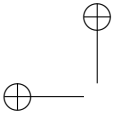


Gisela Gonçalves, Ian Somerville, Ana Melo (Editors)

# Organisational and Strategic Communication Research: European Perspectives

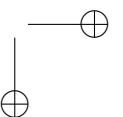
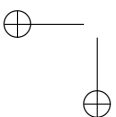






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# Organisational and Strategic Communication Research: European Perspectives





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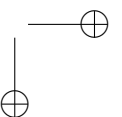
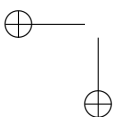
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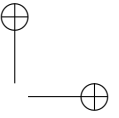
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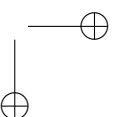
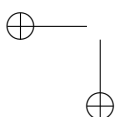
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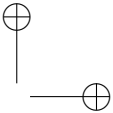
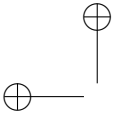




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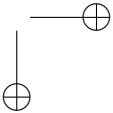
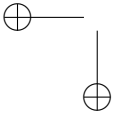


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## Introduction

Created in 2006, the Organisational and Strategic Communication Section of the European Communication Research and Education Association (ECREA) aims to promote an active and critical dialogue among scholars involved in the study of Organisational and Strategic Communication (OSC) and to propose new research topics and debate concepts relevant to the interdisciplinary growth of this field of studies. At the 4th international ECREA Conference in Istanbul (24-27 October 2012), the OSC Section approved more than 40 presentations and 10 posters. Under the conference theme, “Social Media and Global Voices”, the proposals referred to the influence of different forms of public communication, including Public Relations, Advertising, Branding and Internal Communication. With the selected papers in this volume, we attempt to keep alive the debate initiated in that conference and to foster the work of the OSC Section members in other themes as well.

The diversity represented in this collection, not only in respect to the Section members’ nationality but also in theoretical and empirical approaches, is certainly one of the most salient features of the ECREA OSC section identity. Moreover, we believe that the heterogeneity of the authors’ origin (Denmark, France, Italy, Northern Ireland, Portugal, Romania, Russia, and The Netherlands) as well as the spectrum of themes under analysis shows how organisational and strategic communication research in Europe is widespread and full of vitality.

Adela Rogojinaru, from the University of Bucharest, and former chair of the OSC Section, opens the book with “Narcissist markets and public relations: Reflections on the post-recession role of PR”. In this article, the author states that the economic crisis period not only has a negative impact on societies but may also lead to a more consistent moral behavior due to alterations in public expectations. Her argument is that the decrease in the narcissist behavior of the market leads to the rise of public relations in their socially genuine sense of engaging public relationships, based on mutuality and accountability of actions.

The following article, by Arlette Bouzon, professor at Toulouse III University, is an interesting contribution that promotes academic literature on organisational communication in French. Examining underlying epistemological foundations, the past chair of the ECREA OSC Section discusses how





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communication phenomena has turned out to be a recurrent theme in France, leading to a growing body of scientific output.

The organisational and communicational crisis theme is central to the articles of different authors in this collection. More specifically, Alessandra Mazzei and Silvia Ravazzani, from IULM University, Milan, and Daniel Morten Simonsen, from the Aarhus University in Denmark, contribute with articles on the relation between Internal Communication and Crisis Management. Mazzei and Ravazzani use a case study approach to highlight how employee communicative actions and companies' internal communication strategies may "mitigate the negative effects of crises". Somonsen discusses the link between communication and resilience in organisational crisis. More precisely, Simonson explores the various roots that create organisational resilience and in view of the different understandings of the resilience-phenomenon, develops a typology of resilience.

The crisis theme is also relevant in the article entitled "Feedback nightmare: organisational communication reactions to digital critic exposure". By analyzing how corporate and political organisations deal with critical reactions to their communication in digital platforms, Ana Duarte Melo and Helena Sousa, from the University of Minho, Portugal, discovered common traits in organisational behavior during crisis situations. That is, that organisational communication reaction during critical situations, namely in social media, is mainly generated by patriotic claims.

Social media research continues at the center of analysis in the two following articles, authored by German and Dutch researchers. Assuming that social media changes the organisational realm and requires an organisational strategy capable of adapting to a changing environment, Natascha Zowislo-Grünewald and Franz Beitzinger, from the Universität der Bundeswehr München, alert us to the need for a revision of the common understanding of strategic corporate communication, both for political and business organisations. In particular, as they stress, because the ability to plan communication has been reduced. W.B.Vollenbroek, S.A. de Vries and E. Constantinides, from the University of Twente, present a study entitled "Identification of influence within the Social Media". Based on a literature review and a Delphi study, the authors constructed a model for the identification of the "social media corporate reputation influencers model". The model assists in our understanding of how social media has an impact on corporate reputations.

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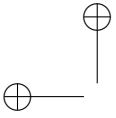


The corporate reputation and legitimacy theme, but now from a CSR perspective, is also central to the contribution made by Gisela Gonçalves, from the University of Beira Interior, Portugal. More concretely, the researcher examines the links between communicating CSR and public relations both from a theoretical and practical perspective. Drawing on data from interviews with Portuguese PR practitioners, the author endeavors to foster the debate over current issues and assumptions on the difficulties of communicating CSR in a socially skeptical environment.

The richness of approaches in the field of Organisational and Strategic Communication is well evidenced in the articles that follow. The study by Charis Rice, Ian Somerville and John Wilson, from the University of Ulster, Belfast, features an original contribution to political public relations literature. Drawing on data from elite interviews with government information officers, special advisers and journalists, the paper analyzes their perspectives on the impact and role of special advisers in Northern Ireland's devolved, power-sharing government. In the ensuing article, "Crisis Communication under Terrorist Threat: a Case Study of Counterterrorist Operation in Chechnya", Elena Gryzunova, from MGIMO-University, Russia, places counterterrorism, an under-researched theme in the literature, at the center of analysis. Based on internal government documents, she studies crisis communication and media relations from the Information Policy Department of the President of Russia between 2000 and 2004, during the counterterrorist operation in the Chechen Republic.

Finally, the last article of this book focuses on a classic theme in Public Relations Studies – that of Media Relations. More precisely, Health Media Relations. The co-authored text by Teresa Ruão, Felisbela Lopes, Sandra Marinho and Rita Araújo, from the University of Minho, Portugal, focuses on cancer news research, following the perspective of information sources and having as its basis the Strategic Communication framework. The results indicate that health officials and institutional sources are predominant as a result of strategic communication actions which gives them a powerful voice as news definers.

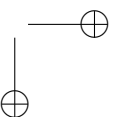
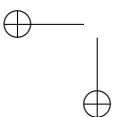




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To conclude, some words of thanks are due to the LabCom Editorial Team, who from the very beginning supported the production of this book. The editors would also like to confirm that all texts, as well as the use of any copyrighted material, are the sole responsibility of the respective author(s).

Gisela Gonçalves, Ian Somerville and Ana Melo,  
November, 2013





## Narcissist markets and public relations. Reflections on the post-recession role of PR

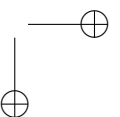
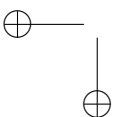
Adela Rogojinaru  
*University of Bucharest*

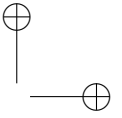
**Abstract:** The overall idea of our approach is that economic crises have not only a negative impact on the societies. Considerable social turbulence drives often to a more consistent moral behaviour in terms of public consciousness and responsibility. In the given context, we would like to examine the roles of public relations in the context of economic recession. We would call the present post-recession time a period of “fall of economic narcissism”. Our proposal is composed of an integrative approach based on theoretical considerations and some qualitative inputs obtained through structured interviews conducted with public relations managers, with the aim of concluding if public relations practices have changed in the last years of economic recession, due to moral concerns and alterations of public expectations.

**Keywords:** public relations, crisis, economy, social changes.

### Some arguments

**E**CONOMIC crises have major consequences at the social level, contributing to the deterioration of the moral tissue of any society. At the same time, it opens new ways of acting and raises new combative attitudes. Starting from May 2009, Romanian economy faced the peak of the economic crisis and recorded by the end of the year an economic decline of 7%, about 700 000 redundant persons and about 133.000 closed firms (BIZ 2010: 77). During 2010, the authorities took additional consolidation measures including a temporary 25% reduction in public wages, a 15% reduction in social spending excluding pensions and an increase in the main VAT rate from 19% to

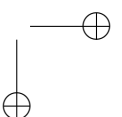




24%<sup>1</sup>. The economy was expected to turn around in 2011, with real GDP forecasted to increase by 1.5% (European Commission [EC], 2011). The decline of the economy and the loss of public trust in the central governance seem to be interconnected in the times of crisis. The European Commission, through the Eurobarometer 74 from November 2010 launched the analysis of the public trust on European Governance showing that “the belief that the EU is best able to take effective action against the effects of the financial and economic crisis is held by majority of respondents in 18 Member States. It has been most widely voiced in Greece (37%), Bulgaria (36%) and Poland (35%). Respondents in the UK, Sweden and Romania mostly trust their national government (40%, 34% and 29% respectively)” (EC, 2010).

Besides the political actions at the EU level, our reflection has been also stimulated by the revived discussions around personal responsibility of the governors (in both political and corporate sense) that came up after the Enron company failure in 2001 and continues to the present time. Some authors such as the French scholar Christian Salmon called Enron one of those “entreprise récitante” that surrounds its business environment with a mythical presence (Salmon, 2008, pp. 101-107). Even before the Enron era, other scholars indicated acute changes in the power culture of the contemporary world. In his book related to *The Fall of Public Man*, Richard Sennett (1978) refers to the charismatic appearance of the narcissism in the contemporary societies: “narcissism is the psychological rationale for the form of communication we have called representation of emotion to others, rather than shaped presentation of emotion” (Sennett, 1978, p. 335). This is conducting to the “tyrannies of intimacy”, a false appearance of emphatic attitude towards publics: “It is retribalization. The term “urbane” and “civilized” now connote the rarefied experiences of a small class, and are tinged with the rebuke of snobbism.” In his early century essays, Max Weber (as cited in Gerth and Wright Mills, 2009) had defined the falling (although significant) power of charisma in shaping the public conduct of modern societies: “Charisma, as a creative power, recedes in the face of domination, which hardens into lasting institutions, and becomes efficacious only in short-lived mass emotions of incalculable effects, as on elections and similar occasions. Nevertheless, charisma remains a highly

<sup>1</sup>At present (beginning of 2013), the Romanian economy is expected to slightly rose with a projected rate of 1,2%, according to the World Bank estimation. Cf. <http://www.worldbank>, and <http://www.worldbank>.



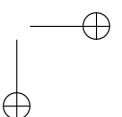


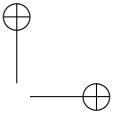
important element of the social structure, although of course in a greatly changed sense” (p. 262). The rise of charisma and the fall of narcissism represent the state of a society in crisis.

### **Critical issues of public relations in the crisis world**

The current economic crisis is not a new phenomenon for the post-modern world. We ought to say that post modern times have been a period of turbulence, producing unexpected risks and crises. The “prophecy” of Francis Fukuyama (2002) on the “great disruption” is part of the scenarios about the fall of modernity as we knew it and the emergence of a new era of economic exchange and moral recovery that we can only speculate about. The raise of the network societies do not substitute our social need for hierarchies, or the need for (just) economic exchange (despite its relative morality). From this point of view, one should note that the world “public” applied to the “network” (sphere or society) is meaningless, due to the desegregation of communities and formal groups that traditionally define all forms of public participation (Castells, 2010). As Castells notes (2010, p. 367): “The rise of communalism, in its different forms, weakens the principle of political sharing on which democratic politics is based”. *Informational politics*, the concept launched by Castells to describe the dissolution of the political sphere into an undetermined media sphere, engage citizens in a different use of public power and deepen the crisis of the contemporary democracy. As far as public relations are concerned, their position is encumbered by the presence of numerous public codes (economic, moral, linguistic, cultural, communitarian, inter-personal), being therefore subject of perpetual transformation. In this context, the discipline does not restrict itself to a linear process of communication (emitter-receptor) or to a triangular one (emitter-third party-receptor), being transformed into a multi-channel and multi-agent communication (networks, communities, platforms).

A rapid re-examination of the historical background of public relations would lead us to reassert that public relations discipline has emerged in the context of the rapid economic growth of the 20<sup>th</sup> century; consequently the discipline is intimately linked with the rise of corporate capitalism at the beginning of the last century. Public relations have been therefore marked by



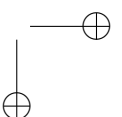
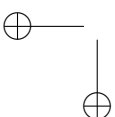


the “narcissist” attitude of both individual capitalists and the capitalist society as a whole. Such a characteristic has been intrinsic to their primary (outdated) image-building function and counts as one of the most effective legitimating instrument for business up to the present moment. *Mutatis mutandis*, this narcissist behaviour can be discussed in connection to the idealistic role of public relations (Grunig, 1992, p. 53), having some beneficial effects over the management of good reputation<sup>2</sup>. For many decades, the word “reputation” in business did not imply any moral principles or consequences, being only related to the public recognition or fame of the entrepreneurs, coming from the perceived value of their exchanged products. Nowadays, new perspectives on corporate relations with the relevant stakeholders are developed in conjunction with the imposition of the Governance Codes, culminating with the OECD official version of the “Principles of Corporate Governance” in 2004 (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development [OECD], 2004). Nevertheless, the ethical principles of corporate governance are not directly linked to the management of reputation or public relations, despite the fact that indirect consequences appear at the branding level while measuring the brand equities. To give an example, the OECD paper on “Corporate Governance and the Financial Crisis. Conclusions and emerging good practices to enhance implementation of the Principles” (2010) does not refer to neither public relations, nor reputation; as for the term of communication, it is used twice, once in the occurrence of internal communication and decision making (p. 6), and secondly to express the need for “effective communication with shareholders” (p. 18).

What kind of influence the actual crisis exerts over the public relations industry? It is our argument that public relations lost to certain extent their narcissist response to business as well as their idealistic function, and started to connect better in the sense of a “radical social role” (Grunig, 1992, p. 52). At the same time, public relations developed new functions and roles, among which a clear personalised or individualised approach to the clients, via social networks (Bailey on “me media” in Tench & Yeomans, 2010, pp. 308-314). On the other hand, we noted that debating on the economic crisis has stimu-

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<sup>2</sup>It is well known that by “idealistic function” James Grunig refers to an optimal symmetrical practice, which is mostly desired in the academic views. According to our view, the idealistic function is embedded in the capitalist roots of public relations, alongside with its pragmatic role.





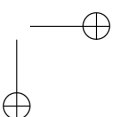
lated additional concerns about the paradigmatic changes of the discipline<sup>3</sup>. As regards the core notions and concepts, there is a subject of scrutiny over the use of (public) “relations” versus (interpersonal) “relationships” (Kelleher, 2007). The examination of public relations discipline from the perspectives of the *Stockholm Accords* also indicates the trend of consolidating their strategic functions and roles, and we consider that such position was directly or indirectly influenced by the impact of the economic crisis on the actual practice of communication management (Global Alliance, 2010). Moreover, the importance of evaluation and measurement of the communication programmes and campaigns becomes crucial in defining strategic corporate priorities, which is an additional argument for examining the key functions of the discipline of public relations<sup>4</sup>.

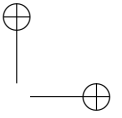
### **Crisis public relations and the economic logic**

The role of public relations and corporate communication as a whole increased constantly during the last 30 years, first as a consequence of the diversification of the range of organisations using PR consultancy, and secondly, in the last decade, as a result of the priority given to corporate transparency and corporate social responsibility. Davis (as cited in Cottle, 2003, pp. 28-30) reports on the increase of the number of professionals as well as of the services in the UK, but the same phenomenon seems to happen all over Europe, including Eastern Europe, in which fast adoption of the public relations practices occurred in politics and business. If we follow the developments of European Public Relations exposed by the annual reports of the European Communication Monitor (Zerfass et al., 2010, 2011, 2012), it becomes evident that the strategic position of public relations has been consolidated over the last two years in spite of the global crisis or as a result of it. Therefore we could say that the present practice of public relations, unlike their past, is rising against the fall of the economy, on different grounds, mostly moral or civic by nature. The tendencies of European Public Relations disciplines and correlated fields

<sup>3</sup>The motto of the work of Naomi Klein on “The Shock Doctrine” (2007) is taken from an Argentinean novel of César Aira and states that: “Any change is a change of the paradigm”.

<sup>4</sup>See among others Barry Leggetter, *Evaluation Important in Recession*, March 2009, <http://www.instituteforpr>, retrieved April 2011.

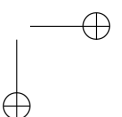




of practice show a significant increase of corporate social responsibility (CSR) and sustainability until 2013 (Zerfass et al., 2010, charts 64-65), confirming that new forms of community bounds will be formed through either social media or by diversified online communication with various publics (chart 69).

It thus appears that the decline of business consolidated the power of communication between the surviving actors, and such phenomenon emerged from the contradiction between the amplification of the crisis effects and the sporadic use of institutional strategies in dealing with those effects. As James and Larissa Grunig outlined in their series of lectures during the year of 2010, all the disastrous cases of corporate or political crisis showed that public relations were not involved at all in responding to the critical issues: “We have less examples of organizations where public relations was involved in decision making and management made better decisions so that the issue or the crisis didn’t occur. What we really need are case histories of successful examples when public relations has been involved and an issue was dealt with effectively” (Grunig & Grunig, 2010).

Various scholars, including awarded economists such as Stiglitz (2008) have debated over the excess of the economic neo-liberalism. If one attempts to connect neo-liberal economy and public relations, it appears that the communicative preference of neo-liberalism would be the use of spin doctoring and propaganda (methodological arguments by L’Etang, as cited in L’Etang & Pieczka, 2006). The crisis of the neo-liberal model of the capitalism (which seems to confirm the Marxist dialectic on the self-destruction of the capitalism) could be either seen as having a direct impact on its favourite discipline (beside marketing) – namely public relations – , or else, as a chance for public relations to emancipate from marketing and detach from any other market/business driven disciplines. In spite of the fact that the business-driven model is the one supporting the theory of excellence in public relations, the use of public relations spreads massively outside the business world. Moreover the transformation of the public relations’ functions – from image building to reputation management and nowadays to the moral response to critical issues – determine a change of ethics in public relations, from commercial pragmatism to mutual commitment and empathy (Jahansoozi, as cited in L’Etang & Pieczka, 2006, pp. 79-80). In spite of the fact that new media have brought and continue to boost large opportunities for international business, the emergence of the social networks determine a line of development to a



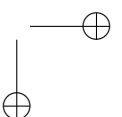


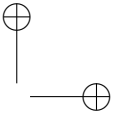


more culture-driven model, public relations practice being determined more often by the values of local communities (Cf. Curtin & Gaither, 2007, p. 70, quoting Fenner et al., 1998, while referring to the “power of moral suasion” during the smallpox eradication campaign of the World Health Organisation in the Western African countries) and by the new rituals of the online interest groups (Cf. Kelleher, 2007, on “peer-to peer public relations”, pp. 43-53.)

Therefore to the question whether the public relations follow or not the economic logic, it becomes evident that the discipline evolves against the economic pressure. In a rather recent paper of R. Lawniczak (2010), which we have retrieved online, the question of the “vanishing economic roots or public relations” is strongly claimed (with examples that go back to the Great Depression of the 1929’s), although the business-driven model is largely accepted as part of the inner functions of public relations (Baines et al., 2004; Rogojinaru, 2010; Curtin & Gaither, 2007; Tench & Yeomans, 2009). Explicit or implicit, the economic role of public relations should be put under an attentive scrutiny. The accentuation of the measurement and evaluation approach to public relations also raises numerous hopes for separating the discipline from its narrow marketing directions. The contradictory tendencies regarding evaluation, incorporated in the European Communication Monitor in 2010 (Zerfass et al.), were confirmed by the public relations firms in Romania, which are concerned with the quantitative assessment against business indicators and media exposure, but, at the same time, more aware of new forms of qualitative measurement of the personal value of their clients’ investment, by means of direct responses via online platforms and networks or by informal research (Rogojinaru, Vasile, 2011). The demarcation line is not visible yet. In Eastern Europe, public relations have been destined during the 1990s to support the introduction of the capitalist relations, while at the present moment the discipline becomes the main tool to express concerns about public needs (sometimes genuinely, other times simply compliant to the legal obligations), as shown by the raise of CSR practices in the last years<sup>5</sup>.

<sup>5</sup>For information about directions and case studies, see the comprehensive website [www.responsabilitatesociala](http://www.responsabilitatesociala). A recent multi-annual (2007-2010) project coordinated at the national level by the national School of Administrative and Political Studies (SNSPA), the University of Bucharest (UB), the Academy of Economic Sciences (ASE), and The Chamber of Commerce and Industry of Romania (CCIR) ended in 2010, see the dedicated website [www.comunicare](http://www.comunicare). As for the subsector of SMEs, a National Report on Romanian SMES has





## **New directions in public relations. Romanian examples**

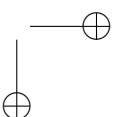
It is one of the premises of this paper that public relations have been changed by the economic crisis. Yet we did not know how much in our Romanian context this change affected the public relations industry and how long the effects would last. Some qualitative data have been collected in the year of 2011 as part of a small research project among 13 Romanian Public Relations firms and 2 corporate departments of multinational companies located in Bucharest<sup>6</sup> (Rogojinaru, Baluta, 2011). The analysis used a purposive sample. The group was formed by general managers of public relations agencies and departments sharing common features such as visibility in the market, cohesion and flexibility of the teams, and their declared innovative vision. There has been no distinction operated in respect to the functions of the departments versus firms of public relations. The interviews have been conducted individually and aimed at collecting responses and comments for seven major topics: the role of the public relations professionals in the context of economic crisis; the consequent changes of the client-firm relations as regards the increased/decreased call for consultancy; the priority domains of public relations consultancy during the last two years; budget modification compared to the reference year 2007; adjustments in media relations; the effects of the economic crisis on overall reputation of the public relations firms; recommendations for priority domains in the 2011.

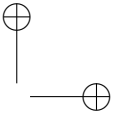
The interviews have been addressed to the general managers of the firms or departments and the responses were convergent, therefore it was possible to outline some views or tendencies at the corporate level. In general, the overall capacity of the firms was affected by the oscillation of clients' degree of trust; indeed they were less inclined to invest large budgets for basic functions (like

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been published by the CCIR in 2007, as a result of a project coordinated by KMU Forschung Austria and funded by European Commission, Enterprise and Industry Directorate General.

<sup>6</sup>Most of the activities of about 30 major public relations firms are concentrated in Bucharest, due to its economic dynamic and to the concentration of national media and lobbying activities. As regards relevant reporting, 21 major agencies have been listed for 2010, a reference year for the peak of the economic crisis in Romania, together with 30 PR companies, [www.victorkapra](http://www.victorkapra). 34 companies have been listed by Forbes Romania in 2011, out of which 14 with profits over 1 million euro, [refresh.ro](http://refresh.ro). 32 digital companies were listed by Forbes Romania in 2011, [refresh.ro](http://refresh.ro). The digital market continues to grow in power during 2013 by regrouping of major firms, according to blogger views, [www.manafu](http://www.manafu).



