to the successes of activists in influencing political changes and policy with perceived detriment to corporations. Ironically, it has often been noted that activists are adept issues management practitioners themselves and the perspective is highly relevant to activist public relations practice (Crabbe & Vibbert, 1985; Jaques, 2006). Indeed, several studies have utilized the perspective to help understand how issues management may abet activist practice (Coombs & Holladay, 2018; Smith & Ferguson, 2010; Sommerfeldt & Xu, 2015).

Only through collective action can people realize important individual and group goals (Bimber, Flanagin, & Stohl, 2012). Thus, collective action—which has been defined as “advocating for causes or goals, recruiting others, and banding together to gain voice and representation before public institutions, corporations or other bodies,” (Bimber et al., 2012, p. 1)—is necessarily constituted by different types of relationships among social actors. To that same point, Sommerfeldt and Yang (2017) argued that the ability of organizations to achieve issues management objectives is limited without a robust relationship network. Yet, despite this axiom, organizational relationship networks have largely remained an afterthought in the issues management literature, and the connection between issues management and relationship networks has not been explored with any real depth. The same is true in studies of political public relations (Kiouisis & Strömbäck, 2014; Strömbäck & Kiouisis, 2011a), which typically has studied the “purposeful activities by political actors to influence their agendas, and how they frame events, issues, and processes” (Strömbäck & Kiouisis, 2011b, p. 7). Missing from the political public relations literature is a consideration of the role of networks within activist efforts to affect political change. Understanding relationship networks is particularly important in activist political public relations scholarship as collective actions are undertaken through various types of relationship networks—activists cannot affect meaningful political and social change without a network to support them.

To address this lacuna in the literature, Sommerfeldt and Yang (2017) presented a framework of activist relationship network strategies, which prescribed the kinds of relationship networks activists should adopt as they attempt to manage issues from their inception to resolution in political fora. This chapter extends their framework by considering two additional streams of literature that are of importance for activists as they attempt to affect political change: framing theory and institutional theory. To successfully merge these new concepts with the existing framework, and to articulate how framing and institutional perspectives impact activist relationship networks, the chapter first briefly reviews issues management scholarship and literature on activist networks. Next, the chapter discusses the relationship network strategies framework, and articulates how political opportunity theory implies that both framing and institutional theory may be used to advance and elaborate the framework.

Issues Management and Relationship Networks

Issues management has been a substream of the public relations literature for more than four decades, and has been applied in a number of different organizational contexts (cf. Heath & Palenchar, 2009). At its heart, issues management is intimately connected to political public relations as issues management frameworks were initially designed to proactively influence

issue development to affect changes in public policy (Crable & Vibbert, 1985; Heath & Waymer, 2011; Jones & Chase, 1979). Broadly defined, issues management is a public relations specialization that entails an organization's efforts to monitor its environment, analyze potential threats and opportunities, and communicate with publics about disputes or matters of contention involving the organization (Hallahan, 2001). Moreover, catalytic approaches to issues management (e.g., Crable & Vibbert, 1985) are seen as a way to initiate desired issue discussions and shepherd them to a favorable policy resolution rather than waiting for the development of favorable social or political trends.

Central to issues management praxis is the notion of an "issue." Issues are points of contention between organizations and stakeholders. "Issues are not simply questions that exist. An issue is created when one or more human agents attach significance to a situation or perceived 'problem'" (Crable & Vibbert, 1985, p. 5). Issues are not static, but take on different characteristics and attract varying levels of public interest with time. To that end, issue life-cycle theory (Bridges, 2004; Crable & Vibbert, 1985), suggests that issues grow from shared grievance expression among a few individuals and groups, to more widespread public discussion, resolution in policy arenas, and into dormancy or disappearance from the public eye. As noted above, catalytic approaches to issues management suggest that engaged issue managers can influence issue development to a favorable policy outcome through using appropriate strategic communication techniques (Botan & Taylor, 2004; Crable & Vibbert, 1985). Hence, issues management is intimately connected to politics and policy making, as the ultimate goal of the practice is seeking changes in policy that benefit the organization and its stakeholders (Heath & Waymer, 2011).

Issues management originated as a business practice designed to assist corporations in their efforts to influence public policy and counteract political changes ushered in by activist movements in the 1970s (Jones & Chase, 1979). Despite its distinctly corporate origins, with time, issues management has become less associated with business and more perceived as a comprehensive approach to planning and communication, with scholars recognizing that all forms of organizations can adopt and benefit from the principles of issues management (Heath & Palenchar, 2009). Indeed, techniques of activism and issues management have converged, with "activism encroaching in the boardroom while the formal processes of issues management spread beyond the corporate environment" (Jaques, 2006, p. 407).

While communication techniques for issue development have been extensively discussed in the literature (Coombs & Holladay, 2018; Heath & Palenchar, 2009; Heath & Waymer, 2011; Sommerfeldt, 2013), little attention has been paid to the role of network formation in activist issue management, despite the acknowledged importance of networks in activist practice (Smith & Ferguson, 2010). The political public relations literature

has similarly ignored network perspectives. Political public relations has been defined as:

the management process by which an actor for political purposes, through communication and action, seeks to influence and to establish, build, and maintain beneficial relationships and reputations with key publics and stakeholders to help support its mission and achieve its goals.

(Chapter 1, this volume; see also Strömbäck & Kioussis 2011b, p. 8)

By this definition, successful political public relations cannot be practiced without building relationships. However, for activist groups—and many other kinds of organizations—successful political public relations practice must transcend the development of single organizations to single public relationships as entire networks of relationships are required to affect meaningful change. Furthermore, recent research has advocated for network assessments of organization–public relationships (OPR), as network approaches assess the complex interactions and structures of relationships that traditional, dyadic approaches to OPR have ignored (Heath, 2013; Sommerfeldt & Kent, 2015).

An issue's progression through its life cycle is inherently connected to the actors who give meaning to that issue (Heath & Palenchar, 2009; Zoller, 2005). Hecló (1978) called such actors and the relationships among them *issue networks*. By implication, for organizations to manage an issue to a favorable resolution, the nature of the relationships it maintains in the issue network must also evolve. Perspectives on issue stages from the issues management literature (Bridges, 2004; Crable & Vibbert, 1985; Heath & Palenchar, 2009) therefore provide a productive lens through which theory on relationship networks in activist issues management might be advanced. As an issue evolves, the nature of organizations' stakes in it may change, resulting in a corresponding change in the overall structure of the issue network as well as the kinds of organizations embedded within it. Relationships, as reified in networks, are therefore vital to advancing an issue position and achieving desired change in politics and policy (Zoller, 2005). Any comprehensive look at activist political public relations should, therefore, recognize the influence of network formation in the accomplishment of activist political objectives.

The Network Strategy Framework

Sommerfeldt and Yang (2017) proposed that activist groups should catalytically adopt different kinds of relationship networks at various stages of an issue's life cycle. To that end, they proposed an activist network strategy model (see Figure 15.1) that described network strategies at each issue stage by two dimensions: strategies that fortify *relationship strength*, and strategies that increase *relationship diversity*.

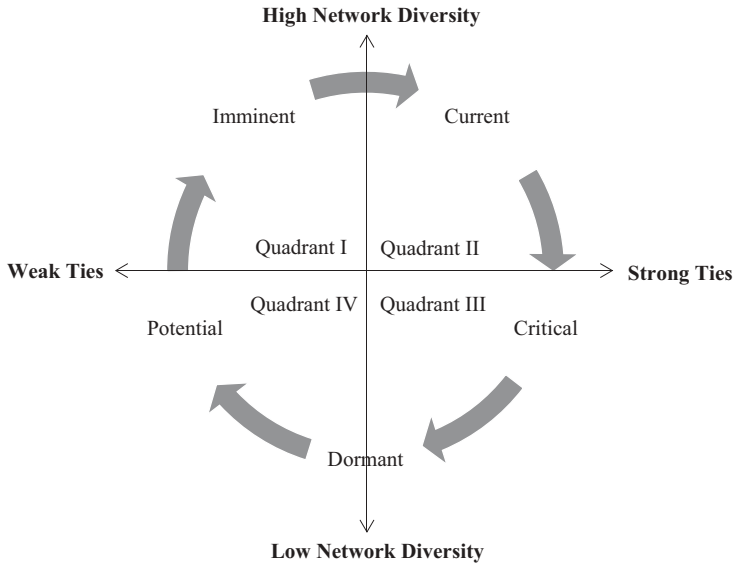


Figure 15.1 A Framework of SMO Network Strategies

In brief, they claimed that early stage issues—which Crable and Vibbert (1985) called the *potential* and *imminent* stages—are more likely to be abstract and subsume many “narrower” policy issues (Heath & Palenchar, 2009). Early stages are more weakly articulated, and attract interest from a broader and more demographically and ideologically diverse array of stakeholders. Broad interest in vaguely defined issues may help to spread the word, particularly through social media channels. Indeed, digital communication technologies have been wildly effective in spreading information in nascent social movements, helping an issue to reach a broader range of stakeholders (Bennett & Segerberg, 2012). As such, Sommerfeldt and Yang (2017) suggested that in an issue’s early stages, SMOs should build a large and diverse network characterized by “weak” ties—that is, ties that require little time, energy, and resources to maintain. Weak ties facilitate the growth of networks and the messages it carries (Hite & Hesterly, 2001). In contrast, strong ties require frequent interactions and resources to maintain and require a high level of trust and mutual support.

As the issue moves toward the *current* stage—the stage at which an issue is widely discussed in the media and defined “sides” of the issue have emerged (Crable & Vibbert, 1985), Sommerfeldt and Yang (2017) proposed that organizations must build stronger relationships with a diverse set of organizations. As Hallahan (2001) suggested, engaging in a diverse and committed issue coalition “[creates] the appearance that an issue

enjoys a broad base of support” (Hallahan, 2001, p. 41). At the *critical* stage, issues have reached the point where they can be “decided” by government or other policy actors in order to achieve resolution (Crabbe & Vibbert, 1985). In the critical stage, questions are more about solutions than problems. As such, as an issue progresses, its scope will narrow and solidify, reducing the number and diversity of relationships required to argue for the issue’s resolution. Strong ties are required at this stage,

Finally, in the *dormant* stage, SMOs should maintain a smaller range of ties with homogenous groups of organizations—most often taking the shape of the “shells” of old coalitions. Maintaining weak ties may help to reignite discussion of the same or similar issue in the future.

The framework posits that opportunities for advancing a political issue can be catalyzed, in part, by building and maintaining appropriate relationship network structures. Activist groups can match their relationship building strategies according to their desire to advance an issue to the next stage. However, Sommerfeldt and Yang (2017) cautioned that networks cannot entirely explain success in achieving issue objectives—which are certainly also the outcome of other strategic efforts, such as media relations and agenda building (Tedesco, 2011), and influenced by other political opportunity structures. Research on activist network strategies should not ignore that network building takes place in a fluid and changing environment and not in a social or political vacuum. As Heath and Waymer (2011) stated, in political public relations, “not only does the organization work to create a favorable playing field, but it also yields to the definitions and dimensions of the field where it plays” (p. 143). Accordingly, the next section takes up the political opportunity literature and offers ways in which the perspective can further integrate network research in issues management.

Insights from Political Opportunity

The notion of political opportunity arose with the development of political process theory (McAdam, 2010). A basic premise of this popular social-political theory is that factors exogenous to social movements enhance or inhibit prospects for mobilization and the effectiveness of movements on institutional politics and policy (Meyer & Minkoff, 2004). Political opportunity thus encompasses important environmental elements that catalyze movements, translating the potential for mobilization into actual collective action. Tarrow (1994) provided an oft-cited definition: “consistent—but not necessarily formal or permanent—action by affecting their expectations for success or failure” (p. 85). The world outside social movements provides a structure of political opportunity within which activists must operate. Thus, political opportunity research often attempts to predict how activists’ claims evolve over time in response to different opportunities, and why social movements differ among different national

or institutional contexts. To a large degree it is assumed that political opportunities exist completely outside the control of activist groups, and that “the wisdom, creativity, and outcomes of activists’ choices—their agency—can only be understood and evaluated by looking at the political context and the rules of the games in which those choices are made” (Meyer, 2004, p. 128).

Scholars have offered a number of essential political opportunity components. Opportunity is sometimes described as issue specific. For example, writing on the civil rights movement, McAdam (2010) argued that changes in demography, repression, and migration created an opportunistic climate within which African Americans could collectively organize and make claims that would be received by some government institutions. Others have proposed more general dimensions that conceptualize cultural, structural, material, and organizational elements as part of the political opportunity (Hooghe, 2005). Scholars sometimes focus on static, structural elements such as the political representation system of a nation, the capacity of a state and its governance structure—all of which are often conflated under the general term “political openness” (Meyer & Minkoff, 2004).

To a large degree it is assumed that political opportunities exist completely outside the control of activist groups (Meyer, 2004). However, some have criticized this “structural bias” and deterministic emphasis of political opportunity research (Goodwin & Jasper, 1999), and argued that activist groups can experience changes in political opportunity as a function of their own actions (McAdam, Tarrow, & Tilly, 2001). Opportunity structures are thus both created and imposed. Advocates of a catalytic approach to issues management would argue that opportunity is something that can—through the application of communication strategy and tactics—be initiated and leveraged to the advantage of engaged actors (Crabbe & Vibbert, 1985). At the same time, models of issues management arguably overestimate the effects of actions, or at least have not adequately elaborated on the environmental constraints influencing the efficacy of issues management techniques within a challenging policy environment.

Networks are an important intermediary between the strategic actions of an activist group and larger structures governing policy creation (Kriesi, 2004). A crucial task in shaping political opportunity is to modify the configuration of actors invested in an issue—the “logic of the situation” at a point in time (Kriesi, p. 74). The creation of those networks, and the “situation’s logic” however, are subject to forces both within, and without, the organization. The challenge facing political opportunity research is to explain which aspects of the environment affects the development of social movements and their constituent organizations, and how exactly that development has been affected (Meyer & Minkoff, 2004). We argue here that issue framing and forces of institutionalization are two primary opportunity structures that must be considered in a strategic management framework of activist network strategies in today’s communication and political landscape.

Issue Framing and Network Building

A social network “is a network of meanings” (White, 1992, p. 67). Thus, how grievances are identified and how causes are articulated can affect the structure of political issue networks. Activist rhetoric—and the internal rationale for constructing such rhetoric—is likely to have significant consequences on issue networks, as “discourses shape structures ... organizations and individuals use discourses purposefully to shape the political situation in and through which they can act and perform” (Clegg, Courpasson, & Phillips, 2006, p. 17). A critical activity in political issues management, then, is issue framing (Hallahan, 2011).

Organizational attempts to frame political issues are acts of self-representation (Hallahan, 2011). The framing of issues, then, is an expression of internal organizational identity—and both frames and organizational identity will evolve as the organization manages an issue through its life cycle (Heath & Palenchar, 2009). The ability of activist groups to create compelling frames, as well as effectively respond to the frames of others, plays a large role in creating favorable political opportunity for activists (Meyer & Staggenborg, 1996). That said, McCammon, Newman, Muse, and Terrell (2007) argued that frames are essential to gaining popular support for an issue at its early stages as well as persuading policy makers in an issue’s final stage. Heath (1990) described activism as a “contest over social reality” (p. 36). Thus, the network strategy framework should also consider that network building is a symbolic as well as practical action, and that frames can affect the formation and structure of activist networks throughout an issue’s life cycle.

Over the last few decades, scholars have incorporated the concept of framing into activist and social movement research by defining a frame as “an interpretive schemata that simplifies and condenses the ‘world out there’ by selectively punctuating and encoding objects, situations, events, experiences, and sequences of actions within one’s present or past environments” (Snow & Benford, 1992, p. 137). Frames emphasize or deemphasize particular aspects of a political reality (Hallahan, 2011). Social movement actors are thus active participants in shaping meaning through framing—meanings intended to inspire participation and/or antagonize adversaries. Benford and Snow (2000) write that frames are utilitarian and goal-directed: “Frames are developed and deployed to achieve a specific purpose—to recruit new members, to mobilize adherents, to acquire resources and so forth” (p. 624). They go on to call the strategic efforts to link their interests and frames with constituents and prospective resource providers as *frame alignment processes*. While strategic communication and public relations practitioners have often been pejoratively referred to as “image-makers” and “spin-doctors,” organizational public relations efforts are often efforts to enact frames, which “involve attempts to define reality ... for the many publics on whom the organization depends” (Hallahan, 1999, p. 206). This process, argued

Hallahan (2011), is neither inherently good nor bad, but a necessary and critical set of choices made in a political campaign.