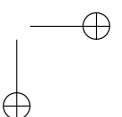


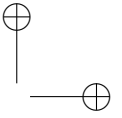
publicity) and more interested in investing creatively in critical issues and single target publics, with less resources and higher concentration of effects. The regime of campaigning changed from the previous “show off” strategy to “talking to people” approach via online media and social networks. Most of the practitioners agree that the role of the practitioner has been transformed from being a growth strategist to acting as a tactical person in applying techniques for corporate “survival” and adaptation. Therefore the *creativity* in public relations emerged as a miraculous promise, forcing both firms and clients to adjust to reality, call for long lasting effects, be more prudent and flexible, use the emotional and the imaginative capacity of publics (being more *expressive* than *impressive*), and call for more partnerships with publics themselves. With reference to the last aspect, a distinct effect of the crisis was the acceptance by the clients to actually invest in social media, not only for the budgetary reasons, mostly for being closer to indefinite problems and publics in the digital era (Rogojinaru, 2011).

In connection to each topic of questioning, the main points of the practitioners’ appraisal of the situation seemed to be optimistic as regards the future of the public relations industry in Romania. The role of the practitioner varies from a support function, for helping the management to commence the proper research of the issues, to a strategic function of issues management and crisis response.

The client-firm rapport and the amount of requests for consultancy decreased in the second semester of 2009 and first part of 2010 due to the fact that media market dropped with almost 40%, and mostly because of the decline of print media (except of specialized business newspapers and magazines) and the subsequent cuts of the budgets for publicity (as reported annually by Initiative Media Romania in 2010, 2011, 2012)<sup>7</sup>. Nevertheless major corporate clients continued to ask for consultancy by renegotiating the value of the contracts, by recalibrating the volume of their activities and by agreeing communicative solutions with less expensive and more personalized media like

<sup>7</sup>According to the Media Fact Book reports, 2010 edition, the media market for publicity in Romania decreased in 2009 by 37% in net value reaching a lower level than in 2006. All media have been impacted as follows: print – 55%, OOH – 40%, TV -34%, radio – 28%, cinema and internet – 19%., [www.mediafactbook.ro](http://www.mediafactbook.ro). The trend continued in 2011: print dropped 8% compared to 2010, OOH with 7%, Radio with 5%, and TV with 4%. Online grew with 30% and continues to grow, [mediafactbook.ro](http://mediafactbook.ro).



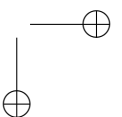
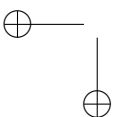


social networks. To rediscover “simple effective” solutions was the headline of the strategy. The market continued with a slight increase in the second half of 2010 and first semester of 2011.

On the whole, we observed that the strategic efforts went towards *simplicity*, a concept largely used in marketing in the early 2000 in response to the new digital era (Cristol & Sealey, 2000). Public relations spontaneously followed the simplicity trend, by adopting simple integrated solutions, reducing the complexity of events (slight decline was also indicated for event management in spite of the fact that it has been for the last decades the dominant public relations tool in the Romanian market). Getting closer to the publics was expressed among the priorities of 2011 practices. Consequently, the clients and the agencies continue to accumulate important know-how (which was limited before 2009) in engaging in conversational type of public relations, e.g. viral buzz and word-of-mouth tactics stimulated by combined techniques of instant messaging and internet communications via iphones or similar. These local findings were also consonant at the European level: the results of European Communication Monitor show that 46,3% of the responding professionals (compared to 53% in 2010) expressed that “coping with the digital evolution and the social web” remains the most important challenge in communication management in Europe until 2015 (Zerfass *et al.*, 2012, chart 54).

There were some other interesting remarks on the media relations, besides the evident rise of social media, namely the reference to the aggressive attitude of the traditional media during the first wave of crisis. Some managers commented on the high level of media hostility, which created additional problems in the process of targeting their news stories. Due to reduced media landscape and to the virulence of the remaining press, most of the media strategies in public relations campaigns during 2009 aimed at counteracting the journalists’ search for news about bankrupt business. In such conditions, press conferences were difficult to organize for reaching favourable press coverage.

As for the budget, the interviewed managers did not indicate exact percentages or weight in financial loss. By corroborating the answers, we conclude that the public relations campaigns and programmes during 2009-2010 were rather cost-effective, with limited financial resources compensated by a higher intellectual engagement. The vast majority of the respondents highlighted the positive side effect of the crisis for having stimulated the agencies to aban-





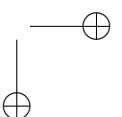
don their routine and start a learning process, adapting to new situations and generate innovative solutions.

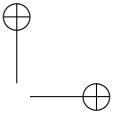
As regards the reputation of the public relations profession and practice during the crisis years, the respondents have been all in agreement that the profession gained in both credibility and usability. Compared to other communication disciplines (e.g. advertising or journalism), public relations manifested a superior capacity to adapt to the clients, according to the responses to the interviews. In fact, this position should have been verified by an inquiry of the actual portfolio of the agencies in the last two years, but the agencies show discretion on their accounts, therefore it was quite difficult to assert an absolute gain in reputation. However, if we compare with the European data of the European Communication Monitor, such statement seems to respond indeed to an increased interest of the organizations for introducing communication activities trainings and practices, and for a better positioning of public relations at the strategic level within organizations (Zerfass *et al.*, 2010). Counseling activities were also getting priority in the corporate requests, some managers declaring that their role became often that of a strategic companion for the client. There was no comment on the possible (negative) consequences on loosing the technical advantage of the discipline as a result of this personalized approach, so we conclude that this “human side” of the discipline is perceived as a professional advantage rather than a risk.

In conclusion, the main findings of this exploratory research were confirming our theoretical premise on the fall of the narcissist behaviour of the market, and along with it, the rise of public relations in their social genuine sense of engaging public relationships, based on mutuality and accountability of actions. The data are insufficient to assert the net disengagement from the economic roots of public relations; nonetheless the pressure for disclosure, transparency and sincere partnerships is noticeable.

## **Towards a post-economic era of public relations?**

Etymologically, public relations denote a hybrid science of economy (meaning originally in Greek the *administration of the household*) and society (referring originally to the member associations or societies, in Latin, or even “companies” in the modern meaning of the word). In that sense, a post-





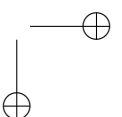
economic era would mean the orientation towards the values of membership and relationships. However the economic grounds are not yet negligible.

Ławniczak & Ławniczak (2009) argue that public relations role in the post-recession era calls for a new “econo-centric” approach, in which public relations regain their virtues and idealistic function of symmetrical communication and help (the State !) in the effort of gaining control over the devastating effect of the deregulated neo-liberal markets<sup>8</sup>.

In many aspects, the studies or the expert declarations about the effect of the recession on public relations (Chartered Institute for Public Relations [CIPR], 2010, or Grunig & Grunig, 2010) argue that the economic decline determined a professional shift of public relations, with probable effects for the entire paradigm. For the moment, the most debated issue refers to various strategic usages of new media and to the interconnected partnerships with marketing disciplines such as CRM or relationship marketing, irrespective to the outcomes of the post-recession (CIPR, 2012). More research would be required to address the interlinked results of the post-recession and what we might call the post-economic era of public relations. The fact that our micro-analysis was conducted in an Eastern European economy might lead to a misrepresentation of the changes of the profession. According to the European Communication Monitor 2010 (chart 22), practitioners in Eastern Europe expressed more satisfaction as regards the quality and stability of their jobs compared to professionals in Western or Southern Europe (the later report the lowest level of job satisfaction). This higher level of intrinsic motivation is a strong drive for professional change. Moreover, the (recent) tradition of public relations in Eastern Europe is not rooted in the business utilitarian logic but connected to ideology (in forms of political or corporate propaganda) and publicity (through media exposure). This aspect might be significant or not for the future of public relations in the respective countries. Post-recession will have global but also specific impact in the regions and countries, according to their corporate governance model and the valorization of human capital. Since the early 1990s, the deterioration of the human resource value within corporations came in a disastrous combination with the severe deregulating of markets. A higher increase in the value of human capital will probably bring a better

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<sup>8</sup>The whole discussion is not clear and it becomes even more confused at the end of the paper where the authors claim (interrogatively) the “revival of political economy”, the connection of which to public relations remains unexplained.





value for public relations, based on the prediction that "... when companies emphasize the importance of multiple stakeholders – customers, shareholders, and employees – their performance exceeds that of companies whose focus is narrower, although one must treat these results with caution" (Jacoby, 2005, p. 98). As Benjamin Friedman (2005) explains "questions about economic growth are not a matter of material *versus* moral values [...]. But economic growth bears social and political consequences that are morally beneficial as well. Especially for purposes of evaluating different courses for public policy, it is important that we take into account not just the familiar moral negatives but these moral positives as well" (p. 14). Economic crises contribute to accelerate prudent corporate behaviour and more transparent governance (some solutions for reducing the democratic deficit in Stiglitz, 2008).

In the CIPR Report on the State of the profession (2010), evidence is shown that: "it is a positive indication of the resilience of the profession that there are plenty of areas of expected growth in spite of the economic downturn. The greatest areas of expected growth in the next five years across the board are in online reputation management (73%), strategic planning (51%) and crisis management (43%). This is undoubtedly due in part to the fact that the financial crisis has led to companies and organisations needing reputation and crisis management services even more than they would in 'normal' economic times." Indeed these areas of applications confirm the orientation of public relations towards achieving intangible and symbolic assets for the organizations rather than a disposition for setting materialistic targets for them. The practice will confirm or not this prediction. For the moment, it is only a matter of expert opinion.

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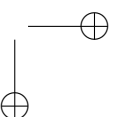
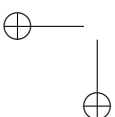


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# Theoretical approaches in organizational and strategic communication: A review of the French academic literature

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**Abstract:** Studies and research work devoted to organizational and strategic communication (OSC) had, until the last fifteen years or so, remained marginal, but during that period they have emerged to become a major focus for analysis by a growing number of researchers in the Information and Communication Sciences (ICS). In the present article, we review works covering organizational communication, focusing on the existing scientific literature on the subject and privileging those references that are likely to inform our thinking on the subject under consideration. We shall seek to give an overview of French language works in organizational communication taking a special interest in the underlying epistemological foundations. Our focus will deliberately be brought to bear on one of these aspects that the specialists concerned call “organizational communication”<sup>1</sup> relating specifically to the communicational phenomena that exist within organizations as this is indeed a recurrent theme leading to a growing body of scientific output.

**Keywords:** organization, communication, functionalism, interpretativism, positivism, french-speaking academic literature.

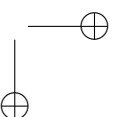
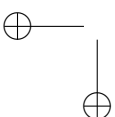
## Introduction

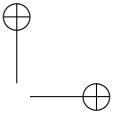
**S**TUDIES and research work devoted to organizational communication had, until the last fifteen years or so, remained marginal, but during that period

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<sup>1</sup>French researchers have readily adopted a straightforward, literal translation of the term *Organizational Communication* as used predominantly in American works.

*Organisational and Strategic Communication Research: European Perspectives*, 23-45



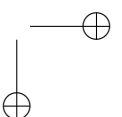


they have emerged to become a major focus for analysis by a growing number of researchers (e.g. their development within the ECREA section since 2009) in the Information and Communication Sciences (ICS). They occupy ever greater ground in theoretical debates relating to organizations that had hitherto been covered by neighboring disciplines such as sociology and/or management. Initially limited to the world of business, they have gradually opened out to organizations in general, meaning any established social unit that conducts a set of activities oriented towards defined goals, as with clubs and associations or local authorities, for example. They now address both communication processes observed and the strategic means employed. A large number of empirical studies have been devoted to the issue.

Although there is an abundant scientific corpus on the subject, it does not, however, benefit from a unified theoretical and methodological basis (even were such a project thought to be desirable). As with the Information and Communication Sciences to which it belongs, within which scientific issues mobilize a host of paradigms, theoretical references and investigative methods, the study of communication both within and by organizations constitutes a space of still fragmented problematics; here, research is being conducted into multi-dimensional explanatory models against a background of criticism and transcendence of the dominant models.

However, enacting a confrontation between works conducted by French-Speaking researchers and abroad over the last few years evinces a certain number of constant dimensions, such that the field of research that has emerged around these issues has become, over time, the locus for the articulation of a certain number of shared problematics.

In the present article, we shall review works covering organizational and strategic communication, focusing on the existing scientific literature on the subject and privileging those references that are likely to inform our thinking on the subject under consideration. We shall thus be led to re-direct our attention to the conceptual and theoretical origins of the communication and organization couple. We shall seek to give an overview of French language works in organizational and strategic communication taking a special interest in the underlying epistemological foundations. Our focus will deliberately be brought to bear on one of these aspects that the specialists concerned call “organizational communication” relating specifically to the communicational





phenomena that exist within organizations as this is indeed a recurrent theme leading to a growing body of scientific output.

## **1. Organizations and communications: fragmented academic works with constant dimensions**

More than an activity in the extensive meaning of the term (at the crossing of the technical, the economical and the social), communication can be indeed considered as one of the founding principles of any social life: it contributes to the processes of exchanges between individuals and therefore constitutes one of the essential modes of self-realization, identity construction and/or “secondary” socialization of individuals (in the meaning of Shepherd and Luckmann, 1966). It leads to a diversity of speech, sometimes caricatural, and symbolizes quite well what is at play in the different social worlds, in particular the professional ones. Today, they mainly concern the processes of communication, the cognitive and social phenomena connected to them and are at the heart of numerous debates.

But when this research on the communication of and in organizations offers the academic researcher a wide range of questions which differ depending on the studied object (a content or a process), and vary according to its finality (describing a situation, understanding a mechanism or explaining a functioning). To bring to the fore a better understanding of the phenomena to be studied, they call on different sorts of knowledge, stemming in particular from sociology, management or psychology. Its investigations feed on multiple methodological experiments. We suggest the reader to question the foundations of the link between communication and organization, but, first of all, the present specificities of this field of research.

### **a) Organizations and communications: an infinity of scientific compositions**

For several years now, organizations, in particular companies, have been confronted to a context of globalization, to a national and international competition (potentially culturally “violent” in the case of privatizations and the desinstitutionalisations), to a globalization of the business sectors, to increa-





sing financial requirements as well as recurring financial and economic crises. This entails the need to think all these phenomena in a collective way. Running a race for productivity, these organizations adapt their structures and forms: extension and productive decentralization, structuring through networks, outsourcing, subcontracting... The transformations resulting from the relation of employment (flexibility, employability, precariousness...), the weakening of the working collectives, the new modes of management (competition, autonomization and responsabilization, evaluation...), the increase of workintensity (with the cult of urgency), of communication strategies, as well as the emergence of new organizational types (by project), the proliferation of Ict's (creating among others effects of "electronic leash" or of cognitive overload)... make them more isolated but paradoxically dependent, multi-committed and likely to undergo paradoxical orders.

Today international research concerns the contents or modalities of the acts of communication or try to understand the role of communication in working situations in all sorts of organizations (companies, clubs, associations, local authorities...). They deal with the discursive construction of the context and/or the situation at work, work being then defined as a situated action, a communicational activity in itself.

Whatever the question, research in communication of organizations concerns the combination of a theme (what to study?) and of a purpose (why?) which forces the choice of an approach (how to proceed?) knowing that an infinity of compositions exist. It is for example necessary to respect the criteria of scientificity of any scientific work, to define the theoretical object and the field of empirical phenomena in a clear way. To prove its abstract relevancy and not be considered artificial, its study must also be confronted with the pluralistic questioning and with the debates on standards. Besides, for the corresponding research project to be fertile, it needs to demonstrate its heuristic power (possibility of producing recognized new facts), but also to produce new questions or new ways of asking old ones while resisting the quarrels of the rest of the scientific community.

Finally, it needs to demonstrate a capacity for growth (the enrichment of the notions and models taken into account) without questioning the concepts, hypotheses and methods which define it. Yet the theoretical and empirical research, carried out in these places of power called organizations, face a lot of obstacles, moulded by uncertainty and dependent of the local contingencies.







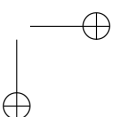
Rare are those which did not meet any difficulty during their implementation or were able to apply a pre-established plan without modifying it slightly! Besides, the presence of the researcher in such a group of actors influences the behavior of the observed subjects, and its continuous participation to everyday life eventually alters its own perception. Besides, the scientific world is more and more called upon to solve problems of social order, forcing it to observe an unstable object with multiple evolutions. That is why these studies on communication in and on organizations cannot refer to a unique theoretical and methodological base, so long as such a project should be encouraged. They still call on diverse communicational problematics and mobilize a multiplicity of paradigms, theoretical references and methods of investigation. Today, they appear as being a space of fragmented problematics reinforced by the search for explanatory pluri-dimensional models. . . with sometimes a background of criticism and overtaking of dominant paradigms.

But the mosaic of the contributions published in the French-Speaking Academic Literature is not without coherence: strong points and fertile paths emerge. The confrontation of lived experiences with the works of researchers from different backgrounds brings to light a certain number of constant dimensions, so that the field of research which emerged at the junction of questionings (on communication policies and their effects, on the processes of communication observed at the level of the work collectives or on the analysis of the interactions at work) seems to be the place for a certain number of common problematics with foundations enriched by multiple contributions.

For that, let us now indicate the various works mobilized and/or recalled in contemporary French-Speaking Academic Literature.

### **b) Communications and organizations: an American origin**

In organization theory (Rojot, 2005), “communication” (an already polysemic term) turns out to be a portmanteau word that has frequently been used, in their writings, by the researchers concerned, in much the same way as terms like “command”, “control”, “persuasion”, “propaganda”, “data processing”, “negotiation”, “coordination”, “interaction”, “retroaction” or “information”. All organizations need to have available to them useful and reliable information from various sources, both internal and external, on a permanent basis, with a view to shaping strategic decisions, the development of knowledge and the





skills of personnel, preservation of the heritage and finally the very survival of the entity concerned. Due to this, communicational issues relating to the organization are multiple.

Its study as an object and observable reality constitutes a phenomenon of Anglo-Saxon, mainly American, origin, that emerged shortly after the United States entered the Second World War. The years 1942-1947 are thus considered to be the years of gestation (Redding, 1985) during which the term “communication” appeared ever increasingly as such in a number of specialized publications. With the war over, one of the main concerns of American companies and researchers working on organizations seems to have been to obtain an ever higher level of production at ever lower cost. One of the assumptions adopted at that time was that once employees are informed of business realities, they will co-operate, work harder and as a result be more productive. A number of articles, heavily influenced by the human relations current, were then published over the years 1946 and 1947 conveying the image of a rational, omniscient manager confronted by individuals to be managed, who are hierarchically dependent. As Roethlisberger explains (1945), in any organization there are two basic social processes, the first relating to accompanying the organization’s fundamental objectives and the second relating to “spontaneous” social processes called “informal organization”.

In 1947, Herbert A. Simon, Nobel Prize economist in 1978 and recognized theoretician, considered that “communication is the essence of organization” in the theory of organizational behavior. A few years later, in 1951, Bavelas and Barrett published an article entitled “An experimental approach to organizational communication” in which “Organizational Communication” became an issue for the first time, with the expression hinging around three dimensions, the message content, the techniques and the transmission channels or networks. This was to be followed by a first compendium of texts published under the title “Management-Employee Communication in Action” in which certain authors made a distinction between internal communication and external communication while others evoked organizational communication and interpersonal communication. In 1959, Sexton and Staudt published a review of the literature under the general heading of “Business Communication”, showing that out of the 178 titles listed, only one, however, used the expression “Organizational Communication”.

It was only in the 1960s that “Organizational Communication” adopted a





marked tendency to seek to rely on “objective” empirical data and thus acquire a strongly assertive scientific status. Moreover, Redding considers 1967 to be the year the expression “Organizational Communication” was officially accepted as an emerging discipline (Conference on Organizational Communication, 1967) accompanied by a substantial specialized bibliography (Voos, 1967).

Then, a few years later, in 1968, Lee Thayer published a work entitled “Communication and Communication Systems” that, deriving inspiration mainly from the formulations of systems theory, was considered to be a thoroughgoing theoretical treatise on communication in organizations. The organization is henceforth considered to be an entity comprising players with multiple competences, motivations and strategies that it seeks to harmonize. Working from a mosaic of roles and statuses, it seeks to obtain an overall dynamic to make the most of human potential while also fostering innovation. It is presented as a structured and hierarchized space for knowledge in which communication intervenes permanently to generate knowledge and experiment with new work processes.

The communication-organization couple now appeared to be clearly identified and was to burgeon over time; researchers (Simon, Weick) now reckoned that “without communication, there can be no organization” (Euske, Roberts, 1987). In their works, French-Speaking Academic Literature mobilizes these various references from America.

After this all too brief historical assessment of just the North American works on the subject, it is appropriate to shed some light on the situation of French-Speaking Academic research before investigating the main assumptions of the works conducted.

## **2. Organizational Communication in French-Speaking Academic works: a central topic with a plurality of conceptions**

In French-Speaking Academic literature, organizational communication constitutes a central topic of research for a growing number of researchers in the Information and Communication Sciences (ICS), a scientific discipline that was institutionally created at the beginning of the 1970s (Boure, 2002), that



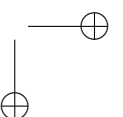


associates “information” AND “communication”, unlike the American works cited previously.

**a) Organizational Communication: A central topic in the Information and Communication Sciences (ICS)**

This evolution is in part related to the initiative taken by members of the French Society of Information and Communication Sciences (SFSIC) to set up in 1994 a study and research group in communication inside organizations, named Org & Co. Since its creation, this body has provided a theatre for debate in the French language where various schools of thought can confront their issues, their methodologies and results (Bernard, 2002). Thus, various meetings, workshops, round table discussions and conferences have led to fruitful exchanges and given the participants of various origins an opportunity to confront their approaches and pool their conceptual resources and investigative methods.

Many issues are covered in a field of science that is increasingly affirming a distinctive difference with functional and/or managerial approaches. These concern both the content, the place of information (and its processing) and methods for acts of communication and the role the latter plays in work situations. But they can also relate to communication policies and their effects (including public relations, advertising, etc.), the resources implemented, the communication process between players and interactions within organizations and cognitive and social phenomena attached thereto. Its fundamental issues have taken on a sharper outline and been enriched over the last few years, especially through research into multidimensional explanatory models against a background of critique to transcend the dominant normative and propositional paradigms. Thus, organizational communication is increasingly considered to be a complex process in which the meaning of the messages is not a given prior to interaction but a construction in a culturally marked situation that depends on the way the process itself unfolds in time and in space. Being both structured and structuring, it is no longer reduced to a single instrumental perspective, where the player’s cognitive work is underestimated, but highlights the performance of individuals in their respective situations. Organization and communication are constructed interpedently, are the emer-

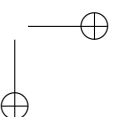
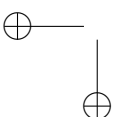




gent realities that form an inseparable couple that can only be grasped through an interdisciplinary approach.