One of the most frequently discussed concepts in the activist and social movement literature is that of *collective action frames*. Collective action frames are “action-oriented sets of beliefs and meanings that inspire and legitimate the activities and campaigns of social movement organizations” (Benford & Snow, 2000, p. 614). One of the tasks of collective action frames is to define the situation or issue in need of change, point out who is to blame, create an alternative course of action, and to “urge others to act in concert to affect change” (Benford & Snow, 2000, p. 615). The task of framing is accomplished in concert (or in competition) with many organizations of various types. Thus, the “prognostic dimension”—how similarly constituent organizations of a collective action frame issues—is a primary way of identifying how a movement’s organizations differ from one another. Indeed, the more inclusive or open collective action frames are, the more likely they are to be shared by a larger number of groups. Gerhards and Rucht (1992) claimed that the “larger the range of problems covered by a frame, the larger the range of social groups that can be addressed with the frame and the greater the mobilization capacity of that frame” (p. 580). The variability in the scope of collective action frames thus accounts for mobilization capabilities of some groups as opposed to others (Benford & Snow, 2000).

Relatively recent advances in communication technology have changed how scholars discuss the nature of collective action networks and the kinds of organizations that produce frames. Traditional collective action theory (e.g., Olson, 2009/1965) proposed that “formal” organizations are required to produce the materials necessary to participate in public debate about an issue. Because brick-and-mortar organizations with high levels of institutionalization and professionalism require significant resources to operate, collective action frames are often couched in terms of supporting the organization producing those frames. However, in the last two decades, the emergence of “network organizations” facilitated by digital communication technology have lessened the need for formal organizations to create the communications necessary to facilitate collective actions (Bimber et al., 2012). These developments have allowed individuals and small groups, rather than formal organizations, to take on leadership roles in activist networks.

Personal linkages established through digital communications have formed “network organizations”, that in some ways have displaced formal organizations as the force behind many collective action efforts. In such networks, the frames that circulate are not necessarily those of formal organizations—though formal or “hybrid” organizations may participate in digital network organizations (e.g., Chadwick, 2007)—but are often those of personal ideology expression which are circulated and adapted by others in the network. A large, loosely connected group of actors may be “stitched” together

through digital communication platforms such as Facebook or Twitter (Bennett, Segerberg, & Walker, 2014). Thus, Bennett and Segerberg (2012) described modern activism as *connective* rather than *collective* action, and proposed that the logic of contemporary collective action is less about *organizations*, and more about *connections*, because action now occurs through the connection of personalized expression in large and fluid digital networks. That said, the most successful modern political organizations are those that can blend the use of older and newer communication technology into what Chadwick (2017) termed “hybrid systems.” Said organizations may choose an appropriate blend of media and messaging to affect an issue’s meaning at different stages in its life cycle.

For purposes of advancing the network strategy framework, we adopt an individual–organizational binary as a parsimonious continuum along which to discuss the evolution of issue framing, as well as activist identity, in contemporary collective action networks. As mentioned previously, “network organizations” consist of abstract ideological and issue commitments. As early stage issues are more likely to be abstract and subsume many “narrower” issues of facts, values, and policies (Heath & Palenchar, 2009), large and diverse networks are ideal for facilitating communication about the issue and elevating social awareness—though concrete solutions to the issue often have not manifested. Thus, issue frames in such networks are often typified by what Bennett and Segerberg (2012) called *personalized action frames*. Personalized frames are inclusive of “different personal reasons for contesting a situation that needs to be changed” (p. 744). As Sommerfeldt and Yang (2017) put it:

Communicative engagement with the network through personalized action frames takes the form of expressing hopes and grievances related to a common problem. Individuals are not asked to align with specific organizations or demands—rather, individuals communicate and identify with others about an issue(s) in their own terms.

(p. 834)

At the other end of our frame continuum are collective action frames, which require allegiance to more established groups or refined ideologies. Such frames place greater demands on individuals to share organizational identifications and/or accept certain political claims. As a result, inter-organizational differences in collective action frames often require communication beyond that enacted through digital technologies to overcome (Bennett & Segerberg, 2012). Conversely, personalized frames are less ideologically demanding, are spread more easily, and are more likely to be accepted by diverse individuals and organizations. Issue frames, therefore, affect the size and diversity of issue networks. Broader and more ideologically inclusive frames support larger and more diverse networks. Further, groups that share similar frames will likely share similar institutional features as well.

Institutionalization and Network Formation

Organizational structure involves building a formal entity to carry out activist activities. As Hallahan (2001) argued, the existence of a tangible structure “enables people to readily and positively identify with a cause, permits coordination of activities, and facilitates communication” (p. 39). Activists often make strategic choices deciding which organizational forms to take (Bimber et al., 2012; Zoller, 2005). As recent scholarship has shown, digital organizations and loose network structures are particularly efficacious in raising awareness about early stage issues. However, if activist groups are to advocate for their issue(s) throughout its life cycle, some institutional maturation is likely required (Heath & Palenchar, 2009). The ability of activist groups to take advantage of political opportunities in specific arenas—such as in forums of public policy making—is largely dependent on their ability to adopt the structures that operate in those venues (Meyer & Staggenborg, 1996). To that end, some activist groups will strive to acquire the forms of more institutionalized non-profits or NGOs (Leitch & Motion, 2010; Sommerfeldt, 2013). In short, to manage issues through their life cycle to the critical stage, activists must often adapt to meet the institutional norms of entities engaged in policy-making.

To this point, institutional theory considers the processes by which structures become established as guidelines for behavior. Institutions have been defined as “regulative, normative, and cognitive structures and activities that provide stability and meaning for social behavior” (Scott, 1995, p. 33), and institutionalization as a process that occurs “whenever there is a reciprocal typification of habitualized actions by types of actors” (Berger & Luckmann, 1967, p. 54). Institutional theory is thus partly concerned with how the environment in which an organization is situated may have transformational effects on its structure and behaviors.

As an organization becomes subject to institutional forces, its structure will increasingly resemble that of its institutional environment—as assessed through indicators such as levels of professionalism, shared norms of behavior, and the increased influence of the environment on internally-set goals (Meyer, 2008). As institutional pressures increase, organizations must appear to conform to their environment if they are to legitimate themselves, gain resources, and enhance their prospects for survival. Relationships among organizations are consequently a simple form of institutionalization (Meyer, 2008). Network connections will affect an actor’s behaviors and pressure it to become increasingly similar in structure to others in the network. Indeed, increased communications with other social actors will eventually “bring [an organization] into conformity with the institutional environment” (Lammers & Barbour, 2006, p. 367). Additionally, Meyer and Rowan (1977) pointed out that the prevalence of different organizational forms in a network can be attributed not only to the complexity of relational processes but also to the existence of shared

belief systems. Shared frames are thus likely indications of similar levels of institutionalization.

Insights from institutional theory therefore help to account for the various types of organizations in modern collective action. As discussed above, recent research has suggested that formal and “traditional” organizations are becoming less important to collective action as a result of digital communication technologies (Bennett & Segerberg, 2012; Bimber et al., 2012; Chadwick, 2007). Chadwick’s notion of institutional hybridity is particularly relevant here, as changes in communication technology have affected “life inside organizations but also the increasingly fluid interactions between them” (2017, p. 11). Digital communication has changed what it means to be an organization, and has changed the way organizations interact with one another in political issue discussions. That said, what we have come to think of as “organizations” still matter in contemporary activism, as individual activists continue to identify themselves as part of specific organizations (Ganesh & Stohl, 2010). Moreover, when discussions turn to resolving an issue in policy-making fora, the role of institutionalized organizations in modern collective action demonstrates the continued relevance of “traditional” collective action perspectives.

Institutional theory also implies that activist groups may have different forms because they pursue issues at different stages in their life cycles, and are consequently more or less likely to connect with others with certain institutional forms. For example, it is unlikely that loosely organized grassroots movements will develop formal relationships with the United Nations or multinational corporations, but such relationships may be feasible for an established NGO with a more bureaucratic structure and moderate communication demeanor (Stohl & Stohl, 2005). While network organizations often have flexible frames and identities, older and perhaps more resource-rich groups whose scope is limited to policy and issue advocacy are likely to be more “strategically linked to party and government politics” (Bennett, 2003, p. 145). More bureaucratic organizations are therefore prone to participate in leader-based and more rigid partnerships less adaptive to change than their more flexible counterparts (Bennett, 2005). This claim essentially argues that different issue stages are more likely to sustain different issue network ecologies that consist of various network structures and organizations with different levels of institutionalization. More institutionalized or “hybrid” groups may also occasionally engage in the advocacy of early stage issues (Chadwick, 2007, 2017; Sommerfeldt, 2013). Indeed, it is strategically advantageous for highly institutionalized groups to adopt more hybrid communicative behaviors in early-stage issue management as established political organizations may be “politically incompatible with the ethos of the crowd” (Bennett et al., 2014, p. 233). That said, participation in early stage issues hardly attracts enough social resources to sustain highly institutionalized groups in the long term. An imbalance between issue stage and issue network

could impede the development of issues, thus leading to the need for activists to restructure the issue network.

As outlined previously, the strength and diversity of an organization's ties within an issue network is likely dependent on the similarity of issue frame. Moreover, diversity in ties will not only be reflected in differences by organizational sector. Simply explicating the multi-sectoral nature of issue networks (i.e., grassroots groups, hybrids, government, industry, etc.) to some extent ignores the degree to which an organization is influenced by its ties (Uzzi, 1997). In other words, the close relationships in a focal organization's immediate network will have strong influences on its behavior and structure. Thus, describing the level of institutional influence on tie strength and diversity at different issue stages, rather than outlining all the types of organizations that will participate in issue debates, provides both a more parsimonious way to discuss influences on strategic tie formation, as well as being mindful of the influence of network ecology (Monge, Heiss, & Margolin, 2008).

Elaborating the Network Strategy Framework

In the prior sections we have made the case for consideration of issue framing and institutionalization as political opportunity structures that influence the network building process. As should be clear from the above sections, such opportunities are both voluntary and imposed in that activists have strategic choices in both how to frame their issues and the kinds of organizational structures they adopt. Yet, activists are also influenced by their network in how they frame issues and behave in their relationships with other organizations and political actors. To clarify how these perspectives affect the network strategy process, the following sections integrate the insights offered by framing and institutional theories into the four quadrants of the Sommerfeldt and Yang (2017) framework.

Quadrant 1: The Potential and Imminent Issue Stages

The first quadrant of the framework examined the types of network relationships activists should seek to build at the earliest stages of an issue's development. During the potential and imminent stages of an issue, "individuals begin to recognize the legitimacy of social issues and recognize others may share similar concerns. Interested individuals and groups may assemble to address the problem, formulate questions, and define the parameters of the problem" (Sommerfeldt & Yang, 2017 p. 833). Given that issues are fluid and somewhat mutable in their early stages, effective communication about early stage issues is likely to be best driven by personal, rather than organizational, identities and frames. Frames at this stage are more about identity expression and inclusive of "different personal reasons for contesting a situation that needs to be

changed” (Bennett & Segerberg, 2012, p. 744). At this stage, people may still join together, or commit to an organization, “but the identity reference is more derived through inclusive and diverse large-scale personal expression rather than through common group or ideological identification” (p. 744). The task before issue managers at this stage is to develop a sufficient level of public concern and discussion so as to ensure the topic emerges on the media agenda (Hallahan, 2011).

As a result of the weak and abstract nature of issue frames at these stages organizations focusing on such issues are unlikely to be subjected to strong institutional forces, and are therefore less likely to adopt certain structural features. Many “traditional” organizations may not participate in such networks at all, but those who do may attempt to create and disseminate personal frames in an effort to shape an issue in its earliest stages (Sommerfeldt & Yang, 2017). The weak connections that activists should build to facilitate information diffusion are unlikely to impose strong institutionalization processes on members of these networks, as the boundaries among organizations and individuals involved in early-stage issues are likely to be quite fluid and permeable (Bimber et al., 2012).

Given the relatively weak forces of institutionalization at this stage, there is likely to be more variety in organizational forms in this quadrant than in subsequent quadrants of the framework. Indeed, Bennett et al. (2014) described collective action behavior at this stage as “crowd-enabled networks” that encompass many different kinds of actors “stitched” together through digital media technology. While some “formal” and highly bureaucratized organizations may be present at the periphery of networks addressing early stage issues (Bennett & Segerberg, 2012), more likely in this quadrant is the presence of “hybrid” organizations that may resemble formal organizations in structure, but still exhibit diverse ways of organizing and mobilizing. Hybrids can work through digital media to build loose networks of support—characteristics associated with social movements—and at the same time “reduce costs and increase their operational flexibility” (Chadwick, 2007, p. 291). Indeed, as Bimber (2003) noted, this postbureaucratic flexibility is what allows such organizations to “adapt from one scale of an issue to the next and back again” (p. 103).

Quadrant II: Current Issue Stage

In the second quadrant, the framework suggests that issues at the current stage are best managed by diverse coalitions with strong ties. The framing of the issue and aligning that frame with others is an important part of this network building process (Sommerfeldt & Yang, 2017). If activist groups wish to be seen as legitimate in public debate (often occurring through media), and as standing for credible social changes, solidifying issue frames and building a coherent coalition to pressure targets is required (Bennett,

2005). Indeed, the spread of collective action (rather than personal action) frames is more demanding in terms of resources. Frame “sharing,” as Hallahan (2011) called it, actually works to build relationships. A more formal organizational structure, often with dedicated staff, is needed to bridge differences with other organizations and create common action frames (Bennett & Segerberg, 2012). The frame bridging or sharing process thus forges bonds more that are more likely to impose institutional pressures.

“Events” rather than lasting interest-based commitments are likely to drive connections at this stage of an issue’s development. As Bimber (2003) described it, while people might join an organization, their reason for doing so is to participate in a particular action, which constitutes an “event-based rather than interest-based political affiliation” (p. 103). This suggests that communication frames at this stage will retain appeals to personal hopes and grievances, but such grievances are more likely to be channeled through organizations that have successfully positioned themselves to represent a “side” in the issue. A moderate level of institutionalization could thus be expected in this stage, implying that some organizations have adopted more institutionalized structures or “bureaucratized” their communications to appear more formal (Chadwick, 2007).

Activists and other actors can work to create political opportunity for the issue by forging coalitions with diverse memberships that socially legitimate the issue. Legitimated coalitions may help to ease the introduction of elites (politicians, government figures/institutions, celebrities, etc.) which will elevate the issue further and propel it to the current stage. Participating in a network of strong ties of diverse organizations from different sectors (i.e. government, industry, religious, etc.) helps legitimate the issue and facilitate its acceptance across broader social circles and in the mass media (Heath & Palenchar, 2009). However, to achieve partnerships with a diverse range of socially legitimate institutions, activists must often assume a more institutionalized or professionalized form, with trained staff who are able to overcome differences in issue frames (Bennett & Segerberg, 2012), thereby achieving a united front that legitimates the issue frame in public debates.

Indeed, as an activist group’s network strategy at this stage should focus on fortifying ties with diverse groups, such connections are likely to impose what could be termed a moderate level of institutionalization on members of the network. Indeed, increased organizational institutionalization at this stage may be beneficial, or even necessary, for continued issue development. As activist groups gain legitimacy through institutionalization, the issue for which they advocate may also become more accepted across broader social circles (Heath & Palenchar, 2009). This also enhances the prospect for elite support—an important aspect of favorable political opportunity as well as a key step in opening doors for changes through more institutional means (Meyer & Staggenborg, 1996).

Quadrant III: Critical Issue Stage

In the third quadrant, at the critical stage, the framework proposes that activists should build strong ties with a relatively homogenous organizational network. Diverse networks are not likely to share a unified frame, which makes such networks inappropriate for strategically managing issues at the critical stage—wherein solutions to the problematic issue are shared (Heath & Palenchar, 2009). Repeated interactions designed to facilitate sustained relationships occur among organizations sharing strong identifications which, in turn, may generate strong ties that tend to be homogenous (Flanagin, Stohl, & Bimber, 2006). These repeated interactions will not only support information and resource exchange, but also promote shared understandings of the issue and acceptable ways for it to be resolved.

Strong ties, while facilitative of cohesive collective action, are at the same time norm-enforcing (Bimber et al., 2012). Processes of goal formation are often reflected in organizational identity as well, which can result in fractures within a previously diverse network of more weakly framed issues (Bennett, 2005). In other words, more solidified frames stop at the edge of smaller and more easily identifiable communities with stronger ties. Thus, the advancement of issue frames is, to some extent, associated with the institutionalization of activist groups. As an issue develops to the current stage, voices solidify issue positions and attempt to perpetuate such frames via the media. Bennett (2005) has claimed the activist “voice” that will reach the general public is disproportionately that of established activists and NGOs with cultivated relationships and access to journalists.