Against this background, a large number of researchers have for a number of years devoted their efforts to studying project-structures that are ever more frequently encountered in organizations (Bouzon, 2006). The project as an uncertain situation oriented towards the future beckons us to ponder the procedures for co-operation between social players whose roles and interests diverge, within a restricted space and for a limited duration. But how do these individuals with their different skills and qualifications manage to co-operate within a project? The players' actions seem to be influenced by their representation of the situation. Collective action then involves a collective representation or at least a minimum of consistency between the representations present. Like any organized group, the project is a social construct that can only exist and survive if it manages to integrate the diverging strategies of its members in a collective production. In this situation, "the object of the process (the goals aimed at, the "thing" to be accomplished, etc.) and the process itself (how each becomes useful to the other . . . ) are built up by mutual influence. In such processes, those involved cannot readily delimit their contributions and must orient their activities in relation to how the project evolves or the activities of the other players". What are the links that the players maintain amongst themselves and how do they interact? The project can only be justified in the eyes of its initiators if its cognitive production capacity exceeds that of its members considered in isolation. How then are "distributed" actions, conducted simultaneously by different players and each mobilizing a language and tools specific to a skill, and activities during which the stages of reasoning are shared out between different partners allotted? As innovation results increasingly from multiple activities, the players are forced to go beyond their original specialization to recombine their knowledge in hybrid domains, moving from the centre towards the outskirts of their skill and transgressing disciplinary boundaries towards the specialists of other skills.

Works currently being conducted summon up all sorts of knowledge and feed off multiple methodological experiments, according to the objects studied (content, situation, process, etc.) and the end goal (describing, understanding, intervening, etc.) of the research. The corresponding works are covered by many empirical studies addressing the content and/or procedures for acts of communication, their effects, their role in work situations or the discursive





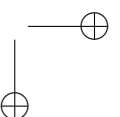
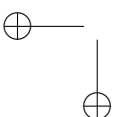
construction of the context in particular. However, in this framework, besides the objects and concepts specific to the ICS, the researchers concerned are constantly confronted by questions relating to investigative methods in a context where their conceptual choices have to be accommodated with the constraints of research out in the field. For conducting an investigation into structured organization is no easy matter (Delcambre, 2000). In addition to difficulties gaining access to the enterprise first of all and then the players involved, the researcher's position is a delicate one, with the considerable risk of confusing the attitude of research with that of consultancy. In this situation, the pressures are keenly felt and the danger is a real one. Moreover, given that the social protagonists neither have a vocation to be interviewed, nor to account for themselves, nor yet to give out information on themselves, gathering relevant data results from what is often a delicate negotiation process. A large number of publications consider how to tackle the issue, rightly considering that no work in the Human and Social Sciences (HSS) can dispense with the need for a debate as to the empirical tools used (Bouzon, Meyer, 206; 2008).

### **b) Organizational communication research: between extension and fragmentation**

It would appear that two features characterize organizational communication nowadays, extension on the one hand and fragmentation on the other.

This rapid extension, as corroborated by the number of researchers now listed can come as a surprise in so far as the first collective work of the group Org&Co (Le Moenne, 1998) aimed at bringing hitherto isolated and dispersed researchers together and sought to have the scientific field of organizational communication recognized in its own right. But the subject of organizational communication is all the more compelling in its attraction to researchers in that, in the current context of globalization, organizations are increasingly adopting operating rules that release them from the conventional framework and timescales that modify the place and role of communication.

This is accompanied by a phenomenon of fragmentation that results from the disintegration of the fields of specialization and the influence of competing paradigms. These processes show through in bibliographical references mobilized by researchers in their works, as revelatory of the links they weave with

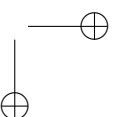
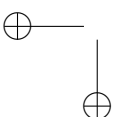




the scientific community. We are thus witness to a burgeoning of the number of references coming out of the field associated with those from a host of other disciplines. With this double evolution, organizational communication is coming to terms with a pluralism of explanations that while not impairing its epistemological validity, does create a certain “marginality” (Dogan, Pahre, 1991) that proves to be creative and provides a source of innovation. Indeed, the mosaic of existing works is not lacking in consistency. Most works fit into the more general questioning relating to the place and role of organizational communication that, considered as a collective form of intelligence (in the meaning given to it by Lacoste and Grosjean), still remains an enigma even if it has generated a variety of models and has already mobilized a large number of researchers in various disciplines.

Though their openness, organizational communication in general now offers the researcher a wide gamut of questions, that differ according to their themes (studying a content, analyzing a process) and vary with respect to their purpose (describing a situation, understanding a phenomenon or explaining a way of functioning), enlisting all sorts of knowledge and taking sustenance from a variety of methodological experiences. Because methods do not belong to an established science, they are procedures whose use is left to each individual’s appreciation. The diversity of the approaches, without rejecting one a priori, appears as being a source of wealth and discovery in a field still far from being formalized. That is why, confronted to the sometimes impassioned speeches, we do think that there is room for a scientific approach and reading of the relationship and place of communication in and/or on organizations, by trying in particular to go beyond the underlying classical oppositions: external communication versus internal communication, professional communication (public relations, advertising) versus interpersonal communication, media communication versus public relations. We decided not to restrict ourselves to a single frame of established structure, but to select a reflection on the theoretical bases.

In the next paragraph, we shall attempt to get to grips with the two best represented epistemological paradigms usually identified in organizational communication, the functionalist one and the interpretativist one, as they each correspond to a particular vision of the organization and communication, structuring the resulting conclusions (Giroux, 1994) .





### 3. Two schools of thought usually identified in organizational communication

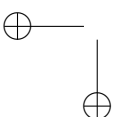
While it appears necessary to define the characteristics of these two perspectives that allow communicational phenomena to be studied, one should however avoid opposing them in confrontations of a too simplistic nature that would artificially segregate transmission from interpretation, as both the latter are constantly interwoven in exchanges. Our argument will deliberately only concern two of the mainstream paradigms: positivism, which is dominant in the theory of organizations, and interpretativism that traditionally takes a stand against it, while excluding the third, constructivism. Indeed, this latter has for long been evinced from the vocabulary of the Information and Communication Sciences (ICS), and if over the last few years it has re-emerged, this is within the scope of an unresolved polemic that we feel moves out of the bounds of the present article. This latter paradigm also shares a certain number of hypotheses with the interpretativist paradigm.

#### a) The functionalist school

Associated with the positivist paradigm, also referred to as the “ballistic vision of communication”, this school of thought considers social reality as a real phenomenon (“ontological principle”), endowed with an existence outside the subject that observes and/or makes it (“objectivity principle”), with a determined functionality and laws for success that are specific to it (“principle of the hardwired universe”) and that can lead to the optimum solution (“least action principle or unique optimum”).

Against this background, Nicole Giroux defines communication as “integrative”, meaning behavioral with a collectivist vision of the organization. As an example, she takes the manager who ponders the links binding him or her to the organization and their degree of integration within the organizational collective.

Goldhaber (1986) considers that, with this approach, organizational communication is the process of creation and exchange of messages that, within a network of interdependent relations, has to adapt to the uncertainty of the environment. His works conceptualize the organizational structure by distributing the roles and actions of individuals into properties, setting levels, departments







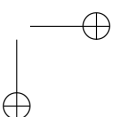
and borders. The organizational structure is then perceived of as a container of entities such that the social structures exist prior to individual actions.

One of the basic postulates of the functionalist school is the notion of determinism. Here we find the telegraphic model of communication that retains an instrumental proposition of communication and is based on the imposition on the players involved of laws and technical schematics. According to this perspective, individuals are products of the environment and respond mechanically to external stimuli. They are essentially reactive. The unit for analysis retained is the organizational entity with its social, psychological and economic characteristics perceived as static entities rather than social processes. The organization is a concrete structure in which activities arise and communication is a tangible substance that travels upwards, downwards and sideways. Messages are seen as physical forms that have spatial-temporal positions and exist independently of an issuer and recipient.

Thus, for functionalist researchers, the essence of communication lies in the transmission of messages and the study of the effects produced by communication channels.

Within this trend, beyond the works specialized in identification (George Cheney), analysis of networks (Peter Monge; Noshir Contractor), structuration theory (Robert McPhee) or conflict resolution (Cynthia Stohl), two approaches seem to characterize the functionalist school (Axley, 1984; Daft, Langel, 1984; Jablin, 1987...), mechanistic approaches on the one hand and institutional approaches on the other.

The highly influential mechanistic perspective perceives human communication "as a transmission process" in which a message travels along a channel from one point to another. It stresses the communication channel as a means of transmission and also a link between encoding and decoding functions. This perspective conveys four basic postulates, quasi-causality, transitivity of communication functions, the conceptualization of materialism and reductionism. Quasi-causality is centered on the link between prior conditions and future conditions: this is a linear vision of the communicational process. The second, transitivity of communication functions, considers that communicational concepts are linked in a chain of relations, while the mechanistic perspective treats communication as a material entity, meaning a message that becomes a concrete substance with spatial-temporal properties. Lastly, communication can be broken down into sub-units. This reductionist conception





implies that concepts are better understood if the whole is broken down into parts while also identifying and measuring the latter in order to check the linear causal chain lining them together.

The institutional theory meanwhile constitutes the alternative approach of the functionalist school. The institutionalization concerned involves all the processes whereby obligations or current issues take on status in thought and social action. It postulates that organizations comply with the expectations of the environment and adapt. In return, the organization is legitimized by the environment that provides it with its financial resources and recognizes its social status.

These two conceptions are often taken up by practitioners and are frequently to be found in manuals, especially those covering internal communication.

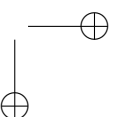
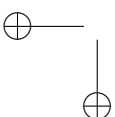
Let us now take a look at the second school of thought, the interpretativists.

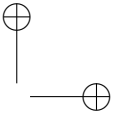
### **b) The interpretativist school**

The interpretativist school considers society as a construction made by the subjective experiences of its members. Through their skill in communicating, individuals are capable of creating and constructing their own social reality through their words, symbols and behaviors. Organizations are then seen to be processes that develop through the changes in behavioral patterns.

The interpretativist school takes an interest in the creation of significances shared by common actions and events. The meaning of words and actions is interpreted symbolically through mutual experience rather than by the sender's intention and the recipient's filtering. Behavior develops through social interactions, changes as the social context changes and forms a new entity (Fischer, 1978).

This vision (Putnam, Pacanoswski, 1983) has implications for the way the organizational structure is conceived. Indeed, structures are treated as a complex, semi-autonomous set of relations that take human interactions as their origin. The members of the organization use their actions and their interactions in order to create departments, levels and procedures that have direct consequences on daily behavior. The organization chart becomes symbolic since it represents relations in processes of change but it is also structural as it has an effect on the daily actions of the members. As the interpretativist



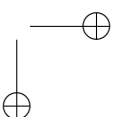


school treats organization as a set of groups with different interests and diverging goals, the vision it entertains of it is no longer unitary but pluralist.

The interpretativist method fits in with a relativistic vision of the world. It seeks to come to an in-depth understanding of a particular phenomenon. Considering the organization to be a social construction of reality, the organizer becomes in turn a communication process. In that same vision, communication is not just another organizational activity, but creates, legitimizes and re-creates the social structures that form the node of the organization (Hawes, 1974).

This approach integrates communication in a dynamic and interactive organizational system where reality is jointly constructed by the players and in which the company's employees constitute the social body, interacting with the organization; in this, it refers back to the progress made in what it has become customary to call the "Palo Alto School". Works from the French scientific community, both for ICS and Management Sciences, mostly refer to a few publications, abundantly quoted, by L. Putnam and Karl Weick. It should be recalled that the latter's research emphasizes the performance of players in situation and the place of communication in daily interactions. It considers communication as an active part of a process of organizing that contributes to a permanent re-generation of the company's structures and the links between individuals. Analysis of situations is thus no longer merely performed from the *ex post facto* reconstruction of phenomena but is based on observations, highlighting the effective operation of the organization in real time.

We could refer to other works, including the post-modern, critical approaches of Dennis Mumby for example. However, we shall simply mention in passing (and all too briefly) the discursive trend that takes on board Foucauldian and critical approaches, conversational approaches (Gail Fairhurst) and narrative approaches (Yannis Gabriel's storytelling). Since the highly innovative works of James R. Taylor (Taylor, Van Every, 2000) on what is referred to as the constitutive approach of organizational communication (Putnam, Nicotera, 2009), a number of researchers have initiated various ambitious and fruitful research programs aimed at exploring the key role played by communication in the constitution of organizations (Cooren, 2000; Robichaud, Giroux, Taylor, 2004). According to this approach, communication manifests itself essentially according to two modes, one, conversational, refers back to the event-related dimension of any interaction and corresponds to what Tay-





lor and Van Every (2000) call the site of emergence of organizational reality, while the other, textual, expresses the iterative, repetitive dimension of any exchange, reflecting the surface of the organization (Fauré, Bouzon, 2010).

To summarize, the functionalist perspective considers communication along the lines of the telegraphic model as transmission from a transmitter to a receiver, whereas the interpretivist perspective reckons that communication is co-constructed by players endowed with processual, cognitive, affective and strategic capabilities during processes of interaction involved in building up meaning; the organization here becomes a product of communication. Indeed, the latter takes part in the process of interaction between individuals and contributes to constructing meaning, with reality. It is not just a one-off or isolated transmission of a message, but also an instance of actualizing individual and collective representations that brings into play previously worked out meanings. It is the locus where the work issues and the players' identities are negotiated. Through communication, the human collective regulates itself, institutionalizes itself or, conversely, brings itself into question and transmutes. Communication thus appears as a complex process in which the meaning of the messages is not a given prior to the interaction but a construction in a culturally marked situation that depends on the progress of the process itself, in time and in space (Bouzon, 2006).

Admittedly, communication is also a product of the organization (both commercial and non-commercial) when it results from a deliberate choice to address an outside (public relations, event creation, advertizing, direct marketing direct, etc.) or internal (company newsletter, Intranet, meetings, etc.) audience with or without the help of the ICTs, but there is a continuum between the two of them that is now clearly apprehended (Bouzon, 2005).

## Conclusion

Whether considered as an institutional or commercial discourse and/or the fruit of the permanent interaction between its members or partners, organizational communication is now the focus of special attention from researchers. The latter take as much interest in its meaning as in the strategic resources implemented, the communicational processes and cognitive and social phenomena attached thereto. In doing so, they develop explanatory models, whose



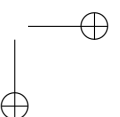


inspiration sometimes derives from other disciplines, that prove to be strongly dependent on their own specific culture.

One of the ambitions of the present article is to offer the reader, whether the professional or the layman, an overall representation of some of the significant research work in this fragmented field. The difficulty in such a project, in a necessarily limited framework, is then to attempt to restore its internal plurality without falling into the trap of a fragmentary vision, and to reconstruct the evolution of issues and the renewal of objects considered without offering too simplistic a representation. To enable the reader to forge an enlightened opinion as to the interest and scope of the works conducted, we were obliged to go beyond the chronological record of works to attempt to find a correlation between them and position them in relation to their respective epistemological fundamentals.

If, through this overview, organizational communication appears in its plurality, the concerns of researchers referring to it are nevertheless increasingly tending to converge around a certain number of basic questions. Thus, there can be seen a growing influence of works referring to the theories and methods of Organizational Communication in line with the trend of the American works of Putnam, and the strong development of those relating to conversations, texts and agentive functions along the lines of Taylor and Cooren (Fauré, Bouzon, 2010).

By way of a conclusion, it is appropriate to look at the question of the respective status of science and the researcher when confronted by social expectations, a question that nowadays fuels a good many debates in the ICS disciplinary field as in others (and all the more so in organizational communication). For there is a social demand, taking the form of public or private commissioning of research, studies or interventions, on which researchers' works increasingly depend in France for reasons of the concomitant financing. In this situation, how to move on from a social demand, from a practical issue, to a broader, more theoretical framework? Is there not here a risk of confusion between the role of researcher and consultant; the researcher being gradually drawn into social engineering? How can we ensure that our human and social sciences remain useful to the individual, the business, and society without being instrumentalized? So, considering the fact that the crux of our various approaches lies where work out in the field and research meet, we shall conclude the present article on the matter of deontology, stressing again





the need for clear ethics and certain bounds to be respected when getting to grips with the world of organizations.

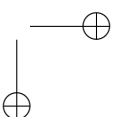
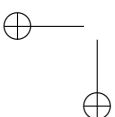
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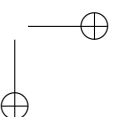
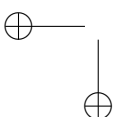


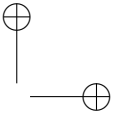
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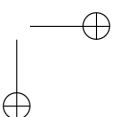
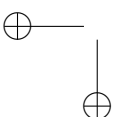


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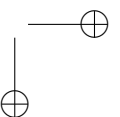
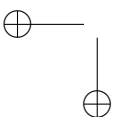
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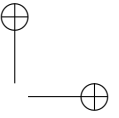
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## Employee communicative actions and companies' internal communication strategies to mitigate the negative effects of crises

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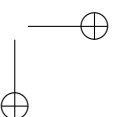
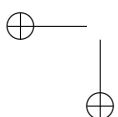
**Abstract:** Can communication with employees lessen the negative effects of a crisis? In the pre-crisis stage, employee communication can strengthen internal commitment, while in the crisis stage it can reinforce the commitment by means of accommodative crisis communication strategies. Employee commitment is at the basis of positive employee communicative actions, like advocacy and positive referrals, which finally protect the company's reputation.

After a theoretical exploration of these issues, this chapter presents first a case study showing how continuous internal communication efforts and factual communication based on managers' and company's actions are crucial in order to build quality relationships with employees. In turn, this leads to positive employee communicative actions when a crisis occurs. Second, it illustrates a survey of Italian companies which examined internal crisis communication strategies during the 2009 global economic crisis, based on a model on possible strategies that range from most accommodative to defensive. The main empirical results show that companies have mostly used defensive internal communication strategies that may damage their intangible assets, namely reputation.

The chapter concludes that employee communicative actions are fundamental in order to protect the company's reputation in case of crises. In addition, during crises it is important to sustain the positive relationship capital developed during the pre-crisis phase by means of accommodative strategies.

**Keywords:** crisis communication, internal communication, employee crisis communication, employee communicative actions.

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## Introduction

**T**HIS chapter deals with the issue of employee communicative actions and internal crisis communication strategies in the context of a crisis. Cognition, understanding and co-operation during crises are affected by employee commitment and expectations, which internal communication can enhance and support before and during a crisis (Gephart, 1993). In addition, employee communication can play a strategic role in protecting other non-material resources in such critical situations and especially in the acute phase of a crisis (Fearn-Banks, 2002; Coombs 2006; Benoit and Pang, 2008), namely reputation (Fink, 1986; Fishman, 1999).

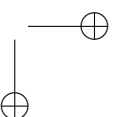
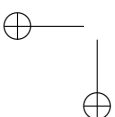
This chapter questions if and how employee communication can mitigate the negative effects of a crisis. To do so, in the theoretical section it analyses two mitigating variables: employee communication for quality relationship building before a crisis occurs; and company's communication strategies during the crisis to protect its reputation and internal trust relationships. Both these variables can enhance employee communicative actions, such as advocacy, that help to minimize the negative effects of the crisis from its first stages to its acute and final phases.

In the second section, this chapter presents main findings from two previous studies. One based on a case study showing how an effective pre-crisis employee communication strategy can lead to positive employee communicative actions when the crisis occurs. The other one based on a survey of Italian companies carried out at the beginning of the global economic crisis in 2009 investigating communication strategies more or less consistent with the need for reputation and trust relationships protection.

Finally the chapter discusses some conclusions and implications for practice and research.

### 1. Theoretical background on mitigating variables

Literature gives evidence to two kinds of mitigating variables of crises damages. The first one is the employee communication implemented by a company *before* a crisis occurs in order to build positive relationships. Such positive relationships, in turn, improve strategic employee communicative actions



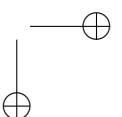


supporting the company during critical events. The second mitigating variable is represented by the internal communication strategies that a company can adopt *during* a crisis, which can vary from less accommodative to more responsible communication.

### **Employee communication before the crisis for trust relationships and positive employee communicative actions**

The importance of internal communication during a crisis, next to the widely explored aspects related to external communication, is increasingly recognized (Frandsen and Johansen, 2010a; Taylor 2010; Mazzei, Kim, and Dell'Oro, 2012). Internal communication can help to prevent crises, support appropriate reactions, minimize damage and eventually produce positive results. In fact, internal communication is relevant, first, for crisis prevention, as it influences organizational climate, culture and relationships, which in turn affect the capacity to implement organizational changes and to solve problems (Taylor, 2010). Second, it helps to manage employees' reactions that affect companies' reputation and communication strategies. Current studies in particular are focused on stakeholders' perspective to predict their reactions to crisis and companies' communication strategies (Fediuk, Coombs, and Botero, 2010). A violation of stakeholders' expectations based on their perceptions of the company promises can lead to negative reactions, like anger and resentment, and cause reputation damage and negative behaviours like ending of the relationship, public complaints, negative word-of-mouth, and even violence (Fediuk, Coombs, and Botero, 2010). For example, employees can affect the company's reputation via word-of-mouth that flows through informal networks (Kim and Rhee, 2011). If employees show to communicate openly and to listen, stakeholders' perceptions of the company involved in the crisis are then positive (Rhee, 2008), otherwise they can even contribute to worsen the critical situation.

In the crisis communication arena there is no dominant sender or receiver, but multiple voices (Coombs, 2010; Frandsen and Johansen, 2010b). In this arena, employees are usually underestimated because they are considered as target publics (Frandsen and Johansen, 2010a; Kim and Rhee, 2011), but on the contrary they hold a critical role (Frandsen and Johansen, 2010a). Their job security, motivation and engagement are at stake, and this affects how they



interpret the company's actions and how they attribute responsibility for the crisis. In addition, employees feel a sense of belonging and identification that influences their efforts in defending or criticizing their own company.

Given the fact that employees engage in both receiver and sender roles, it is important to broaden the concept of employee communication behaviours. Employee communication behaviours (Grunig, 1997) have been conceptualized considering three aspects: *megaphoning*, *scouting*, and *microboundary spanning* (Kim and Grunig, 2011; Kim and Rhee, 2011). Megaphoning consists in voluntary information forwarding or information sharing about organizational accomplishments or problems (Kim and Rhee, 2011). Scouting is conceived as employees' voluntary attention to information, the search for further information during their formal and informal contacts with constituencies, and the sharing and forwarding of the same information within the company (Kim and Rhee, 2011). The integration of megaphoning and scouting generates microboundary spanning, that is defined as "non-nominated (non-designated) employees' voluntary communication behaviours to 1) disperse positive information for one's organization, 2) search and obtain valuable organization-related information from internal and external constituencies, and 3) disseminate acquired information internally with relevant personnel and groups" (Kim and Rhee 2011, 249). This concept is close to that of networking and active allegiance (Mazzei, 2010).

The concept of employee communication behaviours emphasizes the multiple communication roles of employees, especially of those with no specific communication responsibilities. In crisis situations, people in an organization show cognitive, affective and behavioural reactions to crisis (Myer, Conte, and Peterson, 2007). Cognitive reactions, like reduction of decision-making ability, can be measured by changes in the decision-making protocols and organizational goals. Affective reactions, like anger and fear, relate to the diffusion of rumors and consequences on employees' moral and loyalty. Behavioral reactions, like immobility to action, imply visible modifications to the organization's agenda, roles and everyday functioning.

On the whole, employees may act as either advocates or as adversaries of their company. They can support the company and give it the benefit of the doubt, or they can criticise it (Coombs and Holladay, 2006). They are either receivers or senders, and can talk about their feelings and opinions with their





families and friends, or disclose information to traditional or social media (Frandsen and Johansen, 2010a).

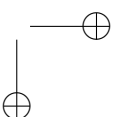
Literature provides a rich overview of employee communicative actions during crises. Employee communicative actions are influenced by the type of organization, the kind and history of the crisis, the company communication and crisis cultures, and the company communication strategy (Frandsen and Johansen, 2010a).

Many studies link the quality of relationships to the communication actions of employees in a crisis. A positive relational history diminishes the attribution of responsibility for the crisis to the company, thanks to the halo effect (Coombs, 2000). In this case, employees tend to act as advocates for their company and do not exaggerate management responsibility or disclose secret information (Kim and Rhee, 2011). On the contrary, when the pride of belonging to a company is negatively affected by a crisis, employees may refuse to be its advocates (Frandsen and Johansen, 2010a).

In other words, good quality relationships between a company and its employees generate trust-related behaviour (MacMillan et al. 2000) which, in case of crisis, lead employees to act as advocates for the company, to keep commitments, to avoid taking advantage or behaving opportunistically, to contradict false criticisms against the company, and to look for occasions to defend or recover the reputation of the company. Communication is a key driver of relationship quality building (MacMillan et al., 2000) and influences employee reactions to a crisis (Myer, Conte and Peterson, 2007).

There is a wide range of employee communicative actions that should be considered in a crisis context and that can be categorized into four categories: explore, interpret, share, and explore (Mazzei, Kim and Dell'Oro, 2012; Mazzei, 2012).

- Explore: ask managers for explanations of the company's behaviour; engage in listening and mutual understanding with constituencies; report to managers about dangers, threats and criticism; value informal communication opportunities.
- Interpret: interpret ambiguous company's behaviour giving it the benefit of the doubt; participate to group discussion to recognize the consequences of the crisis; avoid rumours and ask managers for reliable interpretation; pay attention to the accuracy of meaning attribution; engage





in cross-functional communication in order to spread trustworthy information; attribute responsibility to the company realistically; contribute to problem solution, caring for victims and damage minimization.

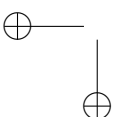
- Share: share arguments with constituencies to support the company's position and reputation; act as advocate for the company; use personal networks for socializing knowledge about the company's pre-crisis efforts and post-crisis accommodative strategies; share data, experience and knowledge with colleagues, in order to increase their awareness of the crisis dynamics; show a sense of belonging and solidarity toward the company; not leak reserved information; avoid aggressive tone of voice, public complaints and negative word-of-mouth.
- Do/performe: activate relations with external stakeholders that are beneficial to the company; suggest business opportunities to managers.

### **Company's internal crisis communication strategies during the crisis**

Crisis communication is a rapidly developing field of research that investigates the communicative responses of organizations to crisis (Coombs, 1998). In particular, crisis communication strategies have been studied considering the possible *rhetorical approaches* in communication and the *situational factors* affecting the choice of the strategy.

Communication can mitigate the negative effects of crisis on reputation and trust through a range of rhetorical strategies. Following Benoit's (1995, 1997) Image Restoration Theory, these strategies are: *denial*, that can be a simple denial of the accusation or a shift of the blame to another party; *evasion of responsibility*, through, for example, a claim that the company lacks ability or has no control over the situation; *reducing the offensiveness of event*, through, for example, minimization that plays down the negative aspects of a situation; *corrective actions*, aimed to restore the original status quo by eliminating the offensive behaviour and by committing to prevent recurrences of the same event; and *mortification*, which involves the full acceptance of responsibility by the company and its formal excuses.

Companies can choose from these five rhetorical strategies in the acute and chronic phases of a crisis (Fink, 1986). Some scholars (Marcus and Go-



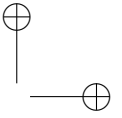


odman, 1991; Coombs 2000; Coombs and Holladay, 2002a) have put crisis response strategies along a continuum from most *defensive*, denying responsibility or evading it, to most *accommodative*, accepting responsibility and taking corrective actions. In the middle of this spectrum are the minimizing strategies, which some studies have shown to be very effective to improve the perception of the company during the crisis (Dardis and Haigh, 2009). However, accommodative strategies are considered the most adequate for protecting reputation (Claeys, Cauberghe, and Vyncke, 2010; Dardis and Haigh, 2009). They are a kind of *responsible communication* because the company shows concern for the victims, takes the responsibility to repair or compensate for the damages and implements concrete actions to eliminate the causes of the crisis preventing new similar phenomena. Actions, in fact, are the primary form of communication (Balmer and Gray, 1999).

The Situational Crisis Communication Theory (Coombs 1998, 2000, 2004, 2006; Coombs and Holladay, 2002b) has identified *situational factors* that can explain the choice of crisis response strategies, based on the concept of attribution of responsibility of the critical event by stakeholders. The attribution of responsibility within a crisis will depend upon factors like the degree of control over the crisis that the organization has, its crisis history and its prior reputation and relational history (Coombs, 2000, 2004; Coombs and Holladay, 2002b). In particular, strong reputation and trust capital with stakeholders developed in the pre-crisis stage can protect an organization during a crisis thanks to the already cited halo effect (Coombs and Holladay, 2006). In any case, during a crisis accepting a certain level of responsibility and taking accommodative actions is expected and interpreted by stakeholders as a signal of responsible communication (Coombs, 2000; Coombs, 2007; Dardis and Haigh, 2009). Such factors, affecting perceptions of responsibility for the crisis, should be considered by communication managers when developing their rhetorical response to a crisis.

All these elements have been used in the development of a model of internal crisis communication strategies, presented in the following section.





## 2. A model of internal crisis communication strategies

The model here presented draws on previous studies (Benoit, 1995, 1997; Coombs, Holladay, 2006; Coombs, 2007), but specifically refers to the internal communication aspects of an organization hit by a crisis.

To classify internal crisis communication strategies, objectives (Myer et al., 1992; Myer, Conte and Peterson, 2007) and contents (Barrett, 2002; Balle, 2008; Aggerholm, 2008) are considered critical elements. In the model, the *objectives* of internal crisis communication, which can operate on a cognitive, affective or behavioral level (Myer et al., 1992; Myer, Conte and Peterson, 2007), have been categorized into *security*, *belonging* and *activating behaviours* objectives. Cognitive objectives tend to reduce uncertainty and increase realistic expectations among employees, thus enhancing a sense of *security*. Affective objectives are directed to increasing identification with and trust of the organization, thus creating a sense of *belonging*. Behavioural objectives aim to sustain employees' commitment in their roles and cooperation to overcome the crisis, thus *activating behaviours*.

The *contents* of internal crisis communication have been categorized as *informative*, *identification* and *factual* contents (Barrett, 2002; Balle, 2008; Aggerholm, 2008) along a continuum that implies an increasing assumption of responsibility (Coombs and Holladay, 2002; Lucero, Tan and Pang, 2008). *Informative* content focuses on figures and the diffusion of information about the situation of the organization and its business. *Identification* content spreads the values and culture of the organization and its perspective on the future. *Factual* content consists of actions to survive the crisis, tangible signs that the organization is taking responsibility beyond simple rhetoric communication.

Their combination generates five possible *internal crisis communication strategies*: *Transparency*, *Cohesion*, *Activation of Behaviours*, *Evasion*, and *Under-Utilization* (Figure 1).

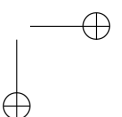
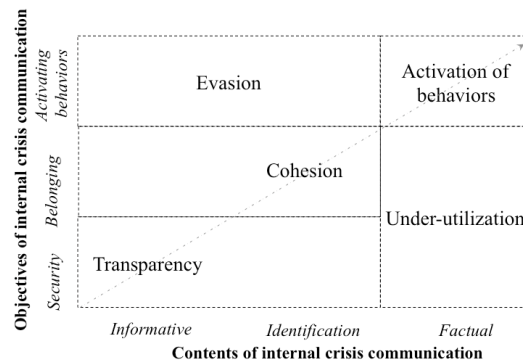
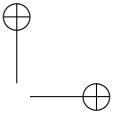


Figure 1: A map of possible internal crisis communication strategies



The *Transparency strategy of internal crisis communication* combines security objectives with informative content, and is adopted by organizations that aim to release information to reduce the uncertainty that is linked to the scarcity of information itself. For example, the organization communicates the reduction of the market share and makes explicit expected behaviours. When identification content is included in the communication strategy, it is assumed that the objective of creating a sense of security will be achieved. The *Cohesion strategy* includes identification content, usually combined with transparent information, to increase the sense of belonging and internal cohesiveness. For example, the organization encourages loyalty through messages based on its solid history and consistent past and present behaviour towards employees. The *Activation of Behaviours strategy* is the most complex and aims to enhance proactive behaviours among collaborators through factual communication that is based on corrective actions (Benoit, 1995, 1997) or accommodative responses (Marcus and Goodman, 1991; Coombs, 2000; Coombs and Holladay, 2002a) adopted to address the crisis. For example, communicating a reward system that engages all employees in gaining new customers. To be effective, the foundations of transparency and cohesion should have been reached before. These first three strategies of the model presume consistency between the objectives and content of internal communication: content is designed to reach the declared objectives.

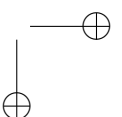
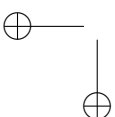
However, it is also possible that companies follow internal crisis commu-



nication strategies that present elements of inconsistency between objectives and content, namely *Evasion* and *Under-utilization of internal crisis communication*. These strategies are the most threatening to quality relationships and reputation with employees. The *Evasion strategy* aims to activate behaviours but does not include a description of actions or the factual communication that could give credibility to explicit and formal declarations (Benoit, 1997; Aggerholm, 2008). Organizations evade responsibility and do not implement concrete actions that commit them to resolving the crisis (Marcus and Godman, 1991; Benoit, 1995, 1997; Coombs, 2000; Coombs and Holladay, 2002a), while they expect employees to respond actively in the face of the crisis. Finally, the *Under-utilization strategy* is pursued by companies that have no real understanding of the role that internal communication can play in times of change (Barrett, 2002). Organizations accept a high level of responsibility and implement corrective actions, but do not try to stimulate and involve employees actively and explicitly, and the organization limits its communication objectives to enhancing a sense of security and belonging.

In the research model, the most accommodative and consistent strategy is the Activation of Behaviours strategy, which, according to the Situational Crisis Communication Theory (Coombs, 1998, 2000, 2004, 2006; Coombs and Holladay, 2002b), should better protect companies with a strong reputation and trust capital. Activation of Behaviours strategy can be considered a responsible crisis communication strategy because the company demonstrates its commitment in overcoming the crisis adopting concrete actions before asking employees' support. Other research has shown that organizations that produce consistent crisis responses will enhance their legitimacy, while organizations that produce inconsistent crisis responses will reduce theirs (Massey, 2001). The least accommodative strategy in the model depicted is the Evasion of responsibility.

Field evidence from previous studies supports the model: a case study highlighting how a continuous employee communication policy enhances positive employee communicative actions during a crisis, and a survey monitoring the internal crisis communication strategies adopted by companies during the global financial crisis in 2009. Main results are described in the following.





### 3. Field evidence from previous studies

In order to understand the role of employee communication in protecting a company's reputation and mitigate the negative effects of a crisis, this section analyses the findings of two previous studies. The first one highlights how a continuous employee communication policy improves positive employee communicative actions during a crisis; the second one shows the internal crisis communication adopted by companies during the global financial crisis in 2009 and their potential effects.

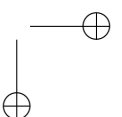
#### a) A case study on employee communicative actions

This case study was conducted in 2011 to explore the contribution of positive employee communicative behaviours during a crisis, which resulted from good quality relationships between the company and its employees cultivated through continuous managerial efforts and internal communication also in the pre-crisis stage (Mazzei, Kim, Dell'Oro, 2012). This experience showed the value of strong trust relationships to corporate strategic management and to organizational adaptability to critical situations.

A very young worker died in an accident at the large diameter tube mill at one of the Company's plant. The Company immediately delivered a press release expressing sorrow and condolences to the operator's family and highlighting "profound consternation that the event took place despite the strong and systematic safety initiatives carried out during recent years" (Company intranet). In addition, the Operations Director explained to a local newspaper that the accident was a defeat for the company, which makes constant efforts to assure maximum employee safety through huge and systematic interventions and training (Press clipping).

Internally, the Company posted comments on the intranet and two articles in the company magazines explaining the dynamic of the accident, the company's position and its sense of defeat, and remembering the worker who died thanks also to his colleagues' and family's memories. At the same time the Company acted concretely by reinforcing its commitment to safety: "The accident is the motivation to accelerate more and more all the activities aimed at decreasing risks in the plant" (Company intranet).

Analysing stakeholders' reactions through press clipping, it appeared that



neither media nor other stakeholders attributed major responsibility to the company for the accident, although public opinion and public concern about workplace accidents were very strong in Italy at that time. For example, a representative of the trade unions was quoted in a local newspaper saying, “The Company is one of the most careful companies talking about safety and has invested a lot in it during recent years, in an industry where the smallest mistake can be fatal” (Press clipping). Another trade unionist emphasized the fact that work accidents are calamities and it is not always possible to anticipate and to avoid them (Press clipping). Also internal trade unions highlighted the strong commitment of the company in safety issues, saying “Safety training and investment at the Company have not been spared during the last years” and claiming that such investments can be ineffective when workers with little experience operate in dangerous areas (Press clipping). After the accident the trade unions called a strike, and an employee interviewed by a local broadcast company said that “The accident happened because of the worker’s lack of experience, despite having attended 170 hours of a theoretical course. But when you are working, experience counts for a lot” (Press clipping). Finally, according to a reporter’s description of the funeral, the priest expressed disbelief at the loss of so young a life and thanked the company for its support to the operator’s family (Press clipping).

This case study shows how positive relationships with employees and stakeholders are strategic in determining reactions when a crisis occurs: “This Company existed for 100 years, trying to build and feed good relationships with employees, communities, and stakeholders in the long term. It isn’t just a matter of communications campaigns but a broader commitment. Good relationships are comparable to plants’ maintenance, without a periodical and careful maintenance the plant would break and stop to produce. The same is with people: you have to take care of your employees and communities and build a strong relationship with them”<sup>1</sup>.

The findings of the 2008 climate survey and the perceptions of the interviewees indicate a positive relationship history that in this crisis has acted as a shield, protecting the company from the attribution of responsibility (Coombs, Holladay, 2006). The company’s relationship building strategy has been effective thanks first to the *use of communication conveyed by the company’s*

<sup>1</sup>From an interview to a manager.





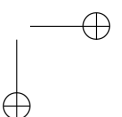
*actions and managerial concern.* The Company was committed to the issue of safety for many years, with commensurate economic effort. Second, the company invested in a *continuous effort on internal communication*, guided by transparency, continuity and consistency.

This case study illustrates that quality relationships are at the basis of positive employee communication actions. Quality relationships rely on the commitment of the company before and especially during a crisis and on transparent and consistent communication that elucidate the company's commitment to face the critical event.

### **b) A study on companies' internal crisis communication**

The model of possible internal crisis communication strategies discussed in section 3 assumes that in order to protect reputation and trust relationships with employees, the most effective strategies are those based on responsible and consistent communication, namely the one in the area of activation of behaviours that could mitigate the negative effects of the crisis. The research model described in Section 3, based on objectives and content of internal crisis communication, was used as the reference framework for a study investigating *the internal communication strategies adopted by Italian companies in dealing with the global financial crisis in 2009*. This study consisted of multiple methods, including exploratory email *interviews* with 13 internal communication managers and 14 employees; two *focus group* involving 12 internal communication managers; a *survey with* a random sample of 135 managers in charge of internal communication strategies (Mazzei, 2009).

Here main results from the survey exploring internal communication strategies are reported. Concerning *objectives*, the majority of companies indicated *affective objectives* (36%) aimed at sustaining a sense of trust and identification towards the organization, followed by *behavioural objectives* (35%) aimed at stimulating employees' behaviours to get over the crisis, and *cognitive objectives* (27%) aimed at generating realistic expectations in employees and increasing their sense of security. Concerning *content*, the majority of companies indicated *identification content* (41%) focused on organizational values and strategies. This was followed by *factual content* (34%) about actions and decisions to sustain the performance, such as the launch of new products, and internal trust and reputation, such as continuous training. Finally, there was

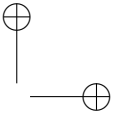


*informative content* (23%) delivering information about the present situation of the company and its business and the consequences for employees. 2% of responses for both questions were not valid.

Companies were then clustered and positioned within the five internal communication strategies of the model. 31% of companies adopted an *Under-utilization internal communication strategy*; 29.3% an *Evasion strategy*; 22.4% an *Activation of behaviours strategy*; 10.3% a *Cohesion strategy*, and 7% a *Transparency strategy*.

These results indicate first that a considerable proportion of the companies have *underestimated the value of internal communication during the crisis* (31% Under-utilization internal communication strategy). They have accepted a certain level of responsibility for the crisis, but they have not involved and activated employees by communicating corrective actions. Second, another substantial group of companies did not accept a high level of responsibility, while they have *pressed employees to act to face the crisis* without supporting them with concrete actions and a responsible communication strategy (29.3% Evasion strategy). Both these inconsistent strategies contrast with previous research indicating that accommodative strategies are the most appropriate to protect reputation and trust relationships (Benoit, 1997; Coombs, 2000; Coombs and Holladay, 2002; Coombs, 2007; Dardis and Haigh, 2009; Claeys, Cauberghe and Vyncke, 2010) and to mitigate crisis adverse consequences and employee behaviours.

The use of inconsistent Under-utilization and Evasion strategies has the potential to generate communication ambiguity, an interpretation gap between what managers try to communicate and what employees actually perceive, and negative reactions and communicative behaviours from employees (Ulmer, Sellnow and Seeger, 2007; Mazzei and Ravazzani, 2011). This highlights a critical point in communication during a crisis, where a company should be able to tell a credible story, which is both sincere and plausible (Heath and Palenchar, 2009), with consistent, timeliness and active communication (Coombs, 1999; Strong et al., 2001; Huang & Su, 2009).



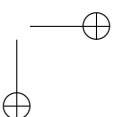
## Conclusions

This chapter has attempted to contribute to the understanding of internal communication to mitigate the effects of crises. Literature about the mitigating variables of the negative effects of a crisis highlights that employee communication is critical before a crisis occurs in order to build quality relationships, as well as during the acute phase of the crisis in order to support and further cultivate the employee relations by means of accommodative strategies and responsible communication. Employee communication devoted to relationship building and accommodative actions and messages can be both considered responsible communications. They can generate further responsible communication from the part of the employees, as they feel supported and loyal to the organization and therefore they act as advocates for their company, do not exaggerate management responsibility, ask for reliable information, and actively suggest to managers opportunities.

Looking at the case study presented, this experience illustrates the effectiveness of the organizational actions and the employee communication policy implemented before the crisis to develop strong and quality employee relationships. In particular, the case study showed that an effective relationship building communication strategy is based on factual communication, i.e. managers' and company's actions, and a continuous and transparent internal communication effort.

Results from the study on companies' internal crisis communication showed a different approach. On the whole companies have not used internal communication as a strategic lever for employee commitment, but mainly adopted evasive and defensive responses that may undermine their trust relationships with employees. These are not responsible communications and can create inconsistent interpretation by employees and negative employee communicative behaviours that may even worsen the crisis situation and the corporate reputation.

In fact, in crisis situations there is a high level of *communication ambiguity* (Ulmer, Sellnow, and Seeger 2007) and a strong demand for *sense-making* (Weick, 1988, 2001). Even if companies develop trust relationships with their employees before a crisis occurs (O'Hair et al., 1995; Coombs and Holladay, 2006), they need to implement responsible communication and concrete actions to give credibility and consistency to explicit messages (Be-





noit, 1997; Aggerholm, 2008), as the positive experience described in the case study shows.

Some managerial implications useful for companies to mitigate the negative effects of a crisis therefore emerge. First, a company should deeply cultivate trust relationships with employees before a crisis occurs (O'Hair et al., 1995; Coombs and Holladay, 2002), accompanied with continuous and consistent prevention efforts and concrete commitment by the company and its management. Second, when a crisis occurs, the company has to sustain the strong relationship built with its employees over time with corrective and accommodative actions and continuous and transparent communication, in order to generate positive communication behaviour. Factual communication, or in other words action, gives credibility and consistency to declarations and explicit messages (Benoit, 1997; Aggerholm, 2008) because it signals the company's commitment (Riley, 2001) and expresses concern towards employees. Concerning communication, a company should privilege accommodative communication strategies that are the most suitable to protect its reputation and trust relationships, which will eventually prevent negative communication behaviours.

On the whole, a responsible communication strategy is helpful to support a company in a crisis from the prevention stage, to its acute and resolution stages, through a consistent renewal discourse (Seeger, Ulmer and Sellnow, 2005; Ulmer, Sellnow, and Seeger, 2007).

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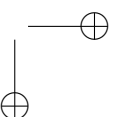
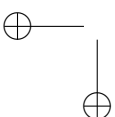
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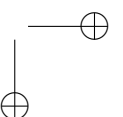


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# Developing the resilience typology: Communication and resilience in organisational crisis

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**Abstract:** There is a growing interest in resilience in internal crisis management and crisis communication. How an organization can build up resilience as a response to organisational crisis, at a time when the amount of crises seem only to increase, is more relevant than ever before. Nevertheless resilience is often perceived in the literature as something certain organisations have by definition, without further reflection on what it is that creates this resiliency. This article explores what it is that creates organisational resilience, and in view of the different understandings of the resilience phenomenon, develops a typology of resilience. Furthermore the resilience phenomenon is discussed against the definition of a crisis as a cosmological episode, and implications for future research is discussed and summarized.

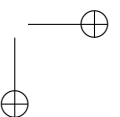
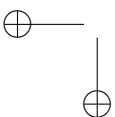
**Keywords:** resilience, communication, organisation, typology, crisis.

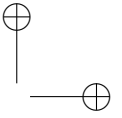
## Introduction

Formally, resilience is the capability of a system to maintain its function and structure in the face of internal and external changes and to degrade gracefully when it must. Resilience occurs when the system continues to operate despite failures in some of its parts. (Weick & Sutcliff, 2007: 69)

**A** SIGNIFICANT part of modern crises management and crisis communication research is based on a normative research tradition aiming at anticipating future crises and developing crisis management plans that fit the scenarios (Johansen & Frandsen, 2007; Coombs, 2007). In recognition of the limitations of this approach and the organisations' inability to foresee all

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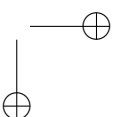


potential crises in a world of constant change, the concept of *resilience* is starting to gain ground in crisis studies (Weick & Sutcliff, 2007; Somers, 2009; Powley, 2009). This increased interest in resilience can be traced back to a discussion initiated by Wildavsky (1988), concerning whether organisational crises is best handled proactively by anticipating and planning in relation to potential crises, or whether to work with the organisation's reactive abilities when the crisis has manifested itself. This discussion has not diminished its currency in light of the global financial crisis and therefore is still discussed in the literature on how crises are best handled (Weick & Sutcliff, 2007). Nevertheless, in literature, resilience is often taken for granted as a distinct characteristic of the organisational system which can be activated and used whenever necessary, with little reflection on how it got there in the first place. Thus the purpose of this paper is to investigate 1) which understanding of the phenomenon of resilience best characterizes the crisis field in 2012, and 2) discuss the phenomenon of resilience from a communicational perspective.