Quadrant IV: Dormant Issue Stage

Finally, when an issue has reached the dormant stage, a strong organizational identity may remain for groups who have managed an issue fully through its life cycle to dormancy. That said, only weak ties are required within the network, which may have previously addressed a critical-stage issue. If an activist group is to move a similar or new issue to the potential stage, the adoption and spread of more personalized frames is likely necessary if organizations in sedimentary networks are to be “revived” or “reconfigured ... to shift focus to new issue areas” (Chadwick, 2007, p. 294). And given the weak nature of relationships at this stage, there is likely to be minimal institutional pressure, suggesting organizations are less likely to be required to adopt, or be able to maintain, certain institutional forms.

Conclusion

In this chapter we have argued that research at the intersection of several bodies of literature provides insights to construct theory and conduct research on activist network strategies in the pursuit of political change.

Monge and Contractor (2003) noted that few theories can provide exhaustive explanations of complex network phenomena. As such, to advance more comprehensive views of network processes research must amalgamate multiple perspectives to shed light on topics of concern. The Sommerfeldt and Yang (2017) framework, and the elaborations offered herein, represents a step in that direction.

The framework contributes to the political public relations literature by drawing a theoretical link between issues management practice and the networks required by activists to catalytically maneuver an issue through its life cycle. We do not mean to suggest that network formation completely explains the success of activist groups in achieving issue objectives. Indeed, network formation is likely connected to other political communication activities such as agenda building or crisis management (Kioussis & Strömbäck, 2014; Strömbäck & Kioussis, 2011a; Tedesco, 2011). As we have explained, the framing of issues is critical to network relationship building processes. As such, future studies of network building might work to interface with the agenda-building literature, which suggests that issues are advanced by strategic frames put forth in information subsidies for use by media outlets (Kioussis & Wu, 2008). Investigations of agenda building and network formation would provide a unique opportunity to examine relationships between network structures and the ability of those actors within said structures to influence the media—and vice versa.

We have also suggested that political opportunity perspectives add considerable nuance to the network strategy framework in particular, and public relations' treatment of issues management and network building at large. Specifically, the framework proposes that at different issue stages, network relationships and the constitution of networked organizations are influenced by changing frames and institutional pressures in an issue network. Such changes are likely a result of both activist initiative and constraints imposed by the network. Continued integration of network perspectives into issues management is necessary if the perspective is to become fully relevant to public relations scholars studying activist political public relations. Moreover, future work is required to rigorously integrate political opportunity and issue management. Issues management can be tempered by a more comprehensive recognition of an organization's "opportunity set" at each stage of an issue's life cycle. Our contribution here has been to explore opportunities of developing a more comprehensive model for theorizing network strategies and the likelihood that they will succeed in influencing policy decisions and political change—the ultimate aim of issues management programs.

Note

- 1 The nomenclature surrounding various types of activist groups, special interest groups, and SMOs has been problematic for decades, and attempts to conclusively define each have confused scholarly efforts to understand such entities.

While we acknowledge the importance of definitional specificity, in this work we adopt the term activist group or organization to describe a range of entities that engage in issue advocacy.

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16 Political Public Relations and Underrepresented Groups

Elizabeth L. Toth

Conceptually, underrepresented groups in the political process suggests a focus on peoples of a society who lack the power to effectively influence their political environment. Such groups include children, prisoners, and the homeless, and their advocates, but also refer to LGBT groups, refugees, and minorities. However, underrepresented groups can amass political power to successfully influence the political process, whether at the ballot box, through legislative or judicial actions, or through public policy change. They can shift public opinion, thus pressuring those in power. For example, the #MeToo movement's advocacy on behalf of sexually harassed women pressured Congress to vote for new regulations on workplace sexual misconduct (Johnson & Hawbaker, 2018; Kane, 2018).

Because underrepresented groups can gain representation in the fluid political process of representative democracies, it is difficult to develop a single definition of what an underrepresented group is. This chapter defines underrepresented groups as two or more individuals who share a common cause or identity and use political public relations to offset their lack of power. The political environment refers to the milieu of many groups, including governments, seeking to influence political decision-making. Political public relations is defined as:

the management process by which an actor for political purposes, through communication and action, seeks to influence and to establish, build, and maintain beneficial relationships and reputations with key publics and stakeholders to help support its mission and achieve its goals.

(Chapter 1, this volume; Strömbäck & Kiousis, 2011, p. 8)

This chapter gathers research theorizing about the actions of underrepresented groups in the political environment and how underrepresented groups use their political public relations to build mutually beneficial relationships. It describes how organizations prioritize political public relationships with groups that have potential consequences for goals of organizations. The chapter concludes with implications on how political

public relations as a field of study should consider underrepresented groups in order to advance best practices.

The chapter is divided into four sections. The first section develops three meanings of what underrepresented groups are: the powerless, the constrained, and the marginalized. The second section discusses research on underrepresented groups and their political activity apart from the organizational perspective; that is, the political public relations activities of social movements, activist groups, and latent groups. The third section addresses how more represented organizations, such as corporations, government entities, and nonprofits have considered underrepresented groups as they try to achieve their political goals. The fourth section recognizes the theorizing about underrepresented groups that adds to the understanding of political public relations.

Three Meanings of Underrepresented Groups

Scholars writing about groups in the political environment that lack power have identified them as “powerless,” “constrained,” and “marginalized.” Dozier and Lauzen (2000), call attention to *powerless* groups, defined as “groupings of people whose lives are affected by the behavior of the focal organization but lack sufficient resources to demand mutually beneficial relationships with that organization” (p. 12.) Examples of powerless groups are victims of Hurricane Katrina, also called “forgotten publics,” because they lacked the ability to communicate their need for food, shelter, or find ways to communicate their dire circumstances (Waymer & Heath, 2007). The victims of the Flint Water crisis have been powerless to offset the denials on the part of the City of Flint and State of Michigan officials, even after reporting brain damage, learning disabilities, and other lead poisoning illnesses because of government failure to put in corrosion control chemicals to treat the Flint River water flowing through lead pipes (Logan, 2018).

Thousands of stateless Rohingya Muslims are a powerless group scattered to seek asylum in Thailand, Bangladesh, and Malaysia without sufficient political power to stop the genocide and crimes against them. (Brooten, 2015; Exclusive: EU considers trade sanctions on Myanmar over Rohingya crisis, 2018).

In the Katrina and Flint cases, emerging agents spoke on behalf of the victims, thus gaining them power, and resulted in their receiving government assistance. Senators Landrieu and Obama obtained relief efforts for the Katrina victims through their speeches (Waymer & Heath, 2007). In the Flint case, it was an outside engineer, Dr. Marc Edwards, who provided irrefutable scientific evidence based on residents supplying him and his team with water samples from their homes. Karen Weaver, Flint Mayor speaking to Edwards, said: “We had cried out for a year and a half and it wasn’t until you came that you gave our voice validation” (Jahng &

Lee, 2018, p. 95). Political advocacy for the Rohingya is emerging with the European Union considering trade sanctions on Myanmar “to stop what the West says is ethnic cleansing of Muslim Rohingya” (Exclusive: EU considers trade sanctions on Myanmar over Rohingya crisis, 2018, np).

Derville and McComas (2003) describe underrepresented groups as *constrained* groups: “groups of people who are so constrained that regardless of significant cause to organize, they cannot engage in activism that attracts sufficient attention to pressure organizations” (p. 4). The authors continued that these constraints are often socio-economic and political. They put forward the use of community-based interventions (CBI’s) to help community members address their concerns about local hazards, crime, etc. With the help of grants to employ professionals, communities develop civic infrastructure. Grants offset participants’ time and other expenses such as daycare (p. 7). Derville and McComas report that with the use of citizen planned solutions and government grants members of severely constrained groups can produce political power (p. 4).

Research describes underrepresented groups as *marginalized* groups because of inequities such as race, gender and class. As an example of a marginalized group based on race, Logan (2018) reports that in the Flint water crisis, the black communities of Flint were “unfairly and systematically positioned as risk bearers allowing white communities of Flint to remain free of environmental risks, hazards, and burdens” (p. 52). As an example of ethnic marginalization, Len-Rios (2017) discusses reasons for lack of political participation by Latinas as “tempered by their lack of access to political information and living in communities where they feel less welcome to participate in community life” (p. 250).

Vardeman-Winter, Jiang, and Tindall (2013) introduce into the discussion of marginalization the theory of intersectionality. They argue that the effects of race, gender, and class are not distinguishable or additive, but are nested within each other (p. 392). Marginalized groups have multiple identities, illustrated by the authors’ focus group findings that women in mixed race groups did not share a similar race-gender intersectional experience.

Vardeman-Winter et al. (2013) argue that the marginalized face structural intersectionalities, such as physical and legal systems that suppress the actual and perceived power of groups. Organizational, and legal policies and procedures, subdue the rights of marginalized groups according to their mix of demographic identities (p. 392). Vardeman-Winter et al. (2013) add that there is representational intersectionality because groups get disempowered when their multiple identities in media stories revert to stereotypes. For example, Martin and Fausset (2018) reinforce the stereotype of racist southern states when questioning whether the first Black woman to run for the Georgia governorship “could win the South” (np). Columnist Porter (2018) discusses the fears of a United States White

majority that minorities and immigrants were becoming politically powerful through sheer numbers alone, thus stereotyping minorities and immigrants as likely to block vote.

Scholars of powerless, marginalized, and constrained groups have identified the importance of the political public relations practices of underrepresented groups. Hon (2015) reports that African Americans and women are turning to online advocacy for the easy access and collective voice social media provides relative to gatekeeping barriers presented by institutional media (p. 315). Len-Rios (2017) advises in her study that political public relations would improve by considering Latinas' media usage, political ideology, and political interests.

Vardeman-Winter et al. (2013) posit that policy-makers who approve of information campaigns use unsuccessfully market-defined demographic characteristics and identities. The authors' in-depth interviews and focus groups participants report how those in power do not understand their publics' interests in health information. One participant said, "she felt the policymakers overlooked African American women, minorities, a lot of us underemployed or working every day and still can't afford health care and rely on Medicaid and Medicare" (pp. 400–1). The authors found that political intersectionality, manifested as unconsidered socioeconomic differences, created a political disparity between the policy-makers and the gendered, raced, and classed groups they wished to build relationships with.

The research describing groups as powerless, constrained, and marginalized gives greater depth of meaning to how and why groups become underrepresented in a political environment made up of groups competing for representation in the political process. They lack advocates who will speak on their behalf, knowledge and resources to engage in the political environment, and face stereotypes on the part of powerful political actors. However, there is indicated in the research the presence of political public relations in use by and for underrepresented groups.

The next section of this chapter summarizes research on three types of underrepresented groups seeking to gain political representation: social movements/social movement organizations, activist groups, and latent groups.

Three Types of Underrepresented Groups

Social Movements

Social movement research provides another perspective on underrepresented groups in the political environment. Research includes how social movements are defined; social movement goals; a logic of social movements; and, theories on how social movements operate strategically to achieve goals.

Social movements are defined by their combination of individuals and organizations; their collective behavior; and their long-term goals. Social movements are made up of individuals and organizations that work collectively. Mundy (2013) states that “social movements are not organizations but comprise thousands of individuals, agendas, and organizations interacting in a complex-yet-informal network” (p. 388). Heath and Palenchar (2009) define social movements as “the engagement of activists and others in a dialogue and power struggle, the sum of the organizations involved in a particular movement” (p. 163).

What keeps these loose confederations of individuals and groups together is a shared identity. Martinelli (2011) states that social movements work under a common cause or identity, often outside electoral channels, quoting Trivedi, (2003, p. 3). Heath and Palenchar describes the key element in social movements as “the shared substance, conjoined and divergent zones of meaning, resulting in an ideology, perspective, and identity/identification” (p. 163).

The goals of social movements are the pursuit of change, to alter institutions, to be a check on power and resource distribution, and to promote public discourse. Sommerfeldt and Yang (2017) state that the goals of social movements are to pursue or resist change, such as to pursue civil rights, gun rights, or abortion rights (p. 3). Dozier and Lauzen (2000) write that the goals of social movements are to “profoundly affect public policy and fundamentally alter institutions” (p. 13). Mundy states that a social movement’s central goal is long-term change:

a crucial check for power dynamics and resource distribution in democratic societies and they support the fundamental goal of a civil society: to promote robust, public discourse that allows for informed, equitable democratic participation.

(2013, p. 388)

Social movements are tied together by collective identity but are at the same time diverse, leaderless, spontaneous, and heterogeneous in strategy and tactics.

Funke and Wolfson (2017) propose “modern” social movement logic with which to understand social movements. First, what must be accepted is the diversity and equality of social movement actors. Second, social movements must be seen as a commitment to leaderless nonhierarchical organizations. Third, social movements use a grassroots, consensus-based decision-making process. Fourth, social movements distrust political institutions writ large. Fifth, social movements use social media in ways that create an infrastructural role for movement politics (p. 397). Social media provide a ready, immediate, relatively inexpensive means to network the collectivity of individuals and groups. Funke and Wolfson explain how the Internet generates networking power “knitting different actors and issues

into a collective tapestry, through one where all actors maintain their autonomy” (2017, p. 398).

Funke and Wolfson’s (2017) model is illustrated in Pal and Dutta’s (2012) study of how a collective resistance by a coalition of groups and individuals join forces but keep their own initiatives through the Internet to campaign for the survivors of the 1984 Union Carbide disaster in Bhopal. Through the networking power of the International Campaign for Justice in Bhopal (ICJB), numerous groups have come together in participatory capacity to blog, raise funds, make donations, initiate a hunger strike, and rally support for campaigns. The ICJB website gives the detailed history of the Union Carbide emission of poison gas that killed thousands. It discusses the dominant frames used to avoid taking responsibility deployed by Union Carbide and the role of Indian politics. The website becomes a means of celebrating the agency of local actors who demand medical and economic rehabilitation to the survivors. The website provides a call for action and has a transformative influence on the resulting collective resistance that brings about support from all over the world.

Social movements operate to effect change through the use of political public relations campaign strategies and tactics. Hon conceptualizes the civil rights movement as “an extended and ultimately effective public relations campaign” (1997, p. 164). Mundy (2013) states that social movements share the same goal as political public relations: “to investigate communication practices that develop collective understanding between organizations and publics, to examine how organizations position issues as legitimate in the eyes of diverse stakeholders” (p. 387).

For example, Mundy (2013) identifies a “ground-up” political public relations strategy, based on interviews with leaders of state-based LGBT advocacy organizations that represented a range of geographic and political/operational contexts (p. 388). Messaging and spokespersons use a public relations strategy of associating LGBT issues with local community issues. These state-based organizations put their public arguments in locally relevant terms in order to obtain supportive LGBT community action such as by a local school board, city government, or town council (pp. 388–9).

Sommerfeldt and Yang (2017) introduce a strategic structural dimension using network theory that helps understand the political public relations of social movements. Social network theory considers how organizations engage in not only dyadic relationships but also inter-organizational networks (groups of organizations). “The network perspective examines patterns of relations, monitors flow of resources, and reveals how social structural factors constrain or foster activities of network actors” (Yang & Taylor, 2015, p. 96). Social network theory looks at the patterns of relations between organizations using four concepts – weak and strong ties, embeddedness, structural holes, and social capital “to explain and

predict organizational relationships and relationships within systems” (Yang & Taylor, 2015, p. 96). Weak ties provide access to new information and opportunities while strong ties consolidate networks.

Sommerfeldt and Yang (2017) propose to apply social networking strategies for social movement groups, formally or informally tied together, that worked as coalitions when attempting to resolve issues. Theorizing social movement organizations as ego-centric networks consisting of direct dyadic ties and the relationships between these ties, the authors propose that to achieve their goals, social movement organizations should use network strategies along two dimensions: “strategies that increase relationship diversity and strategies that fortify relationship strength” (2017, p. 833).

Their four-part framework indicates that as social movement organizations begin to address issues, they should pursue a strategy of weak ties with many diverse groups; that is, raising issues awareness and scaling up the movement using digital media to “spread the word” (Sommerfeldt & Yang, 2017, p. 834). Then, as issues develop into a critical state of engaging key influential groups such as government organizations, social movement organizations should shrink their networked diversity and build working relationships with policy officials. Having managed an issue through to a dormant stage, then social movement organizations should reactivate their weak ties. Sommerfeldt and Yang (2017) use the example of the unsuccessful Occupy Wall Street movement that did not move toward strengthening relationships to focus on specific goals. Instead, it maintained its weak connections among many interested parties, thus limiting the movement’s ability to achieve policy changes (p. 837).