## Methodology

The study is designed as a combined content analysis and literature study, with the ambition of a systematic review of the research field. Data collection is performed on the English abstract and citation databases ScriVerse Scopus and Web of Knowledge. The database Scopus is provided by Elsevier and the database indexes more than 17,500 peer-reviewed journals. The social sciences account for about 5,900 of the journals in the database. In addition to peer-reviewed articles the database contains over four million papers of conference proceedings, making Scopus one of the largest abstract and citation databases (SciVerse Scopus, 2012). For a more thorough review of Scopus selection criteria see Kähler (2010). In addition to Scopus the abstract and citation database Web of Science, is also used as a supplement. Web of Science is provided by Thomson Reuters and indexes approx. 12,000 journals from natural science, social science and humanities (Thomson Reuters, 2012). Scopus and Web of Knowledge complement each other well, since the former can be said to focus on European journals (approx. 45 percent) while the latter focuses on American journals (Petersen & Kampf, 2011).

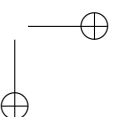
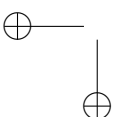
Different approaches to content analysis have been deployed, especially





for the database searching process. Initially it was attempted with a method where resilience served as dependent variable, while crisis and all synonyms for crisis according to The Oxford paperback thesaurus (2006), served as independent variables. Nevertheless the 23 keywords were too complex for a database search. Furthermore, there are differences in Web of Science and Scopus SciVerse search options, For example, in Scopus it is possible to search by keywords, which is not an option in the Web of Sciences database. Because of this diversity an adjusted search strategy that was applicable to both databases was used. In all its simplicity, the dataset for this article is based upon a relatively simple, search for *resili\** and *cris\** in the article title, combined with a limitation to English language peer-reviewed articles. Such a search results in 31 articles on ScriVerse Scopus and 29 articles on the Web of Knowledge. When the two data sets are conflated and duplication removed, it results in a single dataset of 41 articles, of these, nine articles were excluded because they did not contain an abstract. The title and abstract of the remaining 32 articles, which constitute the dataset, was then the subject field for a content analysis.

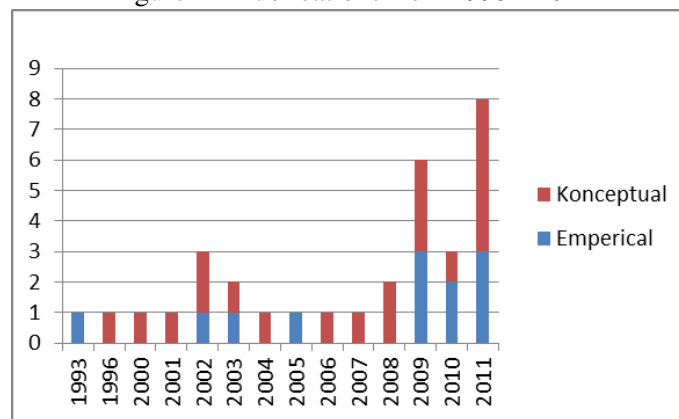
There are different approaches to a content analysis methodology and the field ranges from the qualitative content analysis where the aim is to understand a phenomenon to the quantitative content analysis, which aims to quantify qualitative data and thus make the data subject to statistical analysis. For the purposes of this article the method is a conventional qualitative content analysis, where the title and abstract of all articles were read as a starting point to create an overview. After this categories were generated inductively. The different encodings are thus not an expression of, or the operationalization of a theory, but the conceptualization of an emergent pattern of different understandings of resilience that characterize the data set. Nevertheless, the ambition of this article is greater than simply categorizing the dataset into different categories according to criteria. The purpose of this method is to create categories and emphasize the distinct differences that exist across the different categories, which help toward the development of a vocabulary that is useful to create awareness and explain the different understandings of resilience at a different level of abstraction than the dataset independently provide (Elo & Gyngäs, 2007). As well as drawing up a typology to answer this article's first research question, the content analysis is also used to support the literature and



to select additional articles that serve as the basis for answering the article's second research question.

## Content Analysis – Conceptualization of a phenomenon

Figure 1 – Publications from 1993 - 2011



The total data set of 32 articles published in the period 1993 to 2011 and consisted of 20 conceptual and 12 empirical contributions, divided, as illustrated in figure one. The various research areas represented in the dataset are numerous and include such distinct disciplines as economics, psychotherapy, ecosystems, political science and engineering. It appears from figure one above, that the concept of resilience, combined with some variation of the concept of crisis, is more and more frequently used in peer-reviewed journal articles since 2007. Why this is the case can only be guessed at, but one possible explanation may lie in the global financial crisis. Several of the studies in the dataset treat economic systems in relation to economic crisis, but still the research fields represented in the data set is more diverse than just economics, why this is the case is difficult to provide a clear answer to.

In the overall analysis of the data set, there are examples where resilience is understood in relation to political and economic systems, that is, resilience against economic crises (Wringley & Dolega, 2011; Aiginger, 2009; Fay &

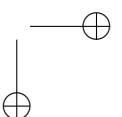


Nordhaug, 2002; de Azevedo, 2009), furthermore there are examples of resilience in relation to organisations (Powley, 2009; Somers, 2009; Edward, 2004) and individuals (Braverman, 1993; Riolli et. al., 2002; Frederickson et. al., 2003). These multiple purposes indicate that resilience can be understood at different levels. Nevertheless, it is difficult to divide the articles because an article can sometimes assess the different levels in regard to how resilience is understood. As exemplified in the quote below:

Authors emphasize that resiliency begins in the individual, as it should; however, obligation, beyond self, allows one to appreciate resiliency as essential to community recovery. (Burkle, 2011:1)

The above quote exemplifies the dilemma; it appears explicitly in the article's abstract that the article discusses resilience at a community level. Yet resilience is understood ambiguously as a phenomenon that operates at both the individual and at a societal level (Burkle, 2011). Thus there are implications associated with the level splitting of the various abstracts in the dataset, because shades of the individual contributions can be lost in such a subdivision. Nevertheless, it can still be argued that resilience is understood at different levels in the dataset, where for example the resilience phenomenon in 12 of the articles is understood in relation to or as arising from human actors. At the same time 20 of the articles in the dataset understand the phenomenon of resilience in relation to, or based on what can be categorized as a system. If we elaborate a little on the two levels, the following can be said to be true:

- Individual level: Articles where the resilience phenomenon is understood in relation to one or more individuals. This may relate to an individual's personal resilience in relation to a critical incident (Sells et. al., 2009) or initiatives that contribute to the creation of resilience among one or more individuals (Berger & Lahad, 2010).
- System level: Articles where the phenomenon of resilience is not understood in relation to one or more people, but in relation to objectified entities, such as a supply chain (Jüttner & Maklan, 2011), an organisational structure (Somers, 2009) or a political and economic system (Borchert & Mattoo, 2010).





An interesting point in relation to the splitting of the dataset into levels is that despite the fact that there are 12 articles at the individual level and 20 at the system level, the empirical research distributes evenly in the two levels with six publications within each level.

From a holistic perspective it makes sense to differentiate the dataset based on level. This kind of differentiating is not an option in relation to an analysis of the different ways the phenomenon of resilience is understood in the data set. It is important to emphasize that the understanding of resilience is far from clear in the various titles and abstracts, either across or within each article. Resilience can in an abstract be understood as the system's adaptability in relation to an incident; while it also is understood as the resistance of the same system in relation to the same event, in the same abstract (Wringley & Dolega, 2011). Nevertheless, adaptability and resistance are not necessarily mutually exclusive understandings of a phenomenon. A system's ability to adapt may be what makes the system exhibit resistance in relation to the previously mentioned incident.

The concept of resilience has different connotations because resilience is an ambiguous concept arising from biology and the ecosystems capacity for self-production and self-preservation and then later adopted by the social sciences, among others disciplines (Wildavsky, 1988; Walker & Cooper, 2011). The concept of resilience can act as synonym for *springiness*, *elasticity*, *survivability* and *robustness*. That the concept is rooted in biology and natural science disciplines can be seen when resilience is used as a synonym for robustness and/or elasticity which refers to properties of a material. Therefore, it is expected that resilience is used and understood in different ways in different abstracts. Nevertheless, there are also some common elements for the understanding of resilience across the data set, as will be evident, when resilience is understood in the context of the abstract as a whole.

There is, as mentioned, different understandings of the word resilience itself, but there can also be said to exist various assumptions of what constitutes the phenomenon understood as resilience in each study. These are influenced by the context in which resilience as a phenomenon is understood in each article abstract. For example, when resilience is understood in relation to a political regime ability to withstand a financial crisis, relative to other regime forms, the implicit argument is that it is the historical and current design of



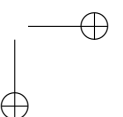




the institutionalized system that creates the resiliency of the system. As exemplified in the quote below:

This paper shows that Malaysia's hybrid approach to authoritarianism has been most resilient, Indonesia's harder authoritarian rule was most brittle, and Thailand's democratic politics displayed an intermediate level of sturdiness, hence delaying – but not preventing – their breakdown. (Case, 2009: 1)

Thus it is not the word resilience, which is interesting and is the subject of this analysis, but the explicit and implicit assumptions about the characteristics of resilience that exist in each abstract as a whole, that is the subject field for this analysis – that is how the phenomenon is understood. As mentioned in the methodology section each abstract is analyzed from an open coding strategy in which each abstract is subject to a content analysis. As an example of this process, the abstract quoted above is used and the analytic treatment of this is illustrated in the table (1):



Citation	Indicator	Understanding
"After the Crisis: Capital and regime resilience in the ASIAN Three" (Case, 2009:1)	Resilience understood as the system's resilience relative to other alternatives	Resilience as a system's resilience relative to other systems relies on the historical and current design of the system.
"A decade after the Asian financial and economic crisis, assessments can be made about the varying capacities of different political regimes to withstand economic shocks" (Case, 2009:1)	The system's ability to withstand economic shock	
"This paper shows that Malaysia's hybrid approach to authoritarianism has been most resilient, Indonesia's harder authoritarian rule was most brittle, and Thailand's democratic politics displayed an intermediate level of sturdiness, hence delaying - but not preventing - their breakdown" (Case, 2009:1)	The characteristics of the different systems are causal explanation of the degree of resilience in the system relative to alternative systems.	
"However, this paper argues also that in trying to explain these varying amounts of resilience, it is not enough to examine the institutions and procedures of which regimes are composed. Instead, in taking a political economy approach, attention is given to prior patterns of capital ownership involving the state, indigenous tycoons, ethnic Chinese entrepreneurs and foreign investors" (Case, 2009:1)	The historical and incremental development serving as additional explanation reason for why a system is more resilient than the alternatives.	

Table 1 – Illustration of the analysis process

This analytical approach is applied to all abstracts in the data set, in order to ensure a structured and systematic analytical approach to the various abstract, which still maintaining a degree of transparency and anchoring in the dataset. The analysis results in a number of understandings of the resilience phenomenon, which can be assembled in fewer and broader understanding categories that can help to describe the different understanding of the phenomenon.

Category	Citation	Indicator	Understanding	Classification
Design	"Supply chain risk effect and knowledge management seem to enhance the Supply chain resilience by improving the flexibility, visibility, velocity and collaboration capabilities of the supply chain." (Jüttner & Makdan, 2011)	Arrangement of the system processes results in a number of effects, which increase the degree of resilience in the system.	Resilience as something a system structural can be designed into	Hills, 2000 Krane, 2002 Fay & Nordhaug, 2002 Anderies, 2006 Boin & McConnell, 2007 Crouse Quinn, 2008 de Azevedo, 2009 Aiginger, 2009 Case, 2009 Burkel, 2011 Gaspanni et. al., 2011 Walker & Cooper, 2011 Schlüter & Henfahrdt-Pahle, 2011 Jüttner & Makdan, 2011 Nemeth et. al., 2011 Wingley & Dolega, 2011
Latent	"When external events disrupt the normal flow of organizational and relational routines and practices, an organization's latent capacity to rebound activates to enable positive adaptation and bounce back" (Powley, 2009)	Resilience as a latent property of the (social) system, which can be activated in the event of a critical incident.	Resilience as something that exists latent in the organization and which are activated spontaneously by an event. Resilience belonging to the system.	Somers, 2009 Zelený, 2010 Johnson & Luna, 2011 Powley, 2009
Relational	"Shared beliefs and narratives that foster a sense of coherence, collaboration, competence, and confidence are vital in coping and mastery." (Walsh, 1996)	Common understanding, narratives and opinion is vital for the development of adaptation and coping strategies.	Resilience as a social phenomenon, related to sensemaking at the individual and the intersubjective level.	Walsh, 1996 Namyłowska, 2001 Walsh, 2003 Sells et. al., 2009 Berger & Lahad, 2010
Traits	"Mediational analyses showed that positive emotions experienced in the wake of the attacks - gratitude, interest, love, and so forth - fully accounted for the relations between (a) precrisis resilience and later development of depressive symptoms and (b) precrisis resilience and postcrisis growth in psychological resources" (Fredrickson et. al., 2003)	Resilience as psychological ability to withstand critical incidents.	Resilience as an individual characteristic qua different personal characteristics and emotions, which can be argued to be more or less deterministic.	Braverman & Paris, 1993 Riotli et. al., 2002 Frederickson et. al., 2003 Pillai, 2004 Edward, 2005 Lating & Bono, 2008 Borchert & Mattoo, 2010

Table 2 – Placing abstracts in broader categories

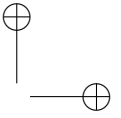
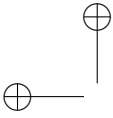


Table two above illustrates the broad understanding categories and presents examples of an analysis sequence from each. It is in this context that one indicator alone cannot justify an understanding category, and there are often several indicators within each abstract, as exemplified in table one. At the same time, it takes more than just one abstract to justify a broad understanding category. As shown in table two, the various abstracts distributes fairly evenly across the four different resilience understandings, however, with most of the normative design category.

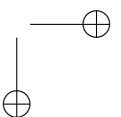
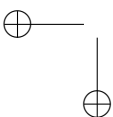
## Developing the resilience typology

Anchored in the two parameters (level and understanding of the resilience phenomenon) it becomes possible to set up an ideal-typical typology of resilience, as illustrated in table three below. As shown in table two there can be said to exist four different understandings, that characterizes resilience in the data set. These understandings of the phenomenon can be placed in a typology based on whether each study is at actor or at system level and whether the nature of resilience is understood to be a feature of the actor or the system – or as a function of various aspects of the actor or the system. The four understandings are: traits, relational, latent and design and the four understandings are distributed as illustrated in table three.

Table 3 – Typology of resilience understandings

	Resilience as feature	Resilience as function
Actor level	<b>Traits:</b> resilience as personal characteristics of the individual	<b>Relational:</b> Resilience as a function of social interaction
System level	<b>Latent:</b> Resilience as embedded in a system.	<b>Design:</b> Resilience as a result of system design

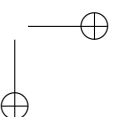
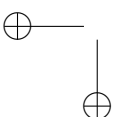
In addition to summarize the four different ways in which the resilience phenomenon is understood in the data set, the typology can also be used to reflect upon the basic assumptions of the phenomenon of resilience as associated within the dataset. A more detailed description of the four categories

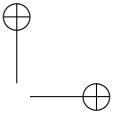




emphasizes differences and similarities between the different understandings of resilience:

- The understanding of resilience as traits, can be said to focus at the individual level and the phenomenon of resilience is understood as being closely linked with the personal characteristics of an individual. These characteristics may be more or less deterministic, in the sense that the field ranges from a pathological genetic understanding that women are more resilient than men (Rutter, 1985) to the understanding that resilience is dependent on positivity, self-esteem, optimism, extroversion and so forth (Rioli. al., 2002; Frederickson et. al., 2003; Edward, 2005). This understanding of resilience can be related to the traits discipline in management research (Lynch, 2006).
- The relational understanding of resilience centers on individuals, but also includes the social context as a parameter and potential resource in relation to the creation of resilience. The focus is therefore not on individual traits alone, but on a unit or group of individuals' functional behavior in relation to creating inter-subjective meaning and understanding in the event of a critical incident (Walsh, 1996; Walsh, 2003). Thereby the context and subjectivity of the individual is included as parameter in relation to how resilience is understood, and the approach can be related to process and interpretation oriented research disciplines, such as sensemaking (Weick, 1988). Thus resilience is in this view not seen as a universal condition of an individual, but as a continuous process or meaningful negotiation in relation to a crisis and with the possibility of different outcomes of success or failure.
- The focus of a latent understanding of resilience can be said to exist after a critical event or incident has occurred. Thus focusing on how the system returns to a normal state of affairs. The nature of resilience thus has a less central role and is assumed to be embedded or latent in an existing system. The ambition of the latent resilience understanding is the description of how resilience unfolds after an incident and not how it is created in relation to the incident. The understanding can be related to the theoretical concept of autopoiesis that explains how the social system can be viewed as being self-referential and a system that

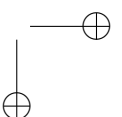
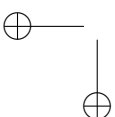




reproduces itself (Luhmann et. al., 2005). Based on the assumption that a crisis can be divided into a before, during and after phase (Johansen & Frandsen, 2007), it is the crisis after-phase, which is the subject of research in the latent understanding of resilience – that is how the system builds its functionality after the crisis.

- The design understanding can be said to be the normative understanding of resilience at a system level. The basic assumption in the design understanding of resilience, is that resilience as a state can be achieved through an appropriate arrangement of for example organisational structure (Somers, 2009), work-processes (Jüttner & Maklan, 2011) or a macro systems (Case, 2009). The design understanding of resilience can be related to disciplines such as business process engineering, classical organisation theory and macroeconomics, whose normative ideal is to develop the optimal way to organize an area or system, that are all other ways of organizing within that area or system.

Based on the above discussion and the different understandings represented in the different categories of the typology, it appears that there is a fairly distinct difference as to whether resilience is seen as something that exists objectively out in the field, or whether it is viewed as a social or structural product. The different perceptions are also of importance when a resilience understanding is operationalized at an organisational level. In principle, it can be postulated that the ideal of a resilient organisation viewed from the perspective of the trait-understanding of resilience, is a staff policy issue resolved by recruiting staff with the right characteristics. When the organisation purely consists of what can be characterized as resilient people, the organisation will as a consequence be resilient. Both research and practice recognizes that reality is more complex than this and several factors come into play, therefore the typology can help to create reflexivity in relation to understanding the phenomenon of resilience from several different perspectives. Thus the typology has more far-reaching applications than the dataset from which it originates. The typology indicates the ontological and epistemological assumptions that form the basis for individual study in the data set and the associated theoretical apparatus, but the typology is also useful for categorization of future works. Furthermore, the typology helps to emphasize the differences that exist in the





four approaches to and understandings of resilience, thereby allowing the researcher to take different positions and create a more nuanced understanding of resilience in a potential study. Nevertheless, it is also important to stress that the establishment of a typology – the placing various research contributions in boxes – reduced the complexity of certain works, and demonstrated why the typology should be viewed as being an ideal-typical typology.

It is not inconceivable that actor created resilience, rather than having to be viewed as either traits or relational, should be seen as a phenomenon that exists in the combination of these two understandings. A significant part of the research in traits understanding of resilience emphasizes also the importance of good social relations, when an individual is facing a crisis or adversity (Rutter, 1985; Walsh, 1996 and Walsh, 2003). Assuming that an individual possesses certain subjective qualities which distinguish the individual from others in terms of ability and expression, this alone is not enough to guarantee resilience in all conceivable situations. It is rather how the subject is able to use these qualities in relation to a specific social and material context, i.e. to experience context and relate to the world. In addition, it is difficult to distinguish the understanding of latent perceptions of resilience, since the social dimension also plays a major role in this understanding, just from a more holistic perspective and as something that exists embedded in the system (Pooley, 2009).

## Unfolding resilience definitions

Following the above discussion, it seems reasonable to explore every definition of the phenomenon of resilience within each level of the typology. As demonstrated by the discussion above each abstract in the dataset rarely defines the phenomenon. However, definitions do exist which may be useful to illustrate the difference between each of the four resilience understandings and still illustrate the convergence that exists between the four different understandings.

Taking the level where resilience is viewed as a feature of the actor as a starting point, Edward (2005) has developed an interesting study of resilience amongst crisis care mental health clinicians, where resilience is defined as follows:





For the purpose of this research, the term 'resilience' was defined as the ability of an individual to bounce back from adversity and persevere through difficult times, and return to a state of internal equilibrium or a state of healthy being. (Edward, 2005:1)

As shown in the above quotation the definition focuses on the individual abilities of the subject, in relation to overcoming adversity and making it through a difficult situation in a reasonable way. Which means an end situation that is not significantly different than before the adverse situation manifested itself. This study presents five descriptions that characterize that helps to produce resilient. These were "The team is a protective veneer to the stress of the work; Sense of self; Faith and hope; Having insight; and Looking after yourself" (Edward, 2005:1). Thus the study operated with individual characteristics that exist in the non-deterministic end of the spectrum which characterizes the traits understanding of resilience.

Then turning to the relational understanding of resilience in the typology, Walsh (1996) in a conceptual paper defines the concept of resilience as such: "The concept of resilience, the ability to withstand and rebound from crisis and adversity" (Walsh, 1996:1). According to Walsh's definition, this, like Edward's definition, centers on the ability to withstand and return to some kind of normal state after a crisis or emergency. Nevertheless, the focus on the individual subject is removed in this definition, which can be explained by the focus of the paper's interest, which is family therapy, with the family in this context, viewed as a functional unit. Thus the starting point is not characteristic of an individual subject, but the interactional processes over time that can contribute to strengthen both individual hardiness and the hardiness of the functional unit (Walsh, 1996). That is why this understanding is at the actor level and with an understanding of the nature of resilience as a function of human actions.

Moving away from the actor level in the typology, which characterized the two definitions above, the next definition is at the system level, with an understanding of the nature of resilience as something that characterizes the system. The understanding of resilience as a latent capacity of a system is defined by Powley (2009) in a study of a shootout at a business school, as such:

When external events disrupt the normal flow of organisational and re-





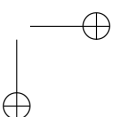


lational routines and practices, an organisation's latent capacity to rebound activates to enable positive adaptation and bounce back. (Powley, 2009: 1)

As is apparent from the above definition resilience is to be understood as a latent capacity in the system which performs a specific function in relation to change in the environment of the organisation. It can be said that the definition above and the definition of resilience provided by Weick and Sutcliff (2007) in this paper's introduction are quite similar. Nevertheless, this definition, in common with the three previous definitions from the dataset, focuses on the ability to rebound/bounce back to what can be characterized as a normal state after a disruption.

In regard to the fourth and final understanding, the design understanding operates on the system level and with a view of resilience as something that is created through an appropriate design of the system, there are no examples of a definition in the data set. This is probably due to resilience being often used as a synonym for robustness and flexibility of the system within this understanding. The idea of the above unfolding of resilience definitions is to concretize what resilience is all about, but also to emphasize that despite the difference in the level-perspective or the nature of the phenomenon, that the various studies impose on the phenomenon of resilience, there is still convergence around what the resilience phenomenon attempts to explain in relation to adversity and crisis.