Activism/Activist Groups

Activists groups differed from social movement groups because they more fully organize around an identity. Activists groups are nonprofit or non-governmental organizations but also companies and government agencies serve in activism/agitation roles (Heath & Palenchar, 2009, p. 163). Activists as underrepresented groups have had a long history of using political communication efforts. Coombs and Holladay (2012a) argued that activists were practicing public relations for some 70–80 years before corporations (pp. 347–53).

Definitions of activism and activist groups agree that a primary function of activist groups is to influence public policy (Derville & McComas, 2003). Activism is “the process by which groups of people exert pressure on organizations or other institutions to change policies, practices, or conditions that activists find problematic” (Smith & Ferguson, 2001, p. 5). Activist groups are “dedicated to the management of issues to a resolution satisfactory to the group’s stakeholders” (Sommerfeldt, 2013, p. 347).

Studies of activist groups call attention to their goals and roles. Activists have two major goals: to correct the problems they identify with target organizations and to maintain themselves as organizations (Smith & Ferguson, 2001). Activist organizations play a dual role as public and as public communicators: “a public in communicating with its target organizations and as a public communicator when interacting with its own publics to maintain itself as an organization” (Jiang & Ni, 2009, p. 290).

Studies of activism suggest a distinction between advocacy organizations, moderate activist organizations, and radical activist organizations. An advocacy organization (described as a grassroots advocacy organization in a case study by Gallicano, 2013) is a nonprofit organization primarily run by volunteers who attempt to influence the environment in pursuit of their organization’s mission. An advocacy organization, identified in a case study by Jiang and Ni (2009), describes itself as non-partisan, non-confrontational, and conservative, focusing on educational efforts and providing information (p. 293). Derville (2005) depicts moderate activist organizations as more likely to practice informational, legalistic, and organizational activities while radical activist organizations used militant communication tactics such as vitriolic rhetoric, disruptive events and actions that provoke backlashes such as unreasonable demands, harassment and sabotage (pp. 328–9).

Derville (2005) separates moderate activism from radical activism using three markers: (1) the degree of change sought; (2) the use of organizational strategies with moderates adhering to reasonable communication strategies that reflect societal norms; and (3) the distinction between self- and other directed movements.

Self-directed activist organizations are those in which people engage in activism for themselves based on their identities, such as gender, race, or sexual orientation, while organizations in which people help others achieve rights are other-directed organizations (e.g., pro-life activists, animal rights activists, and men who advocate for women’s rights.

(p. 529)

“Grassroots activism is a form of spontaneous activism with a bottom-up system or organization without high levels of professionalism” (Sommerfeldt, 2013, p. 351). Grassroots activism brought attention to the water poisoning of the Flint community after the City of Flint began using drinking water from the Flint River. Environmental Protection Agency water experts and residents, such as Lee Ann Walters, a mother of four, whose children broke out in rashes, collected water samples according to instructions from Edwards, a Virginia Tech professor of civil and environmental engineering. He and his team of 38 participating scientists worked with Walters and other volunteers to produce the scientific evidence that pressured local, state, and federal governments to address their concerns (Jahng and Lee, 2018, p. 95).

Scholars argue that activist groups should be studied in their own right rather than as antagonists to organizations (Ciszek, 2015; Coombs & Holladay, 2012b, 2012a). Sommerfeldt (2013) examines how activist groups manage resources so as to produce strategic political communication. He argues that resource mobilization is a precondition of strategic communication. Resources are categorized as tangible (money, space, means to publicize); intangible, such as human assets (becoming a member, volunteering, blogs, signing a petition, message boards/chat rooms); and, coalition building, drawing power and resources from stakeholders in other groups.

Conducting an analysis of 300 randomly sampled activist group websites, Sommerfeldt (2013) codes resource mobilization features and five strategies of communication: informational, organizing, legal, symbolic, and civil disobedience. His results confirm the predictive nature of mobilization and communication strategy. He discusses three heuristically interesting findings: general donation features of activist websites are positive predictors of symbolic strategies such as boycotts or protests; registered memberships are indicative of groups needing committed and identifiable members to draw further resources; and, coalition building behaviors identify early stage activist groups (pp. 360–1).

Ciszek (2015, 2017) proposes to study activism using the cultural-economic model, a broader view of public relations beyond a “tool of commerce,” to look at social, cultural, and political contexts (p. 451). This model helps understanding of “identity, difference, and power in the discursive practices of public relations” (Ciszek, 2015, p. 451). The cultural-economic model presents five moments – representation, regulation, production, consumption, and identity. Ciszek (2015) hypothesizes that activists in the moment of production act as cultural intermediaries creating materials that define norms, values, and realities to shape discourse around issues and causes. The moment of consumption represents how publics perceive activist strategies. The moment of identity “functions as an ideological tool for mobilization and is a process that serves the situational needs of both producers and consumers” (p. 452). The moment of representation refers to the symbolic devices used by activists to direct their messages. The moment of regulation refers to formal and informal controls on cultural policy and politics such as regulatory bodies, institutionalized educational systems but also cultural norms, ethics, and expectations, such as transparency as opposed to astro-turfing.

Latent Groups

Underrepresented groups known by a shared identity and striving for influential political space must be rethought, according to Hon (2015), because of the remarkable impact felt by a digital media ecosystem that allows publics to mobilize in unprecedented ways. Hon conceptualizes latent publics as one way of describing how digital technologies have accelerated the political communication process. Latent groups, sometimes call the general public, are described

traditionally as low in problem recognition and involvement in the political environment (Kim & Cameron, 2016). However, latent groups have become increasingly influential, or at least have that potential because of their use of online media, (Hallahan, 2000; Kim & Cameron, 2016, p. 1935).

Using the Trayvon Martin Campaign as a case study,¹ Hon (2015) provides a model that overturns theories of activism, such as the necessary prerequisites of financial resources or a collective identity, for how latent groups mobilize. She states: “In particular, the normative assumptions about the need and benefits of formal organizing, leadership, and standing membership among activist groups do not fully take into account the rapid mobilization, fluidity, and loosely aggregated nature of some digital social advocacy” (2015, p. 302).

Hon (2015) presents a model for latent groups that takes advantage of supersizing or scale-related changes and second generation 2.0 theory of leverage affordances, or the theory that assumed that digital technologies change the actual processes of organizing or participating (p. 300). She finds support for the theories of supersizing and 2.0 theory of leveraged affordances at the macro, meso, and individual levels. The macro or many-to-many principles is illustrated in the thousands of followers and friends generated in support of Trayvon Martin by hip-hop mogul Russell Simmons and syndicated radio host Michael Baisden. At the meso level, the Trayvon Martin campaign strategies and tactics occurred absent of formal organizations and leadership. Instead, Hon reports that small teams do much of the work of a digital campaign. At the micro campaign level, Hon finds a reduced need to cultivate long-term allegiance for any enduring collective identity.

To illustrate the sudden appearance and impact of latent groups through social media, Ciszek (2016) details the 2012 sudden take-over of Chick-fil-A’s Facebook page when Chick-fil-A’s chief operating officer “triggered a public relations firestorm via Chick-fil-A’s Facebook page after expressing in an interview that gay marriages ‘violate God’s plan’” (p. 314). Chick-fil-A’s Facebook page became a soap box for organizational supporters, critics, and activists to express diverse opinions and experiences: “a place for brand evangelists to become organizational martyrs, a place for activists to rally the troops, a place to share information on other related concepts and a place for personal stories” (p. 318).

This section discusses underrepresented groups apart from the political public relations interests of corporations, governments, and nonprofits. The next section includes research on how these organizations strategize to build mutually beneficial relationships with stakeholders and publics such as underrepresented groups. The section covers prioritization and publics theories, the Excellence Study, Contingency theory, and issues management.

Organizations and Underrepresented Groups

Crozier writes about the “dramatic increase in the use of communications expertise and public relations by government (as well as business and the third sector)” (2007, p. 1). However, research specific to organizational efforts to build mutually beneficial political relationships with underrepresented groups is limited to only considerations of activist groups. Public relations theory addresses more generically how organizations relate to groups, not on the basis of representation or underrepresentation but with groups that are viewed as important to organizational goals.

Theory on how organizations cultivate relationships with groups suggested that organizations prioritized these relationships based on two criteria: the possible consequences to organizations of relationships with internal and external groups and how organizations need to deploy resources. All organizations have stakeholders and publics whose behavior has the potential to influence organizational goals. Rawlins (2006) defines stakeholders according to their relationships with organizations. According to Rawlins, “employees, customers, shareholders, communities, and suppliers are those most commonly classified as stakeholders within an organization” (p. 2). Publics are defined according to their relationships with organizational messages (Rawlins, 2006, p. 1).

Rawlins proposes a prioritization model, positing that organizations use their limited resources based on stakeholder linkages or connections; prioritization of attributes such as power, dependency, legitimacy, urgency, and support; prioritization of situation; and, prioritization by communication strategy. He proposes prioritizing key publics by “profiling their demographics, lifestyles, values, media preferences, cooperative networks, and self-interests and reaching priority publics through appropriate channels” (2006, p. 12).

In another perspective on how organizations strategically build mutually beneficial relationships, Grunig and Hunt (1984) propose that when stakeholders use their stakes around problems or issues, then organizations should segment stakeholders into subgroups or publics, using the situational theory of publics (STP), to counter strategic threats or to take advantage of strategic opportunities that present themselves. STP theory helps organizations prioritize which publics, defined as groups that arise around problems (Grunig & Hunt, 1984, pp. 143–7), to cultivate, based on three variables: problem or issue recognition; degree of constraints to do something about a problem or issue; and, level of involvement. Publics became more active in seeking information about the problem or issue as they recognized a problem exists, believe they can do something about the problem, and feel involved in solving the problem (Grunig & Repper, 1992).

Two resulting classifications of publics include Grunig’s issues publics and Dozier and Ehling’s categorization of publics on the basis of their

actions. Over a series of experiments using eight public policy problems, such as air pollution, extinction of whales, and strip mining, J. E. Grunig theorizes a set of consistent categories to identify publics by issues: all issue publics; apathetic publics; single issue publics; and hot-issue publics (Grunig & Repper, 1992, p. 139). Dozier and Ehling provide a different category scheme based on the degree to which publics recognize a problem and organize to do something about it. Nonpublics have little connection to a common problem; latent publics fail to recognize a common problem; aware publics recognize a common problem; and, active publics organize to do something about a common problem (1992, pp. 170–1). Activist groups are highly involved and problem facing; that is, they feel they can do something about the problems they recognized (p. 174).

Publics theory suggests that organizations should focus their resources on aware publics although Hallahan argues not to overlook inactive publics (2000). Active publics cause organizations to expend more resources because they would have already formed opinions and have prepared to take actions (Dozier & Ehling, 1992, p. 171). Activist publics have the most potential consequences for organizations because they mobilized and are willing to participate in threatening an organization's goals.

Kim and Grunig (2011) propose a more generalized situational theory of publics, the Situational Theory of Problem Solving (STOPS) to depict the problem solver's acquisition, transmission, and selection of information pertaining to a given problem (Kim, Ni, Kim, & Kim, 2012, p. 145). The authors add referent criteria to the three independent variables of STP: problem recognition, constraint recognition, and involvement recognition. They add situational motivation in problem solving as a mediating variable. The dependent variable of communicative action in problem solving has six subvariables of information behaviors (p. 145). "STOPS explains that communication, being epiphenomenal and instrumental to problem solving, increases as one's situational-specific perceptions and motivations are activated" (p. 145). Kim et al. (2012) find applicability of STOPS to the rise of hot-issue publics in a study of South Korean panel members who responded to a controversial issue regarding the South Korean government's decision to resume imports of United States beef. The theory of STOPS showed application in a different cultural setting.

The earliest treatment of activism from an organizational perspective is L.A. Grunig's chapter on activism in the Excellence Study's review of literature (1992). She establishes from an organizational perspective the definition of activism: "an activist public is a group of two or more individuals who organize in order to influence another public or publics through action that may include education, compromise, persuasion, pressure tactics, or force" (p. 504). She recommends monitoring the organizations' relevant publics, especially those that are active and antagonistic.

With the publication of two books, *The Manager's Guide to Excellence in Public Relations and Communication Management* (Dozier, Grunig, & Grunig, 1995) and *Excellent Public Relations and Effective Organizations* (Grunig, Grunig, & Dozier, 2002), the Excellence study is the most comprehensive examination of organizational public relations practice ever produced. The Excellence study includes a quantitative survey of 327 organizations in the United States, Canada, and the United Kingdom to measure critical success factors for public relations. It also reports on in-depth case studies of 25 of the organizations that in the quantitative survey had the highest and lowest scores on a scale of excellence (Grunig et al., 2002, p. 3). The results of the Excellence study produce an Excellence factor that provides a benchmark by which organizations can measure their public relations effectiveness and a number of theories, including theories on activism.

Two propositions from the Excellence study that receive statistical support in how to relate to activist groups are (1) use two-way communication to tell publics what organizations are doing about negative consequences; and, (2) make continuing efforts at communicating with activists (Grunig et al., 2002, pp. 458–9). The Excellence study authors maintain the assumption that two-way communication between organizations and activist groups is the most effective strategy. They report that no organization in their study had communication programs that were exclusively symmetrical or asymmetrical. As a result, the Excellence authors propose a new model contingent on the need for public relations practitioners to choose which group (public or dominant coalition) needs to be most persuaded in each situation (Dozier et al., 1995, p. 48). In the final summary of the Excellence study, the authors cite participants' approaches to public relations that "suggested a deliberate fusion of advocacy and collaboration – collaborative advocacy – when coping with activist pressure or when attempting to survive a crisis" (Grunig et al., 2002, p. 471). The Excellence authors conclude: "Activism pushes organizations toward excellence" (Grunig et al., 2002, p. 442) because faced with activist pressures, organizations would:

assign public relations a managerial role, include public relations in strategic management, communicate more symmetrically with a powerful adversary or partner, and develop more participative cultures and organic structures that would open the organization to its environment – the key variables of our index of excellence.

(p. 449)

The index of excellence in public relations and communication management is based on the thinking of a subsample of organizational CEOs who had placed the highest values on their communication departments. The Excellence authors call attention to the power of activist groups to gain legitimacy through the media and also through the levers of government

that regulate organizations operating against social interests (Grunig, 1992, p. 510). However, Holtzhausen critiques the Excellence study for “the privileging of institutional perspectives over the interests of activists” (2007, p. 364). She notes that the focus of the Excellence theory views activist groups as an “enormous problem in the typical organization” (Grunig et al., 2002, p. 450). According to Holtzhausen, “for many organizations it (activism) remains a must-win situation” (2007, p. 364).

Holtzhausen proposes a different stance for how organizations should interact with activist groups. She calls on public relations practitioners to engage activists in order to make an important contribution to society:

By communicating about issues, even when advocating on behalf of one party, public relations practitioners place issues on the agenda and invoke reaction and discussion. It might even be that practitioners attract activism through the communication process and in this way stimulate democratic discourse.

(2007, p. 364)

A second critique of the Excellence study is that it fails to capture the complexity and multiplicity of the public relations environment, such as situations of irreconcilable differences and “repugnant publics” (Cancel, Mitrook, & Cameron, 1999, p.173). This critique launches a new line of theory building on how organizations should strategically manage relationships called Contingency theory, later called contingency theory of strategic conflict (Cancel, Cameron, Sallot, & Mitrook, 1997; Cancel, Mitrook, & Cameron, 1999; Pang, Jin, & Cameron, 2010).

Contingency theory proposes to explain the strategic choices of public relations practitioners, not on the basis of best practices (or ideal or normative benchmarks, such as found in the Excellence study), but built on a grounded research approach to what public relations practitioners in quantitative surveys and in-depth interviews say about the realities of practice.

The Contingency theory authors argue that the Excellence theory’s ideal approach to relationships, that of two-way symmetry, has limits to its utility. Despite the Excellence study’s resulting mixed motive model, called a new model of symmetry as two-way practice (Dozier et al., 1995), the Contingency authors cite moral conviction, multiple publics, regulatory constraints, management pressure, jurisdictional issues, and legal constraints as situations in which symmetrical communication will not work (Cameron, Cropp, & Reber, 2001).

The authors propose that Contingency theory explains how relationship choices flow and change depending on specific situations on a continuum between pure advocacy and pure accommodation. Public relations practitioners make relationship communication choices depending on 87 variables (Pang et al., 2010). These variables fall into two categories: predisposing variables and situational variables.