After the development of the above typology, an attempt to clearly categorize resilience and illustrate the various resilience understandings which characterize the research field today, the study's first research question is considered to be answered. Moving on to the study's second phase, which seeks to address the second research question, the phenomenon of resilience from a communication perspective. This part will be based on a resilience understanding, which is inspired by the understanding of resilience that the typology categorized as relational resilience.





## The cosmology episode and Resilience

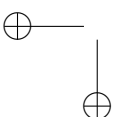
Resilience may, as shown in the typology developed above, be understood through different understandings. These understandings can also be said to have different focus in relation to the anatomy of a crisis.

If we assume that a crisis can be divided into several phases, such as a pre-crisis phase a crisis phase and a post-crisis phase (Johansen & Frandsen, 2007), then the different understandings of the phenomenon of resilience gain ground in the various phases of the cycles of a crisis. For example, it is probably not during the crisis that an organisation changes the design process or organisational structure, but rather before the crisis, to prepare for it, or alternatively in the aftermath of a crisis, based on experience and the lessons the crisis has for the organisation. Likewise is the case with latent resilience, in which, as argued in the typology, the focus is on after the crisis has manifested itself and how the organisation returns to «business as usual» (Powley, 2009). The traits approach can be said to be relevant through all phases of the crisis, but not least the relational resilience understanding which focuses on the resilience phenomenon as the crisis situation unfolds and manifest itself. The relational understanding of resilience, as mentioned above, is characterized by 1) the way in which individuals in a unit relate to the life world, enact and thus actively act as co-creators of their own reality, and 2) how subjective and intersubjective meaning is created in that same reality.

Following the two characteristics of relational resilience, the interpretive approach that characterizes organisational communication act as an exciting communication approach in relation to discussing the phenomenon of resilience from a communication perspective. This is because “interpretivists focus on the subjective, intersubjective and socially constructed meanings of organisational actors” (Putnam, 1983: 8). Thus it’s focus on the interpersonal social dimension of organisational life (Zorn, 2009), is in line with the focus that exists in the nature of the relational resilience understanding.

In addition the organisational communications principle about communication constituting organisation (Putnam & Nicotera, 2009) provides a potential explanatory framework in relation to how individuals in communicating actively create the organisational reality as specified below:

Communication acts on the world; it is a social practice alive with po-





tential. Not “mere” talk or transmission, it (re)produces and alters current realities. In a constitutive model, then the primary question is one of influence and possibility: How does communication constitute the realities of organisational life? (Ashcraft et. al., 2009: 5)

At the same time, the very way in which individuals make sense of their world through communication is a central theme in the interpretive tradition of organisational communication (Putnam, 1983: 31). Thus, there exists an overlap between the features that characterize relational resilience and the interpretive approach to communication that characterizes organisational communication as an academic tradition.

Within the field of crisis communication and crisis management, organisational communication is represented by the crisis-sensemaking tradition in particular (Maitlis & Sonenshein, 2010). The crisis-sensemaking tradition can be said to consist of two different streams, one whose research interest is in sensemaking as it unfolds during the manifestation of a crisis (Weick, 1988 & Weick, 1993), and one in which the research interest is the sensemaking processes as it unfolds in the aftermath of a crisis (Shrivastava et. al., 1988). Crisis in the crisis-sensemaking literature is defined in different ways, however the notion of crisis defined as a cosmological episode takes a prominent position within the internal crisis management and crisis communications literature in general and in the crisis-sense-making tradition in particular (Frandsen & Johansen, 2011; Jacobsen & Simonsen, 2011; Johansen et. al., 2012). The cosmological episode is defined as such:

A cosmology episode occurs when people suddenly and deeply feel that the universe is no longer a rational, orderly system. What makes such an episode so shattering is that both the sense of what is occurring and the means to rebuild that sense collapse together. (Weick 1993: 663)

As is apparent from the above definition, a crisis derived from a cosmology episode is understood as the collapse of sense among individuals. Furthermore such a crisis definition is characterized by the understanding that the resources to rebuild this sense are not present in the situation. So the cosmology episode describes the specific situation in which the individual leaves the cognitive schema, that functions as the basic of subjective causal relationships in a life-world context, and are used as a premises for the being in the

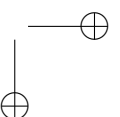




situation. Thus the cosmological episode describes the time of a crisis, when individuals leave earlier expectations for the outcome of the situation and are in a situation of total uncertainty (Sellnow & Seeger, 2009).

The very nature of the cosmological episodes makes such a crisis definition relevant in the discussion of resilience, in the sense that the cosmology episode operates with a definition of crisis that describes the very manifestation of the crisis for the individual, and not just the technical specifications of the crisis as being low probability/high consequence events that threatens the organisations basic assumptions (Weick, 1988) or "... a disruption that physically affects a system as a whole and threatens its basic assumptions, its subjective sense of self, its existential core" (Pauchant & Mitroff 1992: 12). The resilience phenomenon in general, can be considered to be useful to crises in organisational contexts (Weick & Sutcliff, 2007; Powley, 2009), and relational resilience to the manifestation of crisis in particular (Weick, 1993; Walsh, 1996; Walsh, 2003).

If resilience is related to a crisis defined as a cosmological episode, there are several suggestions as to and how resilience can be manifested. A very clear way to define resilience compared to a cosmology episode would be to argue that resilience is the phenomenon that occurs when a crisis does not include a cosmological episode. So something like "... resilience is defined as the ability of individuals to bounce back from a critical situation and not end in a cosmology episode" in this case, then the phenomenon of resilience will refer to the proactive dimension of the crisis, thus it can be described as a phenomenon occurring in the pre-phase of a crisis (Weick & Sutcliff, 2007). Nevertheless, the resilience phenomenon has, as mentioned above, an impact on all crisis phases and relational resilience relates specifically to the inter-subjective sensemaking formation process, that is the phase of the crisis that can be characterized as the cosmological episode. In such a context resilience is about reestablishing meaning in a situation where it has collapsed and the immediate resources to establish this meaning is not present. So resilience can be defined in comparison to a cosmology episode as "The ability to reestablish meaning after it has collapsed so the universe yet again to some degree seems like a rational orderly system. Even though the conditions to reestablish this sense of what is occurring is challenged by the conditions of the present situation."





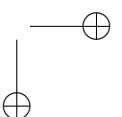
## Further research and concluding remarks

This article has presented a resilience-typology based upon a content analysis of the title and abstract of 32 peer-reviewed journal articles in the databases Scopus and Web of Sciences. The article presents four different understandings of the phenomenon of resilience; traits, relational, latent and design understandings of resilience. Furthermore the article unfolds the different yet convergent definitions of resilience from the different understandings within the typology, and discusses one of these understanding and definitions from the perspective of organisational communication. Inspired by organisational communication and the crises-sensemaking tradition the article discusses the concept of relational-resilience and argues for a preliminary definition of the concept as opposed to the notion of a cosmology episode (Weick, 1993).

The idea of resilience as opposed to a cosmological episode raises questions relevant for future research. First, it is interesting to explore the paradox that exists in the collapses of sense and the fact that the resources to rebuild this sense are not present. Are those individuals who experience a cosmological episode doomed or does there exist possibilities for action in spite of these two factors that characterize a cosmology episode.

If action is a possibility, what characterize such an action? If sense has collapsed, any action could potentially be characterized as an improvised action since the effect of the action for the individual will not be possible to foresee or calculate, because the world does not act as a rational orderly system for the individual. An improvised action may in this respect be understood as an individual's ability to act in uncertainty, but with knowledge and experience repertoires as ballast (Rerup, 2001). That is to say, that in a situation where sense has collapsed, then resilience can consist in the action and enactment of the environment. The question here must therefore be whether the improvised action can facilitate the resources needed in relation to once again rebuilding sense in the phase of the cosmological episode. The theory of sensemaking (Weick, 1995) indicates such a possibility, but a definitive answer must be unexplored for now.

There are implications and opportunities for future research in opposing the phenomenon of resilience to the crisis definition characterized as a cosmological episode. In addition, organisational communication and crisis-sensemaking can act as exciting lens' in the attempt to understand how mea-





ning can be rebuilt after a collapse in a situation where the resources for this reconstruction is challenged or non-existent.

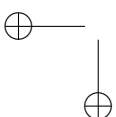
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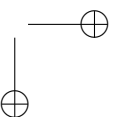
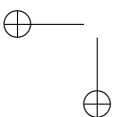
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### **Appendix 1 – Dataset**

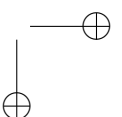
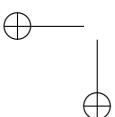
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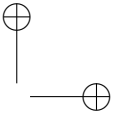




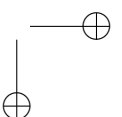
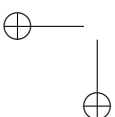
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## Feedback nightmare: Organisational communication reactions to digital critic exposure. A view on some Portuguese cases (2011-2012)

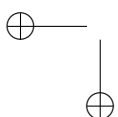
Ana Duarte Melo and Helena Sousa  
*University of Minho, Portugal*

**Abstract:** The national and the European economic crisis has plunged Portugal in a difficult situation aggravated by consecutive down ratings of the country's economy and IMF's demanding objectives, resulting in more austerity measures, cost of living raise, salary cuts and a growing unemployment rate. Such conditions put an extra pressure to the everyday life that seems to have found in the digital world a platform for active criticism, a quick and right to the point response often based on what seems to be a patriotic sentiment against the intrusiveness of hard economic measures. Powerless to fight back in equal terms, consumer-citizens are empowered by easy access technology and appear to be eager to express their discontent in the digital world.

This paper will focus on three Portuguese organizations: President Cavaco Silva, after a comment on how his pension was hardly enough to pay his costs; FNAC, after airing an exchange books campaign that appealed to the abandon of allegedly boring Portuguese classic authors for more updated international literature; Pingo Doce, the main retail corporation in Portugal, after the announcement of the transfer abroad of the majority of its capital. We will analyse each case from the starting point that motivated reactions, the speed and type of reactions it caused and how organizations reacted to them. The choice of these cases intends to understand if there is a common trait in different profile institutions behaviour and to observe how are organizations dealing with unwanted, unforeseen and extremely exposed critic reactions to their communication in the digital platforms, namely in social media.

**Keywords:** strategic communication, feedback, participation, consumer-citizen, social media, empowerment.

*Organisational and Strategic Communication Research: European Perspectives, 95-110*



PORTUGAL is a country immersed in a deep crisis. Economical, financial, political and social difficulties have always been part of the Portuguese everyday and as Portuguese are known for their inventive capacities under challenging environments<sup>1</sup>, surviving harshness has become part of the country's culture. Although some might judge living in crisis as a structural condition – one of the most respected, sharp and snappy comic commentators described this as “The country, we all know it, is going through hardships and is not good. But as the crisis has been lasting only for the last 800 years, everyone expects it to be a mild disease.” (Pereira, 2007:137)<sup>2</sup> — the situation seems to be aggravated in the last few years, especially after the economic and financial crisis became official in 2010 (BBC, 2012).

In the Spring of 2011, Portugal became the third Eurozone country to seek European Union financial assistance and a bailout package was approved to cope with high public debt levels (Steinhauser, 2011). Together with it, Portuguese received even more austerity measures, several downgrades of the country's debt by rating agencies (Jolly, 2011; Smith, 2011), salary cuts and heavy tax raises. Economic, political and social crisis aggravated as unemployment growing rate became the third in Europe, only preceded by Spain and Greece, putting an extra pressure in the everyday life and resulting in a wave of rallies, demonstrations and general strikes.

In this context, the digital sphere proved to be a popular set for feedback from the population, as well as the streets. Providing a fit tool for quick to the point response the digital complies as platform for active criticism. Powerless to fight back institutions in equal terms, consumer-citizens are empowered by easy access technology and appear to be eager to express their discontent in the digital world.

We will discuss how this criticism seems to be supported by a patriotic sentiment against the intrusiveness of hard economic measures, imposed by foreign institutions, and how Portuguese consumer-citizens took over the reins of the digital communication, regarding sensitive matters and institutions. The aim of this paper is to observe and analyse this phenomenon by asking the

<sup>1</sup>“Desenrascar” is a typical Portuguese attitude that can be translated as “muddling through”.

<sup>2</sup>Approximate translation by the authors. Original quote: “O país, sabemo-lo todos, passa por dificuldades e não anda bom. Mas como a crise só dura há 800 anos, toda a gente espera que a maleita seja passageira.” (Pereira, 2007:137)



main question: **how do organisations deal with extremely exposed critic reactions in social media?**

The corpus of our study being this broad context, we will be focusing our analysis on three main cases, featuring diverse natures, motivations and organisations:

- **The President's Income:** featuring the reactions to a comment of Portugal's President, Aníbal Cavaco Silva, on how his pension was hardly enough to pay his bills.
- **FNAC Book Exchange:** featuring the reactions after airing an exchange books campaign that appealed to the abandon of allegedly boring Portuguese classic authors for more updated international literature.
- **Pingo Doce flees abroad:** featuring the reactions on the announcement of Pingo Doce's – main distribution corporation in Portugal –, majority capital transfer to Holland to avoid high taxes.

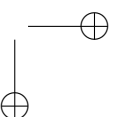
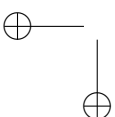
By choosing these cases we intend to observe if there is a common trait in different profile institutions behaviour. Furthermore we will try to understand how are organizations dealing with unwanted, unforeseen and extremely exposed critic reactions to their communication in the digital platforms, namely in social media.

Each case will be analysed from the starting point that motivated reactions, the speed and type of reactions it caused and how organizations reacted to them.

## On the relevance of feedback

Feedback has a recognised and important role on communication, both operationally and symbolically.

In the functional approach, feedback works as a warranty of the technical quality of communication. Being assessed as a performance element of the communication process, feedback serves as a tool to calibrate the communication channel. By sending back to the sender a returning signal it confirms the communication efficiency.





Yet, feedback definition does not confine only to the technical universe of communications. More organic and vivid, the neurological approach of feedback, for instance, enhances its importance in setting standards and communication procedures in order to obtain more efficient and selective responses, thus generating predictable reactions and better communication.

To interact with the environment efficiently, the nervous system must generate expectations about redundant sensory signals and detect unexpected ones. Neural circuits can, for example, compare a prediction of the sensory signal that was generated by the nervous system with the incoming sensory input, to generate a response selective to novel stimuli. (Marsat & Maler, 2012)

On the symbolic, political and social level, feedback has always been valued as “the voice of the people”, with all the representational and participatory connections it implies in the Western democratic cultures. Feedback has a legitimacy role in democracies, a value-added attribute in the media system, a priceless value in strategic communication. In all of these sectors feedback is a warranty of value, a proof of quality and even stands to some extent as a legitimacy stamp.

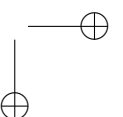
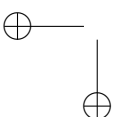
In the last few years, due to the communication paradigm shift, particularly in strategic and organizational communication, from one-to-many to one-to-one and from a top-down to a multilevel and networked communication, feedback has regained its protagonist role.

Due to its recognized importance we will analyse the reactions of the consumer-citizen feedback to the following cases.

## Case 1 – The President’s Income

### Event

20.1.2012 – In a public opening, the president of Portugal, Aníbal Cavaco Silva, vents that his income (retirement pension) is not enough to pay his expenses. (Luz, 2012)







## Impact

Besides immediate intensive media coverage, this declaration, spoken almost in the tone of a confiding speech, led to a thorough scrutiny of the president's income sources, based on the obligation of all public office holders to deliver an annual declaration of their income and assets to the Constitutional Court. This scrutiny exposed a more than average full income, composed of various sources, and generated a blast of disapproval by comparison to the people who have to live with significantly lower wages, namely the minimum wage.

The cloud of protests became so thick that eventual and potential positive facts of the President's financial life were utterly ignored. The fact that Prof. Cavaco Silva gave up receiving monthly a lifetime grant, that he was entitled to for being Prime Minister between 1985 and 1995, was not given special attention (Costa, 2012).

## Feedback

Intensive and extensive social media 'buzz' was generated: the Facebook president's page was literally flooded with negative comments and several political blogs became platforms to disseminate criticism to the president's attitude.

Ironic and creative critics overwhelmed the digital sphere: a Facebook page for funding the president in order to help him with his expenses<sup>3</sup>; the organization of a solidarity walk, where participants were invited to bring one euro to the presidential palace; a "Help Cavaco to pay his expenses" merchandising collection and even an online game where the president has to catch bills but no coins were some of the highlights.

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<sup>3</sup>[www.facebook.com](http://www.facebook.com).

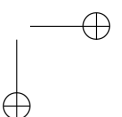
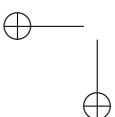




Image 1 “Could you be so kind to help Mister President” Funding Campaign (Canal Q, 2012)



Image 2 – “Bring a coin to Cavaco” march (S/N, 2012b)



Image 3 – “Help Cavaco to pay his expenses” merchandising (Cão Azul, 2012)



Image 4 – online game “Missão Cavaco Silva” (Nogueira, 2012)

Crowning this movement, a petition demanding the president’s resignation hit the online world on the 21<sup>st</sup> January 2012, reaching 4000 signatures in 48 hours, and entering the Assembleia da República, the national assembly, with more than 40 000 signatures in March, in an unprecedented participated event. The relevance of the numbers stand out as one blogger’s comment puts it.

It is not a "like" on FB, you must leave BI, full name, mail. Is not a simple impulse. But you never saw anything like this, this hourly growing number of Portuguese who sign a petition.<sup>4</sup> (Cardoso, 24.1.2012)

<sup>4</sup>Our translation.

Notwithstanding the practical results of such a petition may be little less than symbolic<sup>5</sup>. There were no consequences beyond image and reputational damage as the assembly has no power to dismiss the President. Nevertheless, on the 24<sup>th</sup> of January police was forced to prevent demonstrators, mostly retired pensioners, to leave charity offers of food and spare dimes in the presidential palace in an ironic public effort to show solidarity with the President (Ames, 2012) and in May there was still one Vigil organised in front of the presidential palace spreading the event in time.

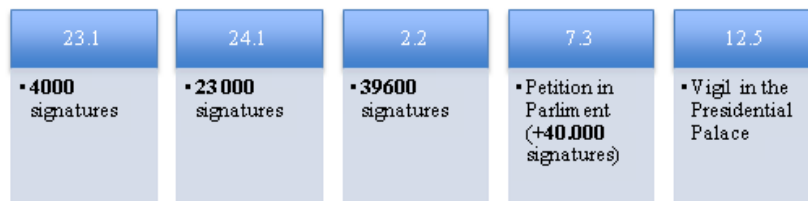


Figure 1 – Online Petition 21.1.2012 timeline (2012)

## Case 2 – FNAC Book Exchange Campaign

### Event

26.1.2012 – “Culture renews itself” was the general title of a book exchange campaign launched by FNAC<sup>6</sup>. The action intended to promote a campaign for exchanging old books, CDs and DVDs for new ones focused on a win-win mechanics: for each old book delivered costumers received a five euros voucher to buy a new one. The campaign insight had a social responsibility framework: the used pieces collected would be donated to AMI – Associação Médica Internacional, one of the most recognized Portuguese non governmental organizations.

<sup>5</sup>The actual impact of this petition went no further than the registration in the national assembly, but its symbolic value was recognised by the media.

<sup>6</sup>International entertainment and culture retail chain founded in the fifties as a discount offering for managers, under the name Fédération Nationale d’Achats des Cadres. <http://www.fnac.com>.



The creative insight was based on the dichotomy “classic *vs* light” literature, assuming the first was heavy, out of date, boring and the latter new, fashionable, enjoyable. The campaign attention catchers bet on phonetic games to connect with the public.

The example “Exchange ‘Os Maias’ for Meyer.” was paradigmatic. Similar sounds and spelling reinforced the counteracting of a 19th century Portuguese literature classic by Eça de Queirós, considered a social and political critic work of art, filled with irony and, with Stephanie Meyer’s contemporary teenage success series, the vampire novel “Twilight”. The alleged benefits of the exchange were made obvious to the public. But the reaction was not the expected one.

### **Feedback**

Instead of directing crowds to the shops to exchange old books for new ones the campaign generated a wave of patriotic indignation spread throughout social media: FNAC’s Facebook page was literally invaded with negative comments and a wave of brand subvertising pieces generated as a reaction.





Image 5 – Subvertising example  
“Swap FNAC for a good old traditional bookshop”

### Organization reaction

Four days after the campaign’s launch, FNAC issued an apology note on Facebook, explaining the campaign concept and referring that it was never meant as an attack to Portuguese culture and literature. The next day, on the 31.1.2012, that specific line of the creative insight was banned and the campaign was carried on as planned until 15.2.2012.

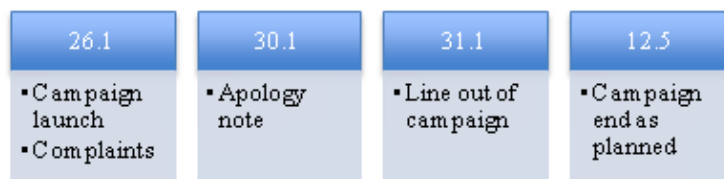


Figure 2 – FNAC exchange campaign timeline (2012)



### **Case 3 – Pingo Doce’s capital transfer (2011-2012)**

#### **Event**

2.1.2012 – The biggest supermarket chain in Portugal (370 shops) announces the transfer of the majority (56,1%) of its capital to its subsidiary in the Netherlands. This fact became public because of the mandatory declaration to the regulatory body (Comissão de Mercado de Valores Mobiliários – CMVM) on the last days of 2011 (Lusa/Público, 2012).

#### **Impact**

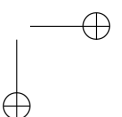
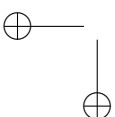
Intensive media coverage in primetime, buzz in the traditional media and notorious activation in the social media were visible in this case.

On the 4<sup>th</sup> January 2012 criticism took off the digital and media sphere to be discussed in the Assembleia da República, the Portuguese Parliament, with denouncing interventions from both left (PCP, Bloco de Esquerda) and right (CDS).

On the 13<sup>th</sup> January, the Prime Minister himself included the matter in the fortnightly debate in the Parliament referring the need to clarify Pingo Doce’s case and reassuring that the authorities were analyzing all fiscal aspect of the operation in order to obtain a more objective and comprehensive perspective of the facts (Lusa, 2012).

#### **Organization reaction**

4-8.1.2012 – The nominated CEO of Jerónimo Martins, Pingo Doce’s corporation group, issued a press release to clarify what he named “serious untruths”. This document was distributed to costumers as a leaflet in all Pingo Doce supermarkets and noted that the company was a source of employment and productivity in Portugal. Furthermore it stated that the social headquarters and fiscal address would be maintained in Portugal, that all obligations of Pingo Doce to the Portuguese state would be kept as usual and that the group would go on contributing socially and fiscally to the country’s development. (Meios & Publicidade, 2012). The document ended with a note declaring “anything that you ear or read opposite to what we hereby declare, should



be considered, beyond any reasonable doubt, fake and/or demagogic.” (Lusa, 2012)<sup>7</sup>

### Feedback

Social media impact generated, among others, one Facebook page exerting to boycott shopping in Pingo Doce and another page demanding a Dutch salary for all Pingo Doce’s workers and several examples of the Pingo Doce’s brand subvertising. Most criticism focused on fiscal evasion and expressed a patriotic sentiment toward what was felt as a betrayal to Portugal and its values.