Publics are considered external groups or individuals. They are assessed on 14 variables: size and number of members; degree of source credibility/powerful members or connections; past successes or failures of groups to evoke change; amount of advocacy practiced by the organization; level of commitment/involvement of members; whether the group had public relations counselors; publics' perception of the group as reasonable or radical; level of past media coverage the public had received; whether representatives of the public know or like representations of the organization; whether representatives of the organization know or like representatives from the public; public's willingness to dilute its cause/request/claim; moves and countermoves; relative power of the organization; and relative power of the public (Pang et al., 2010, pp. 31–2).

In sum, Rawlins' prioritization, STP/STOPs, Excellence theory and Contingency theory assume that publics when at their most active are potential threats to organizational goals. Whereas the Excellence theory sought to provide the most effective or ideal practices of relationship building with activist groups, Contingency theory sought to explain actual relationship building in managing conflicts.

A third stream of theory building from the perspective of how organizations should build relationships with underrepresented groups is strategic issues management theory. This line of theory building specifically addresses organizations and public policy challenges (Heath & Palenchar, 2009). Issues management, as a function of communication management, focuses on how organizations should anticipate and address emerging issues and public policy "and spot and even forge opportunities through legislation, regulation and even litigation" (Heath, 2002, p. 210). Issues managers are a key part of an environmental scanning process that takes into consideration the actions of activist groups and social movements as they involve political issues of importance to their organizations.

Heath and Palenchar (2009) propose a five-stage model to analyze how activist groups developed and how they might influence an organization's communication practices: (1) strain, a stage when publics identify issues; (2) mobilization, a stage when activists organize, build their communication networks, and amass resources; (3) confrontation, a stage in which activist groups push resolution of issues with an organization; (4) negotiation and collaborative decision-making; and, (5) resolution. While these stages suggest antagonist relationships with special interest activist groups, Heath and Palenchar conclude their thoughts on the stages by also discussing the fostering of mutual interests instead of antagonism (2009, p. 192).

Conclusions

Political public relations as a field of study is enriched by the research on underrepresented groups in the political environment. This research provides much rich, thick description on how underrepresented groups

at times powerless, constrained, and marginalized because of their identities, causes, and circumstances have been able to gain power and influence in political situations. Scholars studying social movements and activist groups contribute new theory on the power of latent groups to an understanding of underrepresented groups.

Scholars identify several communication and structural strategies with which underrepresented groups can achieve mutually beneficial political relationships. Underrepresented groups apart from organizations are able to gain power through emerging agents who speak on their behalf. The social movement and activism research reveals distinct public relations strategies such as appealing to local issues in a “ground up” approach to achieve activist goals and distinguishes between advocacy, moderate, and radical groups. Scholars are continuing knowledge about how underrepresented groups use the Internet, such as Hon’s (2015) supersizing and 2.0 theory of leveraged affordances. Sommerfeldt (2013) analyzes activist group strategic thinking in observing the relationship between resources and communication strategy. Sommerfeldt and Yang (2017) propose a social movement network framework for when to increase the diversity of coalitions and when to shrink network diversity in order to move toward specific goals.

The research clarifies that underrepresented groups are not homogeneous but have intersecting experiences based on such factors as race, gender, class, geography, religion, community, age, and military service. Their actions are based on political, legal, and representational intersections. Organizations that wish to build successful political relationships with underrepresented groups will have to bracket their own interests in order to understand the beliefs and interests of underrepresented groups and what barriers prevent them from building mutually beneficial relationships.

The research on social movements, activist groups, and latent publics or the general public, help develop the political public relations discipline by considering underrepresented groups in their own right and not as antagonists to organizations. There is a logic to social movements that centered on the concept of a loose collective and how the fluidity of individuals and groups come together as coalitions. Social movements are better understood by their separateness and suspicion of institutions, their strategic uses of social media that have revolutionized their actions, and when social movements can use relational structures to affect political issues.

Activist groups use political public relations based on the change sought, how their organizational strategies reflect societal norms and whether activist groups are self-directed or other directed. The cultural-economic model that assumes that social issues and interests are moments informed by representation, regulation, production, consumption, and identity allow a deeper understanding of the work of identity, power, and difference in the discursive practices of political public relations.

The latent or general public becomes another view of underrepresented groups that reflects the seminal changes in communication that have come

from the Internet. Political influence can be felt almost instantly around incidences and Twittered words. In addition to examinations of more finite underrepresented groups, the field of political public relations will have to consider the rapid coalescing and dispersing of millions of Internet followers and Facebook users.

Research on how corporations, governments, and nonprofit organizations build politically mutual benefits with underrepresented groups seems lagging upon reflection. Even the theories of prioritization that promote considering power, dependency, legitimacy, urgency, and support seem too abstract when considering the research on activism, social movements, and the spontaneous latent groups of the Internet.

The focus on situational problems or opportunities of STP/STOPS theory and its identifying of groups based on issues or activism continue to address relationship building from the organization's perspective. Contingency theory has the advantage of a more micro view of how to make strategic political choices. However, the normative choice of symmetrical communication recommended by the Excellence Study appears to be more ethical. Conversely, issues management theory errs on the side of protecting organizational interests even though its issues management process may engage activist groups through negotiation, conflict resolution, and mutual interests.

Underrepresented groups in the political environment deserve scholarly and practitioner attention as important to the resolution of political issues not because they are less powerful but because they have shown their ability to achieve power and influence in political affairs. That is, despite the assumption that engagement should be with the most active of political groups and their advocates, the Internet requires a recalibration of priorities or the ability to address rapidly changing influences possible because of social media.

Beyond the scope of this chapter, scholars and practitioners should realize ethical political public relations principles with respect to underrepresented groups. As Holtzhausen (2007) suggests, political public relations practitioners may have an ethical obligation to engage the activism of underrepresented groups in order to improve democratic discourse.

Note

- 1 The Trayvon Martin Campaign emerged in a media and national public protest frenzy on social media after the February 26, 2012 fatal shooting of an unarmed 17-year-old African American Trayvon Martin.

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17 New Challenges for Political Public Relations Professionals in the Era of Social Media

Kara Alaimo

According to a common definition, political public relations encompass

the management process by which an organization or individual actor for political purposes, through purposeful communication and action, seeks to influence and to establish, build, and maintain beneficial relationships and reputations with its key publics to help support its mission and achieve its goals.

(Strömbäck & Kiousis, 2011, p. 8; see also Chapter 1, this volume, for a slightly updated definition)

From that perspective, during the last decade political public relations professionals have confronted a host of new and heightened challenges, created largely – though not exclusively – by the evolution of social media. Over that time, practitioners have been challenged to practice and respond to the use of new tactics to engage citizens on social media. They have been confronted with how to respond to politicians who dominate the national conversation through the creation of continual spectacles, cast aspersions on mainstream news reports, make populist appeals, and go on mercurial and malicious Twitter attacks against their enemies. They have also been faced with how to respond to fake news reports and claims by fake accounts on social media, which have sometimes been promulgated by foreign states. At the same time, corporate public relations practitioners have faced new expectations that they will articulate public stances on controversial political issues and have come under fire from politicians, employees, and endorsers when they have done so. Thus, it is no exaggeration to state that the environment and the challenges political public relations professionals face today are vastly different than just 10 or 15 years ago.

The purpose of this chapter is to outline some of the new challenges facing political public relations practitioners, and discuss strategies that practitioners can use to respond to these challenges. The focus will mainly be on the United States, as this country can be considered to be ahead of the curve and as many of the challenges are most clear there. As

will be discussed, these are not unique to the United States however, and in one form or the other, they are also obvious in other countries. It is therefore my belief that the lessons that can be learned there are applicable also in a broader, international context.

Use of Social Media as a Campaigning Tool

One area where new media technologies in general, and perhaps social media in particular, have had a profound impact is on political campaigning. In the United States (U.S.), the first presidential campaigns were truly waged on social media in 2004 and 2008. Kreiss (2012) noted that the campaigns of Democratic candidates Howard Dean and Barack Obama used cutting-edge, data-driven techniques to mobilize voters on social media while attempting to underplay the roles of their campaigns in catalyzing this support. Kreiss explained that “the rhetoric publicly articulated by Dean and Obama, as well as their staffers, situated their campaigns as the products of authentic expressions of political commitment and moral values among citizens.” However, in doing so, such staffers “elide[d] the hard work of infrastructure and organization building that goes on behind the scenes” (p. 15).

In particular, Obama’s team pioneered new ways of targeting individual voters driven by the use of data. His campaign had “what many staffers describe as an ‘obsession’ with data and analytics” (Kreiss, 2012, p. 144).

In other words, at every step in the process, staffers measured user engagement and refined their messaging and approach accordingly. For example, staffers tested nearly all imaginable content and design in emails through A/B testing, which entails measuring response rates of a control email against a host of different manipulations to find the optimal content for different categories of user.

(Kreiss, 2012, p. 148)

Alaimo (2016) argued that, like Obama, Donald Trump won the 2016 U.S. presidential election on social media. Like Obama, Trump amassed more social media followers than his rivals. Trump also tweeted more than his rivals, which helped create what one market researcher called “a continuous Trump rally that happens on Twitter at all hours.” According to the social media firm SocialFlow, by January 2016, Trump was “the most talked-about person on the planet.” The organization found that he got three times as much free exposure on social platforms as his Democratic rival, Hillary Clinton.

The use of social media clearly generated large cost savings for Trump. His campaign spent half as much money as that of Clinton, yet he won the election (in electoral votes, if not the popular vote). Trump later explained that “the fact that I have such power in terms of numbers with

Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, etc., I think it helped me win all of these races where they're spending much more money than I spent" (Helsel, 2016). Although Trump claimed to have large personal resources, the ascent of social media as a tool for conducting political campaigns stands in the future to benefit non-establishment politicians who lack significant funding for television ads and other traditional campaign tactics but can nevertheless build movements using free and low-cost tactics on social platforms.

The use of social media also helped Trump bypass the traditional mediators of political communication: reporters and debate moderators who are charged with fact-checking the statements of candidates. Trump tweeted that having a large following on Twitter is "like having your own newspaper." As a result, Alaimo (2016) argued, he was able to more easily make false claims. In fact, just 4 percent of the statements of Trump which have been fact-checked by PolitiFact have been fully true. This development posed an especially large challenge for political public relations professionals in opposing camps when Trump leveled untrue accusations against his rivals on social media – such as, for example, his tweet claiming that Clinton repeatedly lied to the FBI, which Politifact rated as false (Valverde, 2017).

In addition to allowing for false contentions without fact checkers, conversations on social media tend to be shorter and more fleeting, leaving less room for substantive policy debate. Kerric Harvey, author of the *Encyclopedia of Social Media and Politics*, argued in an interview that Twitter "makes it so that what ought to be a conversation is just a set of Post-it notes that are scattered." (Sanders, 2016). Carr (2018) also noted that Twitter encourages "reflexive responses" which lead to a "reductive view of the world." These phenomena were reflected in the tweets of and about candidates during the 2016 election. According to Brandwatch, with the exclusion of three presidential debates, the ten most tweeted days during the Trump and Clinton campaigns included just two conversations driven by policy (Sanders, 2016). Alaimo (2016) argued that "this helps explain why a candidate who had never before discussed policy was able to win the election." According to Barbaro (2015), during the campaign, the most frequently used words in Trump's tweets were "great," "winner" or "winners," and "loser" or "losers."

These characteristics can also spill over into the conversations of citizens about policies and affect how people feel about politics. As Carr (2018) argued,

Thanks to the rise of networks like Twitter, Facebook and Snapchat, the way we express ourselves, as individuals and as citizens, is in a state of upheaval, an upheaval that extends from the family dinner table to the upper reaches of government. Radically biased toward space and against time, social media is inherently destabilizing. What it teaches us, through

its whirlwind of fleeting messages, is that nothing lasts. Everything is disposable. Novelty rules. The sense that “nothing matters,” that wry, despairing complaint of people worried about national politics right now, isn’t just a Trump phenomenon; it’s built into the medium.

The Trump campaign’s use of social media also raised privacy concerns. In the 2016 election, for example, his campaign hired Cambridge Analytica, a now-bankrupt British consulting firm which also worked on the 2016 referendum known as “Brexit” in which U.K. citizens voted to leave the European Union. Cambridge Analytica created psychological profiles of millions of Americans through personality quizzes citizens took on Facebook, answering questions such as whether they complete their chores in a timely fashion and whether they think art is important. Of course, many of the people who took these tests likely did not suspect that their results could be mined by political consultants and used to target them in the future (Funk, 2016). Although Cambridge Analytica claimed that it did not use this data to target voters on behalf of Trump and the role they played in the election remains unclear, the imbroglio raised serious concerns about whether political firms gathering data about citizens on social media should be required to disclose how they will use it (Alaimo, 2017c). Further concerns were raised when Facebook announced that a University of Cambridge professor passed user data from Facebook to Cambridge Analytica without permission (Alaimo, 2018).

Limitations of Social Media as Tool for Maintaining Support and Governing

While social media can be an effective campaigning tool, its impact in terms of governing and maintaining support is less clear. This is evident again looking at the example of Trump. While social media has been credited with helping Trump win the presidency in the United States, his continued use of such platforms has not been successful in building widespread public support. One year after he was elected, Trump had an approval rating of 40 percent, which is the lowest of any American president since 1945 and 22 points lower than the average president (Enten, 2018). Although he tweeted voluminously to promote and defend his policy positions, Trump’s record of accomplishments was mixed. For example, although he promised to repeal the Affordable Care Act, a signature Obama achievement to provide universal healthcare, Congressional attempts to do so have been unsuccessful. However, Trump’s tax bill did eliminate the requirement that individuals purchase health insurance, which helped weaken the law. The president also delivered on his promise to enact tax reform, though the law that passed was widely unpopular. At the time of this writing, he was not on track to fulfill his promise to create 25 million new jobs (Berenson, 2018).

Further evidence of the limitations of social media as a tool for governing comes from Egypt. Scholars have credited Facebook with helping catalyze the Egyptian revolution in 2011 by fomenting anger at the regime of Hosni Mubarak and driving people into the streets in protest (Alaimo, 2015). However, social media has not been an effective tool for building the consensus needed to govern the country, which remains mired in political instability. In fact, Wael Ghonim (2015) – the Google executive who helped lead the revolution on Facebook – later argued that social media was also responsible for pulling Egypt apart after the revolution. According to Ghonim, social media causes political problems for five reasons: it facilitates the spread of rumors, creates echo chambers in which people only talk to those with whom they already agree, spreads hate speech, causes people to jump to conclusions too quickly, and leads people to post shallow comments, rather than engaging deeply on issues. As Friedman (2016, p. 271) has argued,

social media is good for collective sharing, but not always so great for collective building; good for collective destruction, but maybe not so good for collective construction; fantastic for generating a flash mob, but not so good at generating a flash consensus on a party platform or constitution.

From this perspective, it is clear that political public relations professionals, tasked with building long-term support and relationships with key publics, face enormous challenges as social media become more important in all aspects of politics.

The Maintenance of Spectacle and Simple Language

A related challenge for political public relations practitioners is what appears to be an increasing use of spectacles and “pseudo-events.” A pseudo-event has been defined by Boorstin (1992) as an event created by humans which, in contrast to a “train wreck or an earthquake ... is planned primarily ... for the immediate purpose of being reported or reproduced. Therefore, its occurrence is arranged for the convenience of the reporting or reproducing media” (p. 11).

The practice of politicians creating such “circuses” to divert their people dates to ancient Rome (Potter & Mattingly, 1999). President Obama was criticized for appearing on entertainment programs such as “The View” and “Saturday Night Live” instead of devoting such time to interviews with mainstream reporters who would ask more difficult questions (Vandehi & Allen, 2013). Former Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez also starred in a television show which featured him governing and often talking for hours (Nolan, 2012). However, the infiltration of entertainment into politics reached its apex in the

U.S. with the election of Trump, a former reality television star (Henninger, 2018). Trump appears to have taken the art of dominating the national conversation by creating spectacles that divert attention from policy matters and other politicians to a new level. Prior to his election as U.S. president, Trump had no government experience but starred in the reality television show *The Apprentice*. Wu (2017) noted that “he has demonstrated that he can hold a news conference consisting of little more than shouting at his enemies for an hour and still dominate national headlines.”

Similarly, Trump’s bold, controversial tweets often lead news reports, thereby showing how skilled he is at using Twitter to influence the media agenda (see further Parmelee, 2014; Tedesco, 2011). Carr (2018) described the “hallmarks” of the president’s tweets as being an “overheated tone and punctuation.” The commander-in-chief often uses tweets to attempt to settle petty scores and insult his opponents. “Why would [North Korean President] Kim Jong-un insult me by calling me ‘old,’ when I would NEVER call him ‘short and fat?’ Oh well, I try so hard to be his friend – and maybe someday that will happen!,” he tweeted on November 11, 2017. Also in November 2017, the U.S. president created a diplomatic incident when he re-tweeted anti-Muslim videos posted by a far-right British politician, a decision which U.K. Prime Minister Theresa May described as “wrong” (Sky News, 2018). Many corporations, from Amazon to General Motors, have also been the subjects of the president’s wrath on Twitter, for decisions such as moving jobs out of the country. “We’ve never had a person with so much political power be so willing to single out corporate actors on a regular basis,” said Chris Nelson, crisis lead for the Americas at the global public relations agency FleishmanHillard. “He can deliver a lot more pressure in one tweet than any activist or advocacy group can in a whole campaign” (Alaimo, 2017b). Perhaps most unusually, the president has publicly criticized members of his own administration, tweeting that former Secretary of State Rex Tillerson was “wasting his time trying to negotiate with Little Rocket Man” – a reference to Kim Jong Un – (Pengelly, Pilkington, Phillips, & McCurry, 2017) and that the decision of his Attorney General Jeff Sessions to ask the Inspector General to undertake an investigation was “disgraceful” (Magan & Breuninger, 2018). As Carr (2018) noted, the president’s tweets

appear, sometimes within minutes of being posted, in high-definition blowups on “Fox & Friends” and “Morning Joe” and “Good Morning America.” They’re read, verbatim, by TV and radio anchors. They’re embedded in stories in newspapers and on news sites, complete with Trump’s brooding profile picture. They’re praised, attacked and parsed by Washington’s myriad talking heads. When Trump tweets – often while

literally watching the TV network that will cover the tweet – the jackpot of attention is almost guaranteed.

Using Twitter to influence the media agenda is, however, not unique to Trump. Many politicians around the world have realized that this might in fact be one of the key functions of Twitter. For example, the Spanish politician Gabriel Rufián, who has advocated for Catalan independence, seized attention and garnered extensive media coverage with his provocative tweets. “Francoism didn’t die on a bed in Madrid on November 20, 1975; it will die in a ballot box in Catalonia on October 1, 2017,” was one such tweet (Torres, 2017).

Because such tactics can be so effective in dominating national conversations, Wu (2017) has argued that, even when Trump does not achieve his policy goals,

he can still win *by* losing. For what really matters are the contests themselves – the creation of an absorbing spectacle that dominates headlines, grabs audiences and creates a world in which every conversation revolves around Mr. Trump and his doings. By this standard, Mr. Trump is not just winning, but crushing it.

The continual creation of such spectacles has often helped the Trump administration divert attention from controversies and other issues it preferred to keep out of news headlines. It has also helped keep public attention on Trump rather than on other voices, including opposition politicians, who are often forced to respond to the latest controversies surrounding the White House while trying to get attention for other issues (Martin, 2017).

Trump has also been unique among American presidents in his use of simple language. One analysis showed that he speaks at a fourth-grade level, which is the lowest of any of the most recent 15 commanders in chief studied (Burleigh, 2018). While his speech may not be traditionally presidential, Winkielman and Cacioppo (2001) found that audiences actually prefer simple language because it is less difficult to understand. Audiences also judge people who use simple language to be more intelligent (Oppenheimer, 2006) and believe that information that is easier to understand is more credible (Alaimo, 2017a; McGlone & Tofiqbakhsh, 2000).

Attacks on the Traditional Media

While any politician can use Twitter to communicate with supporters, key publics, or the news media, a prominent feature when social media is used by some politicians is to couple this with attacks on traditional news media. According to Coronel (2008),

Since the late 17th Century, classical liberal theorists had argued that publicity and openness provide the best protection from the excesses of power. The idea of the press as Fourth Estate, as an institution that exists primarily as a check on those in public office, was based on the premise that powerful states had to be prevented from overstepping their bounds. The press working independently of government, even as its freedoms were guaranteed by the state, was supposed to help ensure that this was so.

In recent years, however, the role the press plays as an independent watchdog of the government has been repeatedly impugned by politicians who have been unhappy with media coverage of themselves. Trump, for example, has repeatedly taunted and cast aspersions on the media, calling mainstream journalism “fake news.” “The ‘Fakers’ at CNN, NBC, ABC & CBS have done so much dishonest reporting that they should only be allowed to get awards for fiction!,” he tweeted in 2018. “Check out the fact that you can’t get a job at ratings challenged @CNN unless you state that you are totally anti-Trump? ... They should clean up and strengthen CNN and get back to honest reporting!” (Nelson, 2018).

The same tactics have been used by Italian politician Beppe Grillo, leader of the country’s Five Star Movement. In 2017, Beppe claimed that “newspapers and television news programs are the top fabricators of false news in the country, with the aim of keeping power for those who already have it.” He called for a jury of the people to determine whether news reports are true (Taylor, 2017). Similarly, human rights groups have argued that, in the Philippines, President Rodrigo Duterte claimed that one media organization which was shuttered by the country’s Securities and Exchange Commission was a “fake news outlet” because it had reported critically on Duterte’s war on drugs (Yap, 2018).

The common denominator among political leaders using social media to bypass and to attack traditional news media is their populist appeals, casting themselves as talking “for the people” and traditional news media as part of some kind of – often liberal – elite. As populism and populist political communication (Aalberg et al., 2017) is gaining ground around the world, attacks on traditional news media have increased and will likely continue to increase. Such efforts by politicians to sow distrust in the media also appear to be working, at least in the United States. In 2016, Gallup reported that just 32 percent of Americans trust the media, the lowest number since the organization began asking the question in 1972 (Swift, 2016). This poses huge challenges for public relations professionals who have traditionally relied on mainstream news media as a key platform for promulgating their messages.

Fake News, Bots, Rumors, and Foreign Meddling in Domestic Politics

The challenges social media are posing for political public relations and traditional news is only exacerbated by the fact that ever more people get their news through social media. In fact, in the U.S., the majority of people now get their news on social media. A study conducted by the Pew Research Center in August 2017 found that 67 percent of Americans turn to social media for their news (Shearer & Gottfried, 2017). A major problem for political public relations professionals is the proliferation of fake news stories and the fake social media accounts that promulgate them.

Allcott and Gentzkow (2017) define fake news as “news articles that are intentionally and verifiably false, and could mislead readers” (p. 213) They attribute the increased prominence of fake news to the ease of setting up news websites and monetizing content through advertising on the Internet, the ease of spreading news on social media, increased social media use, reduced trust in the mainstream press, and increased political polarization (pp. 214–215). During the 2016 election in the U.S., for example, one fake news story claimed that Trump had been endorsed by the pope. Zeynep Tufekci, associate professor of information and library science at the University of North Carolina, found that this story “was shared almost a million times, likely visible to tens of millions” of people on Facebook (Isaac, 2016). Another high-profile fake news story published by the “Denver Guardian” reported that “an FBI agent believed to be responsible for the latest email leaks ‘pertinent to the investigation’ into Hillary Clinton’s private email server while she was Secretary of State, was found dead in an apparent murder-suicide” (Snopes, 2016). And in 2016 a man fired a gun at a Washington, D.C. pizza shop after reading a fake news report claiming that Clinton was keeping children as sex slaves at the establishment (Kang & Goldman, 2016). Similarly, during the 2017 referendum on independence in Catalonia, fake headlines claimed that “Global powers prepare ground for war in Europe” and “EU officials supported the violence in Catalonia” (Rankin, 2017).

A study by BuzzFeed of the top-performing stories on Facebook during the last three months of the U.S. 2016 presidential election found that fake news stories got more engagement than real news stories from outlets such as *The Washington Post* and *The New York Times* (Silverman, 2016). Similarly, Vosoughi, Roy, and Aral (2018) found that fake news stories are 70 percent more likely to receive retweets than accurate reports and that fake news stories reach 1,500 people six times faster than accurate reports. Allcott and Gentzkow’s (2017) model estimates that, on average, American adults read and remembered 1.14 fake news stories during the 2016 election. A 2016 study by Ipsos found that American readers were fooled by 75 percent of the fake news stories they read (Silverman & Singer-Vine, 2016).

The fake news that has plagued governments and political candidates is also affecting corporations. Recent fake stories have claimed, for example, that Dasani water was contaminated with a parasite, that Chobani's founder had vowed to "choke [the] U.S. with Muslims," and that Pepsi's chief executive had said that supporters of Trump should "take their business elsewhere" (Alaimo, 2017f; Tesfaye, 2016).

Another challenge is fake accounts. Twitter Audit, for example, found that 39 percent of Trump's followers on Twitter were bots, or automated fake accounts, which Halpern (2016) noted were "unleashed into the global conversation by untraceable agents, governments, political parties, individuals, and organizations among them."

The Chinese government has long employed individuals colloquially known as members of the "Fifty Cent Party" to create fake accounts with content that gives the appearance that there is vast domestic grassroots support for the Chinese Communist Party (Wu, Alaimo, & Chun, 2018); in Russia, the Kremlin does the same (Chen, 2015). Recent years have seen foreign agents create the same kinds of fake stories and accounts to interfere in domestic politics in other countries. The ease of joining in social media conversations without geographical limitations has facilitated such infiltration. Facebook, for example, has admitted that a company linked to the Kremlin purchased 3,000 ads between June 2015–May 2017 on hot-button U.S. political issues such as race and immigration, in what appears to have been an effort to influence the 2016 election and American politics. The U.S. Federal Bureau of Investigation, Central Intelligence Agency, and National Security Agency have also reported that Russia hacked and leaked emails of Democratic operatives during the election and that hundreds of Russian accounts were paid to post messages damaging to Clinton on social media (Shane & Goel, 2017).

Iran has also been accused of creating fake social media accounts and news sites in order to spread misinformation in the Middle East, United States, United Kingdom, and Latin America (Hamilton, 2018). Similarly, researchers at Swansea University and the University of California, Berkeley identified over 150,000 accounts in Russia that tweeted about Brexit (Mostrous, Bridge, & Gibbons, 2017), while researchers at the University of Edinburgh found 419 Twitter accounts run from a Russian organization tied to the Kremlin that tried to influence the Brexit vote (Booth et al., 2017). And Spain's government has said that "propaganda campaigns" supporting Catalan independence were orchestrated from Russia and Venezuela (Cotovio & Grinberg, 2017).

False rumors spread through social media have become another major global problem. In 2018, for example, rumors such as the myth that Muslims were attempting to render Buddhists infertile spread on Facebook in Sri Lanka, sparking fatal communal violence (Beech & Nang, 2018). In India, between April and July 2018, at least 24 people were killed as

a result of false rumors spread on WhatsApp about kidnappers targeting children (Goel, Raj, & Ravichandran, 2018). In Brazil, where WhatsApp has been used to share videos urging people not to get vaccines, the app has been blamed for causing an outbreak of yellow fever (Waterson, 2018). And in Germany, researchers found that, in towns where more people use Facebook, there have been more attacks on refugees (Muller & Schwarz, 2018).

In 2018, the U.K. government created what a spokesperson for the prime minister called a “dedicated national security communications unit” responsible for “combating disinformation by state actors and others,” such as fake news on social media (BBC, 2018). Also in 2018, the Italian government launched a portal where readers can report fake news stories they come across (Serhan, 2018).

The impact of such initiatives is, however, uncertain. In the past, public relations professionals could call editors when news organizations made factual mistakes to demand corrections. However, the same is not possible when social media accounts and sites are dedicated specifically to promulgating misinformation. This leaves public relations professionals challenged as to how to correct the record.

Filter Bubbles and Political Polarization

How to correct the record is, however, not the only challenge. Even if traditional news media or other organizations manage to get the correct information out, it is far from certain that it will reach citizens at large or those publics they aim to reach. One reason is what Pariser (2011) has labeled “filter bubbles”. According to Pariser, Internet users increasingly live in “filter bubbles” because algorithms on search engines and social media platforms are designed to primarily show them content that is aligned with their pre-existing beliefs:

With Google personalized for everyone, the query “stem cells” might produce diametrically opposed results for scientists who support stem cell research and activists who oppose it. “Proof of climate change” might turn up different results for an environmental activist and an oil company executive. In polls, a huge majority of us assume search engines are unbiased. But that may be just because they’re increasingly biased to share our own views. More and more, your computer monitor is a kind of one-way mirror, reflecting your own interests while algorithmic observers watch what you click.

(Pariser, 2011, p. 3)

Filter bubbles are not the only problem, however. Another challenge for political public relations practitioners is selective exposure and selective attention, where people expose themselves primarily to like-minded

people and to information that confirms their already held beliefs (for an overview of research on selectivity, see Knobloch-Westerwick, 2014). While selective exposure and attention is nothing new, this challenge has also been exacerbated by digital and social media. Bakshy, Messing, and Adamic (2015), for example, studied people who reported their ideological affiliations on Facebook and found that, on average, just 18 percent of the friends of conservatives listed themselves as being liberal, and just 20 percent of the friends of liberals reported that they were conservative. Therefore, people tend to view information that is consistent with beliefs they already hold. They also tend to favor such information; Allcott and Gentzkow (2017) found that Republicans and Democrats were more likely to believe headlines that were aligned with their beliefs. However, it is unclear that filter bubbles are the main cause of political polarization. Boxell, Gentzkow, and Shapiro (2017) found that Americans who are least likely to use social media have experienced the greatest increase in polarization.

Social endorsements – such as postings of content that contradicts a person’s views by Facebook friends – may help reduce filter bubbles and the effects of selective exposure. Messing and Westwood (2014), for example, found that social endorsements help reduce selective partisan exposure to news. However, Bail et al. (2018) found that reducing filter bubbles may not reduce political polarization. When people followed a bot of the opposite political persuasion on Twitter, they became even more entrenched in their original beliefs.

Populism

Another key feature of contemporary mediated political environments is the rise and increasing impact of populism and populist political communication. While there are different forms of populism, at the heart of political populism and populist political communication are references to “the people,” and anti-elitism, often coupled with antagonism towards designated out-groups (Reinemann et al., 2017). In line with that, Bimes and Mulroy (2004) defined the key elements of presidential populism as “the legitimation of presidential action through popular authority” and “the use of an antagonistic appeal that pits the people as represented by the president against a special interest.” In the United States, Trump came to power through “populist positions on Wall Street (‘Hedge fund managers are getting away with murder’), free trade (‘We need fair trade, not free trade’) and immigration (‘We’ll have a great wall’)” (Becker, 2016) and went “out of [his] way to fan racial and other tensions” (McMullin, 2017). Similarly, the Brexit “referendum was marked by the rise of a populism based on the desire to regain control of immigration and reclaim national sovereignty from international institutions” and, as in the U.S., appealed to individuals who feel that globalization has left them behind (McBride,

2016). The far-right politician Marine Le Pen used similar appeals in her failed bid for the French presidency in 2017, vowing to make the country “more French” and referring to immigrants as “interlopers” (Nossiter, 2017).

New Political Expectations of Corporations

Corporate public relations practitioners are also being confronted with new political expectations and challenges. First, companies and their chief executives are increasingly being expected to take stances on political and social issues. One campaign, called Grab Your Wallet, called on consumers to boycott brands associated with Trump and his family. Many corporations have also faced difficult decisions of whether to alienate Trump opponents by maintaining affiliations with the president’s company and family or whether to alienate Trump supporters for discontinuing them. Nordstrom, for example, was first boycotted by anti-Trump consumers for selling his daughter Ivanka Trump’s line and then boycotted by Trump supporters when the department store announced it would no longer sell her products (Alaimo, 2017d).

Another challenge has been activism by employees and endorsers. The chief executive of IBM’s decision to congratulate Trump on winning the election led more than 2,000 of her employees to sign a petition indicating that they did not want to be forced to work on projects which they believed violated civil liberties. And three celebrities which Under Armour paid to endorse the company – Misty Copeland, Stephen Curry, and Dwayne “The Rock” Johnson – shocked many in the industry when they spoke out publicly against the company’s CEO for complimenting Trump (Alaimo, 2017e).

Altogether, then, there is no shortage of challenges facing political public relations practitioners, and many are struggling with how to respond to them in ways that are effective as well as ethically appropriate and defensible. In light of this, in the remainder of this chapter I will discuss some strategies for responding to some of these challenges.

Strategies for Responding to Fake News

As previously discussed, fake news reports represent a unique challenge to political public relations practitioners because it is impossible or nearly impossible to force such websites to set the record straight. The authorship behind such articles is often unclear and, because such stories are intentionally inaccurate or misleading, it is typically not possible to convince site owners to correct them. Peter Duda, head of the global crisis and issues practice at the global communication agency Weber Shandwick, therefore said that victims may need to consider suing sites that promulgate fake news (Alaimo, 2017f).