Subvertising enhanced also identity and self-representation issues, both as consumer-citizens, *vis a vis* to brands, corporations and economic and political institutions and as a nation, *vis a vis* to Europe and its institutions.

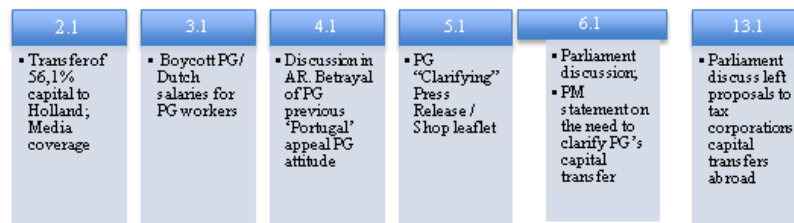


Figure 3 – Pingo Doce flee abroad timeline

<sup>7</sup>Our translation.





Image 6 –Pingo Doce subvertising example 1: "It tastes good to pay so less taxes"(2012) (Martins, 2012)



Image 7 – Pingo Doce subvertising example 2: Pingo Doce abandons the sinking ship of Portugal to find a safe harbour in Holland (2012) (S/N, 2012a)

## Final Notes

Albeit representing different types of organization, institutional communication and feedback reactions, all cases exposed revealed common traits as they all generated patriotic claims. Furthermore was possible to observe that publics seem to be more sensitive and prone to express themselves in a context of change and/or crisis and this seems to affect the impact of consumer-citizen participation, leading to more media and institutional impact.

In all cases feedback management proved to be critical to the crisis overcome and it can be positively capitalised to the organisation — after suspending the sensitive line, FNAC's Facebook page received several positive com-



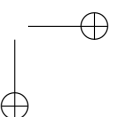
ments praising the organisation attitude — therefore confirming best practice recommendations: quick response; positive dealing with comments; never ignoring or trying to censor antagonism.

It was also possible to observe, as noted by other authors, that crisis can be triggered by minor events. The cases studied highlighted also that organisations are vulnerable to consumer-citizens instrumental empowerment to criticize *status quo*. These conclusions lead to recommendations that organizations should be particularly context conscious in crisis environment and prepare alternative agendas to deal with unforeseen consumer-citizen feedback.

As a final note and possible clues for further research we would like to highlight two issues. On one hand the cases analysed demonstrate that economic, political and social crisis expose imaginary, symbolic, intangible values of “Portugality” in distress. On the other hand all cases reveal that virtual criticism may not have real consequences but it is symbolically meaningful and might affect organizations image and reputation in unprecedented dynamics.

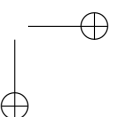
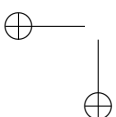
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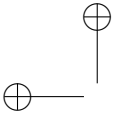
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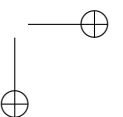
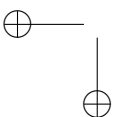
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## Organizational communication and social media – Challenges for strategizing in business and political communication

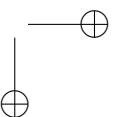
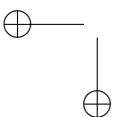
Natascha Zowislo-Grünewald and Franz Beitzinger  
*Universität der Bundeswehr München, Munich*

**Abstract:** The rise of social media calls for a revision of the common understanding of strategic corporate communication, whereby organizations try to reach an advantage for themselves through long-term monitoring and consciously initiating necessary steps accordingly, towards more interactivity, reciprocity, participation and sociality as well as new applications through technological advancement. Social media change the organizational realm and ask for organizational strategy's adaptation to a thus changing environment. This is true for organizations in politics and business in equal measure; yet, the kind of change can be quite different. However, it applies to all organizational types that the ability to plan communication has been reduced. Disturbances of communication have become normality. Instead of interpreting them as nuisance, these disturbances might entail enormous strategic innovative potential that needs to be let unfold.

**Keywords:** social media, organizational communication, business communication, political communication, communicative innovation.

**T**HE rise of social media calls for a revision of the common understanding of strategic corporate communication, whereby organizations try to reach an advantage for themselves through long-term monitoring and consciously initiating necessary steps accordingly, towards more interactivity, reciprocity, participation and sociality as well as new applications through technological advancement. Social media change the organizational realm and ask for organizational strategy's adaptation to a thus changing environment. This is true for organizations in politics and business in equal measure; yet, the kind

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of change can be quite different. However, it applies to all organizational types that the ability to plan communication has been reduced. Disturbances of communication have become normality. Instead of interpreting them as nuisance, these disturbances might entail enormous strategic innovative potential that needs to be let unfold.

## **1. Social Media and Organizational Communication: What's new?**

In the Web 2.0, the task to research information, to process and to diffuse it can be fulfilled by any amateur. Unhampered, anybody can set up content, opinion and information in the Internet. This 'peaceful' media revolution of the Web 2.0 constitutes new challenges for organizational communication.

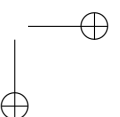
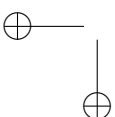
In summary, there are primarily three characteristics of the currently new media that distinguish them from the classical media of the pre-Web 2.0 era:

Firstly, new media only reflect an organization's internal and external structure by way of their technological features. The exchange between organizations and their stakeholders is per force put on a symmetric basis: 'pull' elements more and more replace 'push' elements. The user must and can decide proactively to participate in communication, for instance by retrieving the organization's website or by commenting an organizational blog's entries.

Secondly: The boundaries between mass and individual communication disappear. Mass communication becomes more individualized; individual communication becomes more flexible. Whereas a linear unidirectional information and communication flow interested in information distribution was predominant in the Internet's starting time, the Web 2.0 is characterized as an interactive and, first and foremost, personalized medium forcing organizational communication to think anew.

Thirdly, the Web 2.0's multimedia features bring about a cross-media integration of all existing media content and enhance the reusability of content. At the same time, integrated communication – erstwhile the sublime goal of communication managers – becomes a natural core element of the new media world.

By way of these three conditions created by the Web 2.0 – symmetry in communicative exchanges; personalization of mass information; implicitness





of integrated communication –, discourses or issue worlds are created which pass by classical information flows. These issue worlds still constitute a kind of 'public' that presents itself as a hardly detectable signal within the Internet's hidden publicness. It is difficult to grasp for strategy finding, yet can become an enormous source of influence for organizational communication within almost no time (Liebl 2000).

## 2. Social Media as a Challenge for Corporations and Political Parties

The advantages for corporations by communicating through social media are clearly visible: for one, the Web 2.0 allows for a target group-centered supply of information (push function) without having to resort to a loop way or gatekeeper such as a journalist or traditional media. Moreover, stakeholder attachment is increased. By way of online communication, the dialogue with different user groups can be led independently of time and place in order to tie them closer to the organization.

To summarize, it pays off for corporations to communicate within the Web 2.0 since, firstly, they can attain reputation benefits and brand awareness for specific stakeholders by way of target group-oriented content (Scott 2008). Secondly, dialogic communication in the Web 2.0 creates reciprocity (Cialdini 1999: 17ff); the users feel indebted to the corporation and pay back. They are tied to the company and are also inclined to do positive PR for the corporation. Thirdly, new customers can thereby be won even without direct customer approach on the part of the company, namely by benevolent intermediaries – opinion leaders as defined by Katz and Lazarsfeld (Katz/Lazarsfeld 1955). Fourthly, added value for the company is created by way of dialogic communication whenever the consumer also produces content, i.e. whenever the consumer turns into 'prosumer' (Tapscott/Williams 2008).

Communication management in the era of the Web 2.0 has become permanent issue management. Not only is this valid in order to reproach dangers, but also to exploit chances as in the example of the Coke Mentos Geysers: In 2006, two performance artists uploaded a video to YouTube where they put several Mentos drops in a 2 liter bottle of 'Diet Coke'. The drops reacted strongly with the liquids inside, and out of the bottle there arose a huge



coke fountain. The video became top on YouTube, and the idea spread virally. While Coca Cola is rather skeptical as concerns this kind of public relations and even considers the brand identity to be endangered, the producer of Mentos drops – Perfetti Van Melle – is delighted (Puttenat 2007: 133f.).

Not only in the field of corporate has the web 2.0 become a powerful instrument: former presidential primary candidate of the Democrats, Howard Dean, was the first to make use of the potential of a two-way symmetric communication by launching the website *meetup.com*, where supporters of Howard Dean met up and shared interests (Wolf 2004).

Dean's campaign was the beginning of a media revolution in political communication. By the time of Barack Obama's election campaign in 2008 at the latest, politics seems to have propelled itself in a pioneering role, even though it had been somewhat lagging behind business's Web 2.0 capabilities up to this point. Obama, with the help of new media – YouTube, push mailing campaigns, Twitter, blogging –, ceded the main part of campaign impulses to the Web 2.0 – and was successful despite the unpredictability of the results (Cain Miller 2008).

Barack Obama and his campaign team combined a self-reinforcing virtual network marketing with mobilizing the real world in an unprecedented expert way, where – according to the Tupperware principle – one trusts his or her neighbor and not the producer (Cialdini 1999: 167ff), where everybody was supposed to convince everybody else of the new political product – namely Obama. Barack Obama's campaign success shows quite plainly what powerful instrument the Web 2.0 is to mobilize whole networks of supporters, who in turn advertise for an even greater number of supporters independently. At the latest with Obama, political communication “is no longer about 30-second television commercials. It is about engaging the voters in a process fundamental to democracy.” (Anderson 2009)

The advantages for politics potentially resulting from communication via Web 2.0 are clear: Firstly, the empowerment created by citizen-driven campaigns can, with the help of social media, bind the online actors to the parties' political offers (Güldenzopf/Hennewig 2010: 46). Secondly, politicians and parties can win additional voters by opinion leaders' 'social recommendation' within the Web 2.0's social networks without addressing them directly (Stirland 2008; Cain Miller 2008). Thirdly, the Web 2.0 offers the opportunity for the citizen to participate in the political landscape. Especially parties that suf-





fer from dwindling membership – whereas social-political organizations are experiencing heretofore unknown support – could trigger more participation through the Web 2.0, create motivation via practical guides for action, and re-design political manifestos as grassroots movement (Gülden-zopf/Hennewig 2010).

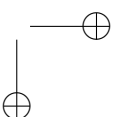
### 3. What is Strategy?

For a classical understanding of strategy, a decentralized, hidden, yet ‘public’ agenda setting as in the Web 2.0 must be supervised, as it is a disturbing factor for communication planning. This leads to an increased complexity for communication, yet no longer in implementing strategy as a result of issue management, but in issue management itself.

However, this classical understanding of strategy is not suitable for the era of the Web 2.0. It would be much more profitable to no longer consider the Web 2.0 and the resulting emergence not as sources of irritation of a strategic formula of reaction just as in chemistry, reminding one of game of dice – yet without any probabilities – but as drivers of innovation that enrich any preset pattern in the sense of Mintzberg’s (1978; 1985) non-chained ‘emergent strategy’.

Whenever intra-organizational or actors who are only loosely bound to the organization have a large leeway for decision making, they can also follow their own strategies that are not connected to the organization’s overall strategy. According to Mintzberg, it might still be useful for the organization to learn from these individual strategies and to adopt the overall strategy accordingly (Mintzberg/Waters 1985: 266). Strategy as defined by Mintzberg is a “pattern in a stream of decisions” (Mintzberg 1978: 934). Strategy therefore has to be recognized as inherent to the process of managing instead of strategy as a static factor.

To understand strategic communication in such a way and to implement it accordingly in the Web 2.0 implicates that any time differential between strategy finding, getting the stakeholders’ buy-in, strategy implementation as well as evaluation and readjustment disappears. Instead of wasting potential owing to understanding disturbances as moments of crisis, organizations and their management might also let things evolve and take chances that arise. Only in

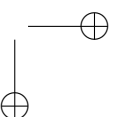
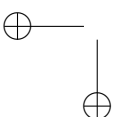




such a way can innovation come into existence. Related to strategic communication, this means that new content that could not be thought of ahead of time can be accorded importance.

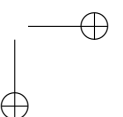
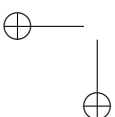
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## Identification of influence within the social media

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**Abstract:** Social media is expected to have a growing impact on the corporate reputation of organizations. Various social media actors referred to as social media influencers can have a particular impact on corporate reputation. It is important for organizations to identify these actors and understand how to interact with them in order to safeguard the organizational reputation. In this study, based on extensive literature review and a Delphi study, we constructed a model for the identification of the social media influencers; the ‘social media corporate reputation influencers model’. The Delphi study shows that the model is suitable for the identification of social media influencers by identifying the main indicators for determining and predicting the influence within the social media. Based on the Delphi study amongst social media marketing professionals, we conclude that social media has an impact on corporate reputations.

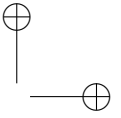
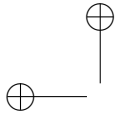
**Keywords:** social media, interaction patterns, corporate reputation, social influencers, delphi-study.

### Introduction

**T**HE growth and success of social media is enormous. Millions of users daily view Facebook profiles, send tweets, write or react to blogs or watch YouTube videos. There are indicators that the value of social media applications has raised to many trillions of dollars (Trusov et al, 2010). The important role of the social media for the life of many people is one of the main reasons for organizations to pay attention to this relatively new phenomenon (Haenlein & Kaplan, 2010). Marketing practitioners try to understand the roles and possibilities of the social media as marketing instruments and integrate them into their marketing programs. They test different social plat-

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forms and make considerations on what types of social media fit best within the policies and strategies of the company (Waters et al, 2009).

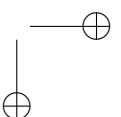
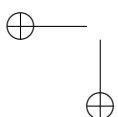
Given the growth of social media, influence of one individual on the corporate reputation can be substantial (Kioussis et al, 2007). That is the reason why more and more companies recognize the importance of social media monitoring to ‘listen’ to interactions on social media (Pang & Lee, 2008). A negative voice within the social media can be a bit to make sure that a chain of negative publicity is made. On the other side, positive voices can improve the corporate reputation. Therefore, the combination of monitoring and engagement became a necessary part of the reputation management.

However, multinationals like Shell or Microsoft cannot react to each social media voice. For that reason it is important to identify the most influential people in the social media. It is important for organizations to not only follow closely what is said about their organization, but also identify the sources of people’s voice and the way this is disseminated. The central aim of this study was to identify the indicators that make an actor influential within the social media. Besides that we also wanted to investigate the impact of an individual actor within the social media on the corporate reputation.

This study is valuable for contemporary organizations with ambitions in social media marketing and communication strategies. The scientific value of this research is the identification of the indicators for the influence of actors, but also to investigate the sources that make an actor influential; like interactions and the network. Influence is not only determined by the characteristics of an individual. Factors associated with the interactions and the network of an individual are also of great importance in such ‘influence processes’. That is the main reason we made a distinction between the three categories of influence: actors, interactions and networks.

## Theoretical framework

There is a growing interest in the value of social media for different marketing and communication purposes. But many marketing and communication professionals often face difficulties in defining the core of social media. The term ‘social media’ was introduced around 2003, the moment that social networks became more popular. For that reason social networks and social media are





often confused. To see this distinction, it is important to see social media as an umbrella term for social networks, where social media is defined as “a group of Internet-based applications that build on the ideological multifaceted and technological foundations of Web 2.0, and that allow the creation and exchange of user-generated content” (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010, p.61). A social network is one of the Internet-based applications of this definition. Other applications are: blogs (Blogger, WordPress), joint projects (Wikipedia), content communities (YouTube, Flickr), virtual social worlds (Second Life), and virtual game worlds (World of Warcraft) (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010), online forums, bulletin boards and review sites (Quora, Epinions, TripAdvisor, Personal Democracy forum Europe) or content aggregators (paper.li, InnoCentive, iGoogle) (Constantinides and Fountain, 2008, Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010).

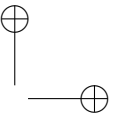
Within the social media we can identify different interactions. Analysis of these interactions leads to recognition of certain patterns: social media interaction patterns. This indicates that individuals within the social media communicate with each other according to a specific pattern. The categories which are listed for determining influence in social media interaction patterns are of great importance, the so-called actors, interactions and networks (Golder et al, 2006). Within these categories we distinguish different indicators that determine and predict influence within the social media.

### Corporate Communication

The core of corporate communication is to influence stakeholders. However, corporate communication is a broad term. Within the corporate communication three streams can be distinguished: management communication (Jo & Shim, 2005), marketing communication (Zeithalm et al, 1988) and organizational communication (Eisenberg, 1984). Management and communication consists of the internal communication within an organization, a form of communication that is not a good solution for the open social media. The marketing communication consists of (corporate) advertising, public relations and direct marketing (Naik & Piersma, 2002; Kotler & Pfoertsch, 2006), while the organizational communication consists of recruitment (Taylor & Bergmann, 1987), crisis communication (Ulmer & Sellnow, 2000) and webcare (Van Noord & Willemsen, 2011).

According to Oomens & Van den Bosch (1999) and Ihator (2001) it is



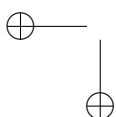


possible to distinguish two main streams of strategic communication types: proactive communication and reactive communication. The goal of proactive communication is actively seeking contact with consumers, while the goal of reactive communications is reacting to a message of a consumer. Within the six domains of corporate communication: crisis communication, public relations, direct marketing, webcare, corporate advertising and recruitment; these two types of communication are addressed. Crisis communication is both reactive and proactive, citizens asked questions about a certain situation, for instance an explosion, and the organization gave an answer to these questions. However, it is also possible to give updates about the explosion. What does it mean for the citizens and what actions should they take, a proactive way of communication.

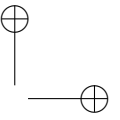
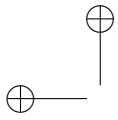
The main purpose of marketing and communications relating to the two main streams of strategic communications is to improve the reputation of organizations. For years the corporate reputation received little attention by organizations (Barnett et al, 2006). However, the rise of social media has completely changed this attitude. Since every social media user can share his thoughts about an organization and so can affect the corporate reputation within the social media, makes people to reckon with. Corporate reputation is defined as: “a stakeholder’s overall evaluation of a company over time. This evaluation is based on the stakeholder’s direct experiences 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” (Gotsi and Wilson, 2001, p.29). Every social media user has some degree of social influence on other users. As van Riel (2004) stated, the reputation of an organization is determined by concerned citizens. However, this social influence of one individual varies per individual.

### **Social Influence**

According to the literature, social influence is: “Consciously or subconsciously persuading others from your thoughts, beliefs or actions” (Kahan, 1997). Influencing another person depends on several different factors. One can be for example influential because of his authority, because of his social status or because of his large network. Based on these different reasons of influence there are three categories in defining social influence: actors (Lazarsfeld &







Katz, 1955; Cosmas & Sheth, 1980; Keys & Case, 1990; Weimann; 1994), interactions (Dholakia, 1978; Hass, 1981) and networks (Cosmas & Sheth, 1980; Gordijn et al, 2002).

According to the actor network theory (Callon, 1982) the three categories in social influence are interwoven with each other. The actor (a human or non-human entity) uses an interaction to affect others in a network: their thoughts, beliefs or actions (Figure 1). These three categories have also the capability of independently exercising influence. We have influential actors, influential interactions and influential networks, each one independently from the rest.

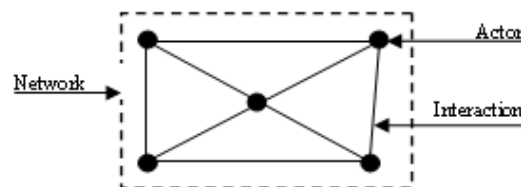
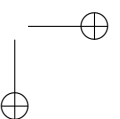
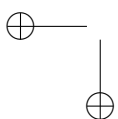
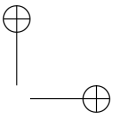
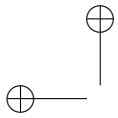


Figure 1: Actor Network Theory (Callon, 1982)

### Influential actors

The emergence of word-of-mouth communication (WOM, or word-of-mouth advertising) via social media has a major impact on business. It is difficult for organizations to have influence on this form of communication that the reputation of a brand, product or service can impair or enhance. Examination of Kiss and Bichler (2008) recognizes the importance of WOM and points to the influence of specific individuals in this form of communication, the 'influencers'. In the marketing world 58 percent of the marketers deem the role of online influencers to be large to very large. 55 percent of marketers indicated that they have no or limited understanding of the identification of the online influencers (PR Lewis, 2011). Research by Gillin (2007) showed already that the concept of influencers has made a new twist, causing gain in the normal citizen influence in various processes. The influential people in the conventional world are not necessarily the most influential people in the digital world (Citera, 1998; Keller & Berry, 2003; Gillin, 2007). The study of

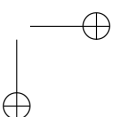
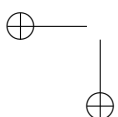


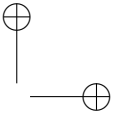


Citera shows that people who were quite introverted in everyday life, on the Internet turned out to be very extravert. They dare to give their opinion and take the lead in online conversations. Therefore, this section is attempted to identify the influencers within the social media.

An influential actor is not always a person, it could also be a company for instance. However, in this study we mainly focus on influential individuals, the influencers. Lazarsfeld and Katz (1955), pioneers of research in the field of influence, define influencers as people who influence others in their immediate vicinity. Their status of 'influencer' gave them the power to speed-up the information distribution (Kitsak et al, 2010). According to Huang et al (2011), it is in any case important to make a distinction between different kinds of influencers, to identify influence within the social media. For example, not only the stereotypical famous people like Barack Obama, but also the people who are closer to you such as your friends or acquaintances, could be influential. According to Gladwell (2001), there is a distinction between three types of influential people: (1) connectors, (2) salesmen and (3) mavens. A connector is characterized as a person with many connections, a salesman is able to sell everything that is within reach and the maven is characterized by his expertise in a particular field. But since influencers occur in many different capacities, it is insufficient to handle only three different types of influencers. Different characteristics of influencers also form different types of influencers.

The literature points to several different indicators for identifying influential actors. Keller and Berry (2003) point to indicators related to influencing characteristics of individuals: active minds, trendsetters, social presence and impact. Other indicators of influencing capacity which both are qualitative and quantitative are: social activity (Bales et al, 1951; Bottger, 1984; Littlepage et al, 1995), charisma (Bass, 1997; Shamir, 1999), expertise (Cosmas & Sheth, 1980), communication (Keys & Case, 1990), power (Kadushin, 1980), authority (Cialdini, 2009), shared interests (Cha et al, 2010), uniqueness (Iyengar et al, 2009), creation of follow-up activities (Keller & Berry, 2003), innovativeness (Agarwal et al, 2008), awareness (Gillin, 2008), personal messages (Cha et al, 2008) and amount of followers/friends (Cha et al, 2010, Kwak et al, 2010).