While a long legal process is under way, however, they will need to focus on setting the record straight with the public. Leslie Gaines-Ross, Weber Shandwick's chief reputation strategist, therefore said that it is imperative for companies that are the subjects of fake news to prominently articulate their values *pre-emptively*. Then, if they are targeted by fake news, it will be easier to point to an established record of corporate social responsibility to prove that the reports are inaccurate (Alaimo, 2017f).

She also advised enlisting employees for help correcting the record. According to Gaines-Ross,

Most people believe ordinary employees before they'll believe a very senior officer of a company. They turn to people they know from Little League or PTA meetings or at the register at the local market. So inform employees and count on them to be advocates. Employees know what's going on, and they will rally to defend the truth.

(Alaimo, 2017f)

It is also important for companies to have possible responses to such attacks drafted in advance, so that they can respond to them rapidly. Garcia (2017) likened a social media attack to a heart attack. Just as a patient having a heart attack is much more likely to survive if he or she gets to a hospital emergency room within the first hour, similarly, organizations that respond rapidly to crises are much more likely to survive with their reputations intact because they have the opportunity to frame the situations themselves, rather than allowing others to speculate about their motives and actions.

Duda said that it is important to carefully calibrate the tone of responses to fake news. "Be authentic, not overly emotional or critical," he said. "Don't play the victim, but rather be the trusted provider of information." Companies can also consider ads and search engine optimization so that consumers searching for information are directed to messages from the corporation, rather than from fake news purveyors (Alaimo, 2017f).

It is important for companies to choose the platforms on which they respond to fake news strategically. Duda said that corporations should know where their target audiences turn for information before such an attack, so that they can reach key stakeholders rapidly if they need to correct the record. He also recommends that companies "focus on 'moving the movable.' Some people aren't open to facts. You should make sure that you're spending your time and resources talking to people who want to hear what you have to say and understand your position" (Alaimo, 2017f).

Companies have also come under attack for inadvertently funding fake news sites and websites promulgating extreme views. Alaimo (2017f) explained,

Many companies purchase blocks of advertising that are allocated to particular websites by robots, which means businesses may not know where their ads will appear and could inadvertently advertise on fake or hateful news sites. An ad for Fiat Chrysler, for example, appeared next to a story on a fake news site claiming that Yoko Ono had an affair with Hillary Clinton.

To prevent this, corporations can either create a “white list” of websites on which they are comfortable advertising or a “black list” of sites on which they refuse to advertise.

Strategies for Responding to Presidential and Other Politicians’ Twitter Attacks

In the case of politicians prone to attacking opponents on Twitter or other social media platforms, it is important for businesses and other potential victims to stay on top of the person’s positions to help predict when they might be targeted. It is also essential for them to craft responses in advance of potential attacks, so they can respond within the “golden hour.” With respect to the case of Trump, Nelson, of FleischmanHillard, also advised trying to foster relationships with the administration so disputes can be resolved outside of the limelight and seeking out third parties who might jump to an organization’s defense in the event of such an attack (Alaimo, 2017b). The same logic can be applied to organizations facing other politicians prone to attacking opponents on Twitter or other social media. This goes back to the notion that at the heart of political public relations is efforts to “influence and to establish, build, and maintain beneficial relationships” with key publics, including politicians (Strömbäck & Kiouisis, 2011, p. 8).

Strategies for Responding to New Political Expectations of Corporations

When deciding whether and when to take public stances on controversial issues, Helio Fred Garcia, President of the Logos Consulting Group, recommended that companies consider whether the issue is related to their core business or public values, or whether it is affecting important stakeholders such as customers, employees, and investors. If so, it usually makes sense to weigh in; if not, it is typically advisable for the company to stay out of the fray (Alaimo, 2017d). A study by KRC Research & Weber Shandwick (2016) found that a company’s perceived favorability increases when they take stances on issues that are directly related to their core business, but decreases when they speak out on unrelated issues.

To guard against attacks by employees and/or endorsers for their political positions, Alaimo (2017e) advised that corporations “proactively communicate their values and public positions on contentious issues,

ideally when hiring or signing people, so that no one is surprised by the stances that the business and its senior executives take.” She also recommended actively soliciting staff input before making decisions on hotbed issues and considering including clauses in employment contracts stipulating that staffers may not publicly disparage the company. However, if employees do go on the attack, she recommended against censuring them publicly because

that will only create a bigger PR problem for your firm. Instead, make clear that you appreciate and encourage a plurality of ideas. State that you respect each person’s right to voice their opinions and that it won’t in any way affect their careers.

Conclusion

Over the past 15 years, vast concurrent political and technological changes have left public relations practitioners facing unprecedented changes and challenges to the way they build relationships with stakeholders. These transformations have made the need for public relations theory to account for politics especially evident to scholars and highlighted the importance of savvy practitioners to political organizations and corporations alike. Moving forward, public relations scholars and practitioners must continue working to find effective ways to utilize social media, respond to social media limitations and attacks, be heard above the spectacles and populist appeals created by politicians, work with a traditional media whose credibility is in question by many, combat fake news and phony social media accounts, resist meddling by foreign governments, communicate with fractured publics, craft and defend political stances for corporations, and address future challenges that will unquestionably continue to arise out of this revolutionized landscape.

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18 Political Public Relations

Looking Back, Looking Forward

Spiro Kiouisis, Jesper Strömbäck, and Pamala Proverbs

Introduction

As shown throughout the chapters in this volume, the topic of political public relations is a vibrant one meriting additional theoretical development and empirical scrutiny. Based on the conceptualizations presented throughout the previous chapters, political public relations is clearly an interdisciplinary subject lying at the crossroads of public relations, political communication, political science, and adjacent fields. While much work in this area has been isolated and independent in the past, we continue to advocate for the integration and convergence of theories, concepts, and principles in contemporary and future research. This is largely based on the notion that political public relations has a rich scholarly history that has developed in isolation in multiple fields.

Indeed, the Martinelli chapter in this book traces its complex roots to the literature on propaganda, persuasion, agenda-setting, relationship cultivation, public diplomacy, and activism to name a few. Over time, scholars have noted that public relations and politics are closely intertwined (Cutlip, Center & Broom, 2000; Davis, 2002; McKinnon, Tedesco & Lauder, 2001; Strömbäck & Kiouisis, 2011, 2013; Waymer & Heath, 2016; Xifra, 2010). As a consequence, the final chapter of this volume aims to identify some common themes across the previous chapters that can be used to inform future scholars of potential domains calling for further attention in political public relations. It also develops a conceptual tool to guide future efforts.

Political Public Relations: Interactions and Engagement

As a starting point, we begin with our revised definition from the first edition that *Political public relations is the management process by which an actor for political purposes, through communication and action, seeks to influence and to establish, build, and maintain beneficial relationships and reputations with key publics and stakeholders to help support its mission and achieve its goals.* This understanding of political public relations has received some criticism

because it is inherently “asymmetrical” (Sha, 2017), but important to note is that this definition is not intended to be prescriptive about how political public relations should be. Rather, our intention is to capture how political public relations actually works.

An important feature of our explication is that political public relations is a *management function* that seeks to help organizations advance their mission and objectives (Kathy Fitzpatrick, Fullerton & Kendrick, 2013; Seitel, 2001; Xifra, 2003). As underscored by Xifra (2010), “Strategies used by political parties and leaders, both during election and non-election periods, respond clearly to the concept established in the doctrine of strategic public relations” (p. 168). In particular, we contend that it should guide not only a political actor’s communication, but its action and behavior as well. Thus, we see political public relations as a proactive and strategic endeavor rather than a reactive and merely technical one.

In this light we see the need to explore and highlight the *leadership* aspect of political communications in the future. Kotter (2001), in differentiating management from leadership, assigned the task of “coping with complexities” to the former while the big picture idea of “coping with change” was thought to be the purview of leadership (p. 4). Since political actors constantly have to cope with change, future work in these interdisciplinary areas should focus more on the role of leadership. For example, the public relations function is thought to be the ethical conscience of the organization, as pointed out by the Bowen and Zhu chapter. The authors offer an integrative introduction to ethical models and applied ethics from utilitarian, deontological, and Confucian moral traditions, respectively. Bowen and Zhu also detail many differences between Western and Eastern political philosophies, and conclude by introducing a new and integrative analytical framework for ethical analyses, considerations, and elaborations for assisting in resolving moral dilemmas across varied socio-political settings. The Bowen and Zhu chapter is based on the Excellence theory which promotes public relations as a management function rather than a leadership function. Aldoory and Toth (2004), for example, argued that public relations scholars stress concepts that are integral to leadership such as management, strategy, and relationship building but “there has been limited research examining the specifics of leadership within the public relations terrain” (p. 158). It is necessary therefore for future research and practice to advance public relations and political communications as leadership functions, because certainly within the context of political communications this is where it usually sits. For good or bad, this has been demonstrated by President Trump’s provocative morning Tweets.

The notion that political public relations is a management function is not to say that political public relations is necessarily top down. Rather, political public relations should be understood as multidirectional between political actors and all their publics and stakeholders. Actors could range

from single politicians to interest groups to a regional collective such as the European Union. Indeed, a potential criticism of our first book is that most of the theorizing regarding the interactions between political entities and other groups might have been thought of as linear. However, major changes in the media landscape such as the explosion of social media and mobile communication, along with the rise of internationalization and globalization in the field, indicate that linear models are largely obsolete. Thus, even the traditional ideal of “two-way” communication in public relations needs to be expanded to *multi-way* and *multi-public* communication (to be explicated below). Some examples illustrating this point include issues such as the global economy and the refugee crisis in Europe where multiple nations, organizations, and stakeholders are impacted and have an impact on the issue. Brexit, for instance, not only shapes the fate of Britain but impacts the EU as a political collective, the individual nations who comprise it, the related regions and the world economy.

From a public and stakeholder perspective, our definition also emphasizes the role of both *reputation* and *relationship* development and maintenance as a core part of the practice of political public relations. As noted in the opening chapter, we have included both the terms *publics* and *stakeholders* to comprehensively acknowledge the multiple fields from where political public relations originates and to include groups that may be on the periphery but are still impacted by politics. Examples might include refugees, war prisoners, illegal immigrants, child labor victims, and so forth. Toth’s chapter is instructive in this regard, as she explicates the increasingly growing impact of underrepresented groups in political public relations. Three major types include social movements, activist groups (the focus of the Sommerfeldt and Yang chapter), and latent publics. Unlike traditional perspectives that tend to view them as adversaries of organizations or simply marginalized, Toth recommends they be considered more central to political actors and that relationship cultivation approaches are appropriate for interactions with these stakeholders. In this context, Kim and Grunig’s (2011) situational theory of problem solving might be useful for guiding political actors in their relationship strategies.

Continuing on the stakeholder perspective, the Berg and Feldner chapter sits within the fourth quadrant of our interaction–engagement matrix in public relations described below, tackling the “blurred lines between political communication and political public relations while also discussing the ways in which thinking about lobbying must change to adapt to the changing communication environment in which public relations professionals operate.” For Berg and Feldner, the traditional focus of “lobbying has been on direct appeals by corporations to legislators in which corporations and other interest groups hire lobbyists to represent, educate, and advocate on their behalf”. Lobbyists traditionally worked behind the scenes to influence politicians and public

policy, but given the changing communication environment coupled with higher expectations of the public, Berg and Feldner argue that lobbying also takes place in a more public space and that attempts to influence public policy in the public sphere should be understood as lobbying.

Applying the ideas of Hutton, Goodman, Alexander and Genest (2001) to a political context, we see political public relations as critical to all stages of stakeholder engagement, whether it involves an adolescent first developing an allegiance to a political party all the way to a lifelong volunteer for civic organizations aiming to recruit new voters. As they write,

reputation (emphasis in original) is a concept far more relevant to people who have no direct ties to an organization, whereas *relationships* (emphasis in original) are far more relevant to people who are direct stakeholders of the organization (employees, customers, stockholders and others, who usually are the organization's most important publics). In other words, a *reputation* is generally something an organization has with strangers, but a *relationship* is generally something an organization has with its friends and associates.

(Hutton et al., 2001, p. 258)

Recent work suggests that *engagement* is helpful to understanding the extent to which relationship and reputation are both key outcomes in public relations (Men, 2015). According to Kang (2010), public engagement can be defined as “a psychologically motivated state that is characterized by affective commitment, positive affectivity and empowerment that individual public experiences in interactions with an organization over time that result in motivated behavioral outcomes” (p. 11). However, one limitation with most current perspectives on these concepts is that they are conceptualized in dyads (e.g., the interaction between political candidates and voters or between local governments and business). While at the conceptual level, most research considers a web of interactions, most empirical work looks at interactions in dyads. A key point made by the Wang and Yang chapter on public diplomacy is that the role of social networks has grown in prominence, given trends in globalization, digital communication, and social media. We concur and suggest that outcomes for the understanding of political public relations be expanded. Consequently, we introduce an updated version of the continuum in the first book (Kioussis & Strömbäck, 2011) as the *interaction–engagement matrix in public relations* that reflects this expansion, as shown in Figure 18.1.

The interaction–engagement matrix in public relations continues to integrate the constructs of relationship and reputation as useful for understanding political public relations via engagement, but it is expanded to acknowledge the complex interactions between groups in the process that can function as dyads, triads, or entire networks. This dynamic might be

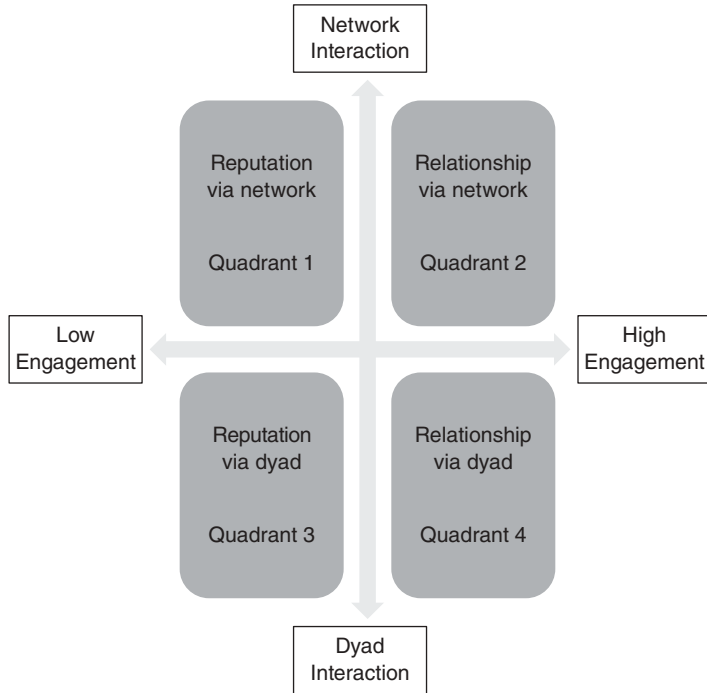


Figure 18.1 Interaction–Engagement Matrix in Public Relations

explained by the contingency theory of accommodation in public relations, where the situation determines the model of public relations used (Cancel, Cameron, Sallot & Mitrook, 1997; Cancel, Mitrook & Cameron, 1999). For example, the role of political public relations between parties and one group of low engagement voters (e.g., last-minute voters) could be accounted for in Quadrant 3, while the associations among highly engaged governments in Brexit across several nations and its implications for the EU is better understood via Quadrant 2 and negotiations between two nations or organizations via Quadrant 4.

Important in this context is also the multiplicity of publics that are relevant for political organizations, broadly conceived. As such, we reject views of political public relations as only focusing either on short-term or long-term interactions between organizations and key publics and stakeholders, and views that reduce political public relations to media relations, news management, or voter relations. The concepts of reputation and relationship management are *both* paramount to capturing this short-term and long-term orientation regarding the engagement of political actors and the multiplicity of their key publics.

From this perspective, political public relations is not limited to simple information dissemination and exchange for peripherally involved publics, but it is also not important just solely for engagement of highly involved stakeholder groups such as major donors or special interest groups. As shown in the interaction–engagement matrix, conceptualizing political public relations along a horizontal axis of stakeholder engagement with reputation and relationship quality at each end as well as a vertical axis from dyads to networks can be a useful tool for understanding its study and practice.

Looking Back, Looking Forward

Nevertheless, media relations are without doubt an important area of political public relations. This is shown by the Arceneaux, Borden, and Golan chapter, which highlights the ongoing importance of news management and media relations in political public relations as a means to connect with stakeholders. This connects with the focus on reputation in our interaction–engagement matrix in public relations. In particular, they argue that agenda and frame building are only part of the news management function in political public relations and that the function now more broadly covers environmental and media scanning and the use of strategic narratives to better understand and react to political discourse in news. They suggest that news media are but one of many voices so that publics are just as likely to impact agendas as other stakeholders. Indeed, they emphasize that political elites may bypass news media in an attempt to reach stakeholders. From this perspective, we suggest that the term *information intermediary* may be more impactful to describe the role of news media, bloggers, and other digital influencers. In addition, political public relations professionals must now be engaged beyond traditional channels to include social media and other platforms as part of their issues management strategy. It should also be noted that the power–differential between source and journalist has shifted, given the additional channels available for reaching stakeholders compared to traditional contexts.

Switching to the other end of the spectrum in the matrix along the vertical axis, Seltzer updates the role of relationship management in political public relations. Distinguishing between reputation and relationships, he notes that

experiential relationships should warrant a relational approach employing symmetrical cultivation strategies. Reputational relationships, on the other hand, should require either simple reputation–building approaches (e.g., publicity) or no action at all if, as theorized by Hallahan (2000), the publics involved have little to no knowledge of the organization or if those publics perceive that their relationship with the organization is not particularly relevant or important.

Several studies since the publication of the first edition have also found support for POPR (political organization public relationships) (Seltzer & Zhang, 2011; Seltzer, Zhang, Gearhart & Conduff, 2013), showing its applicability in a political context. The chapter also highlights the importance of social media as relationship building tools from recent research exploring their associations. Nonetheless, Seltzer also argues that there are limitations of a relationship management perspective in political public relations because of the sometimes intrinsic conflict of politics and increasing polarization, especially in a U.S. context. Thus, the complement of including both relationships and reputations to understand the interactions between political actors and their publics and stakeholders is confirmed by this theorizing, as outlined in the interaction–engagement matrix in public relations.

The linkage between relationships and networks is perhaps best explicated by Sommerfeldt and Yang's chapter on the ties between issues management and network development strategies by activist groups to better understand the issue life cycle. Activist groups are an important stakeholder group that remains understudied in the political public relations literature, yet their influence on its antecedents, processes, and consequences are meaningful. Interestingly, they suggest the intersection of agenda building and network theory as fruitful, and some work has already begun in this area (Kiouisis, et al., 2016; Neil, et al., 2018). What is missing in this scholarship though is the integration of an issues management perspective, as suggested by Sommerfeldt and Yang. We concur and posit that future studies linking these perspectives might look at what types of information subsidies are most effective in impacting issue networks and that might lead to stronger relationships between political actors and their stakeholders. Activist groups may be ideal for this type of research due to their focus on singular issues.

Throughout the book, the impact of digital political public relations and technology is highlighted. Sweetser's updated chapter from the first edition tracks the expansion of its use in the arenas of campaigning, voter engagement, government communication, and activism. For example, she observes how online petitions have triggered formal responses by governments in the United States and other countries. As a potential linkage to the interaction–engagement matrix in public relations in terms of social networks, she discusses the growing impact of research showing how social capital translates into political capital and that digital political public relations plays a major role. Among the theoretical perspectives mentioned as possessing the highest potential for future work in this area are agenda-setting theory, framing, and relationship theory.

The Alaimo chapter further looks at new technologies in the area social media and the new challenges they bring to political public relations. A strong linkage to the matrix is in terms of social networks and reputation; the chapter discusses challenges such as fake news, fake social

media accounts, and foreign efforts to meddle in domestic politics via the Internet and social media among others. Alaimo quotes earlier works for attributing the Obama election victories to social media. Social media's currency was further endorsed by the Trump campaign which reportedly spent half the money as the Clinton's yet he won, a demonstration of the important role social media – when used effectively – may have in political communications. Within the context of government communications, the Sanders chapter also endorses the use of digital and social media for allowing governments to become more citizen centric.

Also important in our conceptualization of political public relations is that the concept of political actors is broader than that of political parties. Political actors certainly include political parties, but also government offices, interest groups, think tanks, non-governmental organizations, and even corporations, to the extent that they attempt to influence political issues, processes, or public opinion related to political matters. In this context, an analysis of political marketing and stakeholder engagement by Hughes and Dann (2009) is germane. Following their analysis and depending on the type of organization involved in political marketing or political public relations, at least 17 stakeholder groups can be identified: political candidates; political opponents; alternative political providers; electoral commissions, parliaments, government offices; industry lobby groups; issue competitors; media organizations; party donors; party members and supporters; private lobbyists; social pressure lobby groups; citizens and society at large; splinter interest groups; voters at election time; and voters between elections. While this may not be the definitive list – as it depends on the organization and thus is contextual – it illustrates that there is a large number of organizations and groups that are relevant in the context of political public relations. Kioussis and Ragas (2016) also identify the importance of journalists, bloggers, and other online influencers, nonprofits, municipalities, interest groups, professional associations, and nations.

A key point is that political public relations should not be confined to examinations of political campaigning – although election campaigns obviously are very important. In fact, according to the Lilleker chapter, studies have stymied political public relations use in election campaigns to hype and persuasion. However, Lilleker postures that “the political context and objectives of the respective parties mean that one can find a broader range of functions utilized encompassing the full gamut of public relations strategies and tools.” The chapter explicates how five primary campaign objectives of securing victory – coalition partnerships, influence, attention and credibility, and representation of a minority group/ideology – align with the political public relations function. Lilleker also offers a range of communications strategies appropriate for each situation and concludes that “parties and candidates might benefit from delving deeper into political public relations theory and the public relations toolkit.”

Building on this point is the notion of grand strategy as articulated by Botan (2006), which offers a relevant backdrop for linking the tactical arenas of political public relations to the strategic levels of policymaking and legislative action. In particular, he asserts that “grand strategy is the policy-level decisions an organization makes about goals, alignments, ethics, and relationship with publics and other forces in the environment” (p. 224). The Eshbaugh-Soha chapter on presidential communications stresses the importance of public relations to political power. The chapter identifies the key ways presidents engage in public relations, exploring their success while considering the impact of supporting institutions, especially the Office of Communications. The chapter also adds a preliminary exploration into the Trump presidency, particularly its use of Twitter and other social media to engage in public relations, and concludes by connecting a primary theme of the chapter to the Trump presidency. Eshbaugh-Soha argues that “new communications technologies simultaneously provide opportunities yet complications for successful public relations and do not necessarily lead to enhance successes as the White House communications offices learn how to use these new media effectively.”

The notion of grand strategy also highlights that to be effective, political public relations cannot be reduced to mere technical tasks of disseminating messages. Instead, practitioners and managers of political public relations should be part of the “dominant coalition” (Dozier & Grunig, 1992; Grunig, Grunig & Ehling, 1992) responsible for grand strategy and strategy, and assigned the task not only of representing the organization to the publics, but also the publics to the organization. As noted by Kelley more than 50 years ago (1956, p. 211),

the public relations man should be able to put his imprint most strongly on the political process if he can participate in more basic policy decisions – selection of issue and of the groups to which appeals will be directed – and if he can do this in a semi-permanent association with particular parties and politicians.

This may be even more important today than when Kelley wrote his book, as permanent campaigning has become an increasingly ubiquitous feature of contemporary politics and governing (Blumenthal, 1980; Kiouisis & Strömbäck, 2015; Ornstein & Mann, 2000).

As important as the role of the presidency is in political public relations, it is but a part of the broader area of government communications. The Sanders chapter on government communications underscores the role of political public relations for political versus civic communications purposes. For Sanders, much has changed since the last edition of this book. Among them, she cites the triumph of populist leaders, causes, and governments across the world, notably the 2016 election of Donald

Trump and the victory of Brexit in the British referendum of the same year – both which point toward a deep citizen disengagement from mainstream politics and governments. For Sanders, political communications by governments is not only key for practical reasons such as explaining government policy and enabling effective operations of citizen's services, but can also contribute to enhancing intangible values such as trust and legitimacy, which are necessary for healthy democracies (Kettl, 2017; Kim & Krishna, 2018; Van Ham, Thomassen, Aarts & Andeweg, 2017). The chapter also explores the areas of development of 21st century government communication and points to key challenges and questions for research.

Going back to the concept of media relations, traditional distinctions among television, radio, and print have become increasingly blurred (Chadwick, 2013). The trend towards multimedia and cross-platform content raises new questions concerning the processes of media relations in a political context. In addition, the range of media in the traditional sense has greatly expanded and led to high-choice media environments and fragmented audiences on the one hand, and a growing share of news-avoiders, yet on the other hand, more viewers and users might still be consuming public affairs information through different venues (Prior, 2007; Strömbäck, Djerf-Pierre & Shehata, 2013; Van Aelst, et al., 2017). A useful framework for defining the channels available to political communications is the PESO model (paid, earned, shared, owned media) which has evolved from the traditional media mix categorizations of paid owned and earned media (Macnamara, Lwin, Adi & Zerfass, 2016). Macnamara, et al. (2016) flipped the PESO acronym to SOEP, giving preeminence to shared media, supporting the Alaimo chapter's thesis of the importance of social media to political communications.

Social media have become so pervasive in political communications that most of the chapters dedicate substantial space to them. Arceneaux, Borden, and Golan look at social media extensively in news management. Sanders, in looking at 21st century government communications, also took an in-depth dive into digital and social media. Dan, Ihlen, and Raknes, in their strategic framing chapter, surmise that "the changed dynamic created by social media begs a reconsideration of strategic framing." In this vein, the Eshbaugh-Soha's chapter on presidential public relations in the United States explores social media in the context of election victories. Taking a more skeptical approach, he questions Twitter's influence on news coverage. And as for the Trump election victory, he also suggests that other confounding variables might have inadvertently inflated the perception of the social media's impact. Despite this, Lilleker in his chapter on election campaigning acknowledges that building relationships across networked situational publics that interact over social media, is key to the public relations function for election campaigns. Martinelli, in looking at the historical roots and scholarly foundations of

political public relations, also finds social media to be important to the present day. Among other things, she notes the importance of social media in facilitating the two-step flow of communication. And this importance is not lost on Seltzer, as he dedicates an entire section to social media and political relationships in his chapter on political public relations and relationship management. Sweetser's chapter on digital political public relations promotes the fact that this type of media "allows the political actor the opportunity to truly connect with citizens." She gives support to Lee and Xu (2018) in the conclusion that "given the breadth of research pointing to the connection between social media activities and electoral outcome, political public relations practitioners integrate digital tools as key components of an overall strategy." Toth, looking at political public relations of underrepresented groups, also reveals how social movements use social media. For Toth, "Social media provides a ready, immediate, relatively inexpensive means to network the collectivity of individuals and groups" that generates networking power. Finally, the Wang and Yang chapter also points to the importance of social media in political communications, explicating the topic of public diplomacy at a cross roads, from a social networks perspective.

Hence, while traditional media relations could be restricted to major newspapers, broadcast entities, and traditional journalistic publications – that is, traditional mass media – news management efforts in the digital age must also include efforts for engaging new media (bloggers), social media (social networking sites), so-called alternative, partisan media, and owned media (mobile communications) (Benkler, Faris & Roberts, 2018; Chadwick, 2013). As a result, future studies of political media relations should move beyond mainstream media analyses and include comparisons with all different types of media in order to broaden our understanding of news management processes in politics.

Another trend raised in discussions of digital communications is that the range of communication tactics and tools used in political public relations efforts has significantly increased in the last two decades. To be brief, online efforts can potentially include email, blogs, websites, RSS feeds, YouTube videos, Facebook posts, text messages, and so forth to name a few, yet traditional scholarship typically examines only one type of communication tool. Consequently, we suggest future research consider multiple message forms not just for online communication efforts, but offline communication activities as well. Returning to Eshbaugh-Soha's chapter on presidential public relations, for instance, the discussion regarding the influence of presidential speeches is insightful and can serve as a foundation for examining other types of presidential messages in political public relations. Indeed, research suggests that message form impacts the dynamics of political public relations efforts (Kiouis & Strömbäck, 2010). Useful here is the Arceneaux, Borden, and Golan chapter, that identifies many of the common tactics and tools used in agenda-building efforts in political public relations.

Thus, we suggest future research explore the influence of various message types to consider the full spectrum of communication activities in political public relations programs and campaigns, particularly those involving the Executive Branch of government. While the focus in Eshbaugh-Soha's chapter is on the U.S. presidency, investigations of executive-political leadership in other countries and settings is also paramount for verifying patterns and trends observed in the U.S. system versus others around the globe, and for identifying factors that may condition the strategies or tactics of political public relations by the Executive Branch. This is, of course, equally true when examining other facets of political public relations. Only through comparative research will it become possible to identify and understand the structural and semi-structural determinants and factors shaping the practice of political public relations. As noted by Blumler and Gurevitch (1995, p. 76), comparative research "can serve as an effective antidote to unwitting parochialism" and has an unparalleled "capacity to render the invisible visible."

Because many efforts of political public relations focus on issues, the process by which issues are selected, prioritized, and acted upon is central to contemplating their impact on governing and democracy. This is true not only of narrowly defined political organizations, but also of corporations that operate in a political environment and thus have to respond to and adjust to political processes. As highlighted by Heath and Waymer in their chapter on issues management,

The discipline of issues management [...] reasons that rather than corporations being able and encouraged to manage issues in ways that benefit their interests disproportionately, the discipline is intended to help corporations to manage their response to issues on the assumption that communities and societies where businesses operate necessarily work to balance interests and/or work to prevent businesses from shifting the costs of their operations, products, and services to others in ways that violate the public trust.

The inclusion of corporate issues management in our understanding of political public relations offers additional interdisciplinary opportunities for scholars from business and related areas to add to its ongoing explication.

The Dan, Ihlen, and Raknes chapter contributes to the explication of issues management and political public relations discourse in general by identifying how framing affects the process, especially strategic framing. They distinguish among variables that shape the likelihood of frame success (frame expertise), the ties of political actors and others during the strategic framing process (framing coalitions vs. framing contests), and what the outcomes of those interactions are for news media, public opinion, and policymakers. We suggest more research in this area, to move beyond looking at framing as a strategic process to also consider its

normative impacts on the political process. Great potential also exists in examining strategic framing in all four quadrants of the interaction–engagement matrix in public relations.

Given our view that political public relations should guide organizational behavior and action, another important theme throughout the book is the importance of ethics, professional values, and standards. Both professionals and scholars alike should be cognizant of concerns regarding the potential positive and negative impacts of political public relations at both the normative and practical levels. For example, questions such as how does political public relations affect the marketplace of ideas and political participation should be addressed, as well as how does it assist candidates in winning elections or interest groups in staging political protests. A single model of ethics or professional values is unlikely to emerge, yet a potential framework for pursuing the study of ethics in political public relations could be to look at intentions, means, and ends. Most ethical theory and systems fall into one of these three arenas, so this could serve as a starting point for ethical analyses in political public relations contexts.

A major setting of political public relations where reputation management is most prominent is in crisis communication. The Coombs chapter asserts that, when referring to the definition of political public relations in the prior edition of the book, “this definition includes the importance of reputation for political public relations, a concern shared by traditional public relations. The emphasis on reputation is even more pronounced in organizational crisis communication as the main theories in this field feature reputation.” In his chapter, Coombs develops a series of propositions by comparing corporate and political crisis communication management research. Specifically, he argues that political crisis managers – compared to corporate managers – typically blame the crisis itself at a higher rate than other factors for responsibility, engage in framing battles more frequently, are more likely to use crisis exploitation, are more likely to try and function as heroes, are more likely to engage in auto-communication (when external messages are also used to increase confidence of internal audiences), and are more likely to try to take advantage of crisis anxiety. In comparison, corporate crisis managers have greater risk of damage if they do not meet stakeholder expectations and are more likely to use a strategy of reassurance during a crisis than their political crisis manager counterparts. He also proposes that political crises get more media attention than corporate crises and use greater levels of dramatization. Empirical work testing these propositions is needed to further advance our understanding of both political public relations and corporate communication.

Concluding Thoughts

Given the major trends in globalization and digital communications, the importance of political public relations in society will continue to expand. It is our hope that empirical research and theoretical models will keep pace to

improve our understanding of this critical component in democracy and civil society. As a heuristic device, we propose the *interaction–engagement matrix in public relations* introduced earlier suggesting that reputation and relationship management and network theory perspectives offer useful frameworks for studying the phenomena, depending on the level of interaction between political organizations and target publics (Hutton et al., 2001; Men, 2015). In conclusion, a major aim of this volume is to serve as springboard for additional research in this interdisciplinary area of public relations, political communication, and political science. The expansion of knowledge awaits.

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