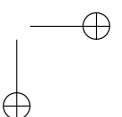


### **Influential interactions**

Social interaction is one of the most common reasons for using the Internet. The introduction of social media strengthened this reason. Current research to influential processes in digital media is often focused on the analysis of social networks. But the value of interactions in influential processes is often underestimated. Within the social media the role of interactions in identifying social media influence is important. Social interactions through online applications differ from offline interactions due to the lesser importance of physical appearance and physical proximity of the sender (McKenna & Bargh, 2000). As a result, the introverted people and people who experience social anxiety and loneliness tended to use the social web to assuage their real-worlds isolation (Correa et al, 2010). But in case of Facebook for example, the extraverted people are better represented. Introverted people who want to talk in anonymity will not use networks where they should release their actual identity. However, in offline interactions the intrinsic properties of an actor are more important to influence another, than in the social media. In the social media, the accent lies more on the intrinsic characteristics of the interactions of these actors.

A sociological definition of an interaction is given by Jensen (1998, p.188) who describes an interaction as ‘the relationship between two or more people who, in a given situation, mutually adapt their behavior and actions to each other’. Reports, messages and dialogues are terms which lie to a greater or lesser extent in relation to an interaction. According to Bales (1955), Dholakia (1978) and Hass (1981) the communicative power of a person largely depends on interactions. Blogs, Tweets or Wall posts, each of these communication forms have their own characteristics. The fact that you should express the core of your Tweet message in just 140 characters makes it a different interaction form than for example a blogpost in which the amount of characters is infinite.

The influence of an interaction can be measured with different indicators. Karpf (2007) studied the influence of interactions in the context of weblogs; he created the blogosphere authority index (BAI) and made in this index a distinction between four different criteria to test weblogs on influence: (1) network centrality score, (2) hyperlink authority score, (3) site traffic score and (4) community activity score. The network centrality score is used to measure the reputation of an individual. Is he a central person in a network



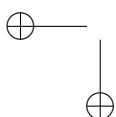


or just someone with some contacts? The hyperlink authority score takes the amount of links to a blog as a criterion for influence. The amount of website visitors is measured in the third criterion: 'site traffic score'. The fourth community activity score is a score that is connected to the number of interactions that evokes from a blog. Other indicators for the influence of social interactions are context (Maheswaran & Meyers-Levy, 1990), argumentation (Hunter, 2004), emotional situation (Forgas, 2007), agenda setting (McQuail & Windahl, 1993), framing (Esser & Spanier, 2005) and timing (Kovoor-Misra & Nathan, 2000).

### **Influential networks**

Network analysis of one individual is a complex task. An individual does not live in a vacuum with only a few clear and stable connections. An individual develops over a lifetime and creates a large network. The rise of social networking sites (SNS) boosts the creation of a large network. There are almost no barriers to connect with other people. One push on a button connects a new person to the network. Users of these social network sites have therefore the possibility to build a large network. A large network is often a form of status, so people are busy trying to boost the network with new connections (Cha et al, 2010). Many relatively unknown friends, the so-called weak ties of Granovetter (1973), clearly emerge. The weak ties offer individuals the opportunity to spread a message to a wide network. Nevertheless, there are just a few differences between the influence of a social network in the social media and a social network in the social psychology.

Van Dijk (1991, p.37) describes a network as follows: 'A network is a connection between at least three elements, points or units'. This definition applies to physical networks, social networks and media networks. The focus in this study is on the social networks within which individual actors can influence others. These networks consist of individuals and relations as described in the paper of Chrystakis and Fowler (2009). The degree of influence of individuals derives mainly from the network in which they live. A characteristic situation where the influence of an individual is clearly visible is within viral marketing. In this marketing technique a message is spread as an epidemic (Subramani & Rajagopalan, 2003). The network in which the influencer is currently located and the characteristics of the influencer itself have an





important role in the spread of information. Indicators which in different studies were associated with influential social networks are: the social distance between two actors (Granovetter, 1973), reciprocity (Tichy et al, 1979), multiplexity (Tichy et al, 1979), size of the network (Perkins & Syrquin, 1989), density (Tichy et al, 1979, Scott, 1988), connectivity (Lindelauf, 2011), centrality (Lindelauf, 2011), emotional value (Ellison et al, 2007), group cohesion (Aviv et al, 2003) and clustering (Mislove et al, 2007).

The indicators described were based on an extended literature study; the indicators mentioned by different studies are validated by a Delphi study amongst an online expert panel. The indicators are pointed to the three different categories within social influence: actors, interactions and networks. In the Delphi study these categories will be fulfilled with different indicators that predict or determine the influence within those categories and then within the social media.

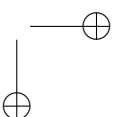
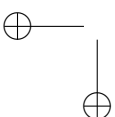
## Research questions

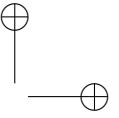
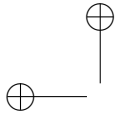
The work above leads us to introduce two research questions that guide the remainder of this paper.

1. How could influence within the social media be identified?
2. What is the impact of dealing with social media in corporate communications on the reputation of organizations?

## Methodology

Answering the two research questions, which belongs to explorative research, an online expert panel in the form of a Delphi study has been used (Dalkey & Helmer, 1963), whereby the participants should come to consensus about the topic of influence within the social media. Compared to other research methods, the online Delphi study has clear advantages for this study. First of all, it is less time consuming for the participants and the researchers; because the participants can all at the same time answer the in-depth questions. Another advantage of the Delphi study is the fact that the data is readily available





online; processing the data takes less time than in offline depth interviews, transcribing issues will therefore expire.

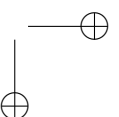
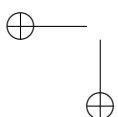
Organizations have a strong interest in the identification of social media influencers. These ‘special persons’ can be valuable in the persuasion of other social media users and so affect the corporate reputation of the organization. So, in this study we identify these social media influencers based on an online Delphi study and investigate which role these social media influencers play in influencing the corporate reputation.

This will be conducted with the objective to find consensus in the number of indicators predicting influence within the social media. In essence an online Delphi Study is an expert study in two or more rounds; the first round gives input for the second round and the second round gives the participating experts the chance to give a reaction on the answers in the first round. In a third round it is possible to generate an anonymous discussion between the participants. In this research we use the two-rounded Delphi Study of Dean et al (2000).

The reason why a Delphi study is used is the fact that this study prevents a tunnel vision (Kvale, 1996); every participant can give input in the concept of social media influence, without the interruption of others. The fact that influence can be seen from different perspectives makes it logical that more insights in more contexts arise. The second round ensures that these different insights result in a global view of social media influence, without the different insights.

The Delphi Study is carried out to twelve marketing and communication professionals in the first round and eighteen professionals in the second round. These professionals have more than 10 years experience in their field of work. The participants first got a whitepaper with global information about the research, but without detailed information. The different goals of the research were not told to them, in order to prevent that the participants were affected in advance. The first round was an open questioned round, the professionals could give their insights in their own words and give the participants the chance to think about a good answer. These answers were analyzed by the researcher and tallied on the number of the same indicators. The most mentioned indicators were used in the second round. Besides identifying the indicators we also asked them to give their insight in the role of social media influence on the corporate communication and reputation.

In steps the Delphi study was conducted as follows:





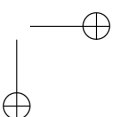
1. The selection of the expert panel.
2. The preparation and distribution of the first open-ended questionnaire.
3. Completed and received questionnaires were analyzed and the results were categorized.
4. The preparation and distribution of the second closed questionnaire.
5. Compare and categorize the suggestions and process results, in order to achieve consensus.
6. Writing a detailed summary for the participants.

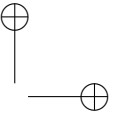
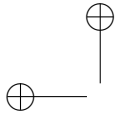
### **First round**

Questions which were asked are: ‘what makes one influential in social media?’, ‘what makes the message influential?’ and ‘what makes the social network influential?’ The professionals gave several characteristics which were related to the three categories: ‘actor’, ‘interaction’ and ‘network’. These characteristics, indicators in the rest of this study, could be divided into two groups: (1) intrinsic characteristics and (2) extrinsic characteristics. The intrinsic characteristics such as being a trendsetter are difficult to measure, the extrinsic characteristic such as the number of friends are better to measure. The results of this first round were used for the second round with closed questions.

### **Second round**

The first round resulted in open answers which were analyzed and categorized for the second round. In the second round the goal was to find consensus about the concept of social media influence, especially on the different indicators. The structure of the questions in the second round of questions was in the form of propositions and hypotheses that have been merged with the indicators from the literature. Every question started with a sentence, which should be complemented with possible indicators. The participant had to indicate (on a five points Likert-scale) to what extent they agreed with the accuracy of these indicators and if they think the indicators were measurable in the social media.





An example question: ‘The message (data exchange) of an online influencer has more influence when...’ This statement was supplemented with different indicators like ‘he has expertise in a certain area.’ Beside that the participants should answer some questions about whether they expect actors to influence the corporate communication and reputation.

The mean and median are used to give value to the extent to which an indicator determines influence. As in the study of Hasson et al (2000) this form of analysis gives the most reliable analytical results in a Delphi study. The fact that an indicator has a lower mean proves that this indicator is insufficient in determining the influence of an actor within the social media.

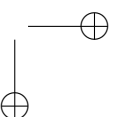
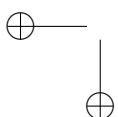
## Results

Most of the marketing and communication professionals looked at a different perspective to ‘social media influence’. The focus of this study is not only on social networks, but more specific on social media. Forums, blogs, Twitter or Facebook, each form of social media was included in the study. Several new indicators are the result of this wide scope of research. The results of the Delphi-study are discussed below.

### Results of the first question round

In the first round twelve of the twelve invited professionals participated. The open answers were interpreted and tallied, if an answer was called more than four times, it was included in the second round of questions. The primary objective of the first round was to pool the different views of the participants regarding influence within the social media. These bundled answers formed the basis for the second round of questions. The fact that social influence could be seen from several different perspectives provides a distinction between the characteristics, on the one hand, there are the intrinsic characteristics of participants and on the other hand the extrinsic characteristics (how to measure the influence).

The experts all introduced at least three characteristics of influential actors, interactions and networks. A striking result is that the twelve participants all look in a different way to the online influencers. One finds the intrinsic





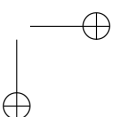


characteristics important, while the other believes the size of the network determines the influence. In order to prevent that a result is sent in one direction has been chosen to make the questions in the first round as broadly interpretable as possible. In the second round these different perceptions should lead to joint consensus on the indicators.

### Results of the second round

The participants have been confronted with the answers they gave in the first round. These answers were evaluated for consensus. The higher the consensus, the more the participants could identify with the indicators in the three categories: actors, interactions and networks. The questionnaire was sent among the twelve participants in the first round; ten of them fully participated in the second round. Two participants have answered the questions regarding the influential actors. In addition, six professionals who were not able to participate in the first round took part in the second round. The total number of participants in the second round was therefore sixteen, plus the two participants who completed the first part. The questionnaire was divided into four parts. The first part consisted of questions regarding the influential actors, the second part of influential interactions, the third part of influential networks and the last part of questions regarding the role that social media plays in influencing the corporate reputation.

Indicators which were mentioned regarding the influential actors are: (1) being an active mind, (2) being credible, (3) has expertise, (4) has authority, (5) is a trendsetter and (6) has substantive influence in discussions and conversations. The influence of an interaction largely depends of (1) the amount of times a message has been shared, (2) the amount of reactions a message raises, (3) the amount of quotes a message raises, (4) the amount of personal reactions an interaction raises, (5) the click-through rate of a message, (6) the amount of readers/listeners which were reached, (7) the quality of interactions, (8) the relevance of a message for readers/listeners, (9) the message has throughput with traditional media, (10) the message evokes a large group of unique visitors and (11) the message provides an additional value. An actor has influence in a network if: (1) the message was shared outside the own network, (2) if content is used by others in the network, (3) if the actor has a large number of good contacts, (4) if the actor can activate others to read



a message, (5) if the actor actively communicates with others, (6) if the actor has a number of subtop-influencers in the network, (7) if a message is shared within the own network, (8) if the actor has many contacts, (9) if the actor shows great commitment and (10) if the speed at which a message is shared/used within a network is high. Figure 2 only mentioned the top 4 of indicators related to the three different categories, these could be seen in the first column, this is also the descriptive side of the model. However, the rest of the model is an effect model. The descriptive side of the model is related to the first research question that was related to the identification of influence within the social media. The overall model is an effect model and is related to the second research question. Influential actors, interactions and networks have a major impact on the corporate communication of an organization. According to the participants the conscious use of social media has a positive impact on managing the reputation of the organizations, which also has an important role for the online influencers. They offer organizations an additional opportunity to strengthen the corporate reputation.

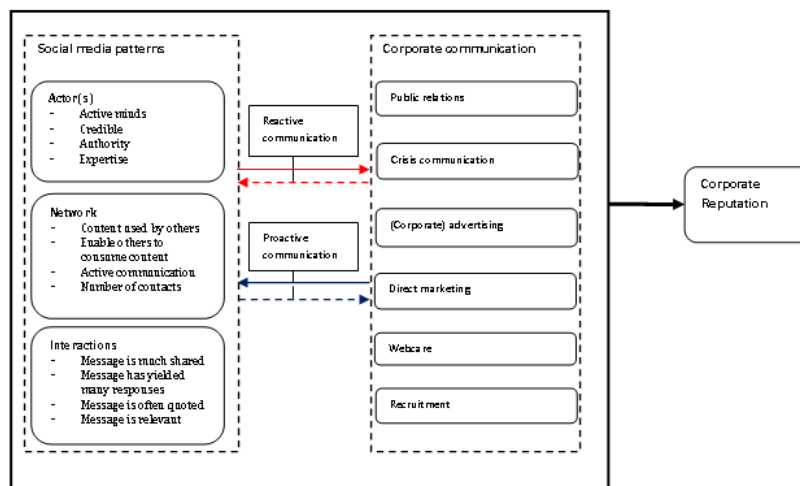
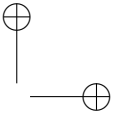


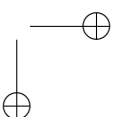
Figure 2: Social Media Corporate Reputation Influencers



## Conclusion

In recent years, an increasing number of methods and tools have been developed to measure the influence of an individual within the social media, examples are: Klout, Kret.ly and Peer Index. Applications that especially use the engagement around an individual, for example by measuring the amount of reactions or the number of times a message is being shared. In this paper we started with an explorative analysis to the intrinsic and extrinsic qualities of social media influencers, by doing a literature review and a Delphi study. We found that actors, interactions and networks are the three recognizable categories in social media influence. Both qualitative and quantitative variables were associated with social media influencers. Based on the research results we can draw different conclusions concerning the different categories. First, we could see a clear distinction between the influence of a transmitter and the way the receiver responds to this influence. The transmitter (actor) performs such influence by demonstrating on a credible way his or her expertise, the receiver evaluates this message and executes an action for example by spreading the word among his or her network. That is one of the main reasons why that we made a distinction between influential actors, influential interactions and influential networks. Within these three categories different indicators could be pointed.

Coming back to the first research question, we can conclude that influence within the social media can be identified with 27 indicators, based on the consensus in the assessment on the Likert-scale, the participants have given in the Delphi study. However, we appoint the top-10 indicators that have the greatest value for the identification of influence within the social media. Influence in the social media increases – in order of importance – if: (1) a message is often shared, (2) a message evokes many responses, (3) a message is widely quoted, (4) a message is used by many others, (5) the actor is an active mind, (6) the message is credible, (7) the actor has great impact on others, (8) the actor is an authority, (9) the actor has expertise in a particular field and (10) a message evokes many personal responses. It should be taken into account that as soon as the value of an indicator increases or decreases, the influence of the actor also increases or decreases. It is important to form different indices to make the influence value more precise. An actor that has authority and much expertise, whose messages are often shared and who evokes many responses has





for example more influence than an actor who has no authority or expertise, whose messages never has been shared, but who has many contacts. An index of these different situations makes it possible to compare the actors with each other.

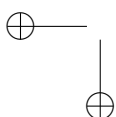
An answer on the second research question is that a correct and conscious treatment of social media influencers affects the corporate reputation in a positive way. The experts in the Delphi study confirm that social media influencers affect the corporate reputation. For that reason, we can conclude that infinite use of social media influencers will only strengthen this corporate reputation, because they were believed by the followers. However, it is important not to use the influencers as glorified advertising columns. Twitter-followers or Facebook-friends of the social media influencers do not take them serious if they suddenly start to promote a certain product or service. But this largely depends on the type of corporate communication that is conducted; in crisis management for example the use of social media and social media influencers may have a greater effect on the corporate reputation than in direct marketing.

## Discussion

In this paper, we came to a descriptive and effect model where influence within the social media was identified with several indicators and where this social media influence was related to the reputation of an organization.

The descriptive side of the model is in the first place important for social media monitoring tools, because they can create an algorithm that shows which actors, interactions or networks (or a combination of the categories) has the most influence in a certain corporate communication context. The construction of this algorithm is a unique selling point for any social media monitoring tool. Afterwards, marketing and communication professionals could use the score based on the algorithm in their choice for the communication with an influential actor, interaction or network. They could be used to play a key role in customer service, crisis management or maybe for example corporate advertising.

Future research should lead to an improvement of the ‘social media corporate reputation influencers model’. An important issue for future research is a study to the construction of indices. Every indicator in this research has





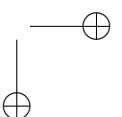
an individual value in the determination and prediction of influence within the social media, but the value of coupled indicators (called an index) is much more valuable. In the future it is recommended to improve this model by constructing indices.

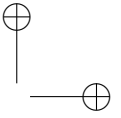
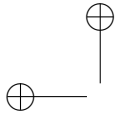
In the future, each type of corporate communication should consist of several different indices. If a supermarket has sold for example a product that contains glass shards, then the product should be recalled. To influence the customers of the seriousness of the situation, it is important to reach them with for example a social media influencer. The organization could then use an index with the indicators which they think fits the best with the influencer they want to reach. The influencer should be approached with the attention message of the organization and the influencer could persuade the specific audience who purchased the product to bring the product back to the supermarket. In another situation this could be different, for customer service it is maybe important to react to persons who has a large network and who has a sense of authority within a specific field. So in the future, it may be valuable to investigate the possible construction context-specific indices.

Another point for the future is the fact that this research is conducted with marketing and communication professionals, which created identification from one perspective. In the future it is recommended to identify social media influence from the perspective of the social media user. When are you affected by another social media user? This research would be from the perspective of the feeling of the social media user especially; this can be done with specific questions in which no prior knowledge is required.

A limitation of this study is the limited sample size of the Delphi study. This has led to two shortcomings. Firstly, only a dozen participants completed the first question round, which ensures that not all indicators that apply to social media influence, have emerged. Secondly, it is not possible with this limited sample size to do reliability analysis on the results of the second question round. The results from the first and second round of questions can only be interpreted by the researcher.

Finally, it is difficult to prove that there is a causal relation between the influence within the social media and the impact on the corporate reputation. The marketing and communication professionals suggest that there is a relation, but quantitative research could give a more reliable evidence of the relation to social media influence and for example a more negative corporate

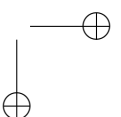
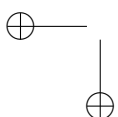




reputation. But without research to this specific research subject, it is difficult to have a watertight proof of this relation.

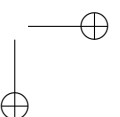
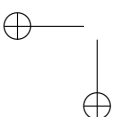
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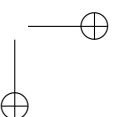
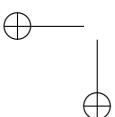


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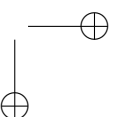
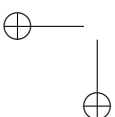
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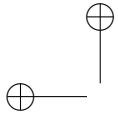


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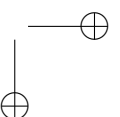
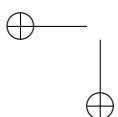




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## The (in) communicability of corporate social responsibility – a Portuguese insight

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**Abstract:** From the perspective of a group of public relations consultants and communication directors operating in Portugal, this chapter discusses the complexity inherent to CSR communication. Some of the key questions to be addressed include: are so-called sustainable and socially responsible business strategies, in fact, indicators of genuine corporate change? Or is CSR *per se* insincere and should CSR communication be considered as a mere invention of PR? CSR will be equated, first, from the analysis of the dialectic relationship between activist movements, government regulation and business discourse and action. Then, some core principles for communicating CSR are highlighted, as well as the dangers and dilemmas in communicating CSR policies from a PR theoretical framework.

**Keywords:** CSR, CSR communication, Portugal, PR practitioners.

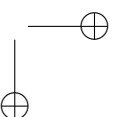
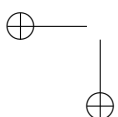
### Introduction

**I**N the Green Book of the European Commission, Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) is defined as “a concept whereby companies integrate social and environmental concerns in their business operations and in their interactions with stakeholders on a voluntary basis” (European Commission, 2001).<sup>1</sup> However, it is difficult to find a consensual definition for CSR in specialized literature, as it is an “essentially contest concept” (Okoye, 2009, p. 624). Over time, various terms have arisen as synonyms or related words for CSR. “Corporate citizenship” (Waddock, 2004) “corporate responsibility” (Hillenbrand & Money, 2007) and “sustainable business” (Zorn & Collins, 2007) are perhaps the most prominent examples.

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<sup>1</sup>Available from <http://eur-lex.europa.eu>. Accessed May 2, 2013.

*Organisational and Strategic Communication Research: European Perspectives*, 143-165



There is no intent here to address some of the conceptual delimitations of which many authors have already focused on (see for example, Elkington, 1998; May, Cheney, Roper, 2007; Ihlen, Bartlett, May, 2011). For the purposes of this article it suffices to know that the concepts revolving around the notion of CSR place greater emphasis on the domain of Business Ethics. More specifically, CSR points to a business stance in the definition of the relationship between company and society that contrasts the traditional neoliberal vision (well exemplified by Milton Freedman) where the sole responsibility of businesses is to make a profit and be in accordance with the law.

The presupposition behind this text is that CSR focuses on the way companies deal with economic, social and/or environmental questions in relation to their stakeholders and the general public. It is also worth mentioning that the fundamental tenet of this vision resides in communication which is an essential component of the process that shapes the company/society relationship.

As L'Etang (1994, p. 113) states, CSR "is often managed by PR practitioners for public relations ends and therefore corporate social responsibility is seen as part of the public relations portfolio". From company websites to annual sustainable reports or from different events to information media, the messages and means used to impact the public on the theme of CSR is quite varied. Through sponsorships or patronage of the arts and sports, to the implementation of volunteer programs, which for the most part engage NGOs, we can see some common examples of CSR programs that can be found all over the world.

But CSR and communication is a sensitive and complex topic. There are many who are wary of the explosion of rhetoric and images on environmental, social and economic sustainability. For many pressure groups, such as activists, journalists and opinion makers, as well as for the common citizen, the prevailing question is: are the strategies for the so-called socially responsible and sustainable projects real indicators of genuine business policies? Or is CSR insincere per se or simply "markethique", that is, a marketing stratagem as accused by Lipovetski (1994, p. 246)? Isn't CSR a mere "PR invention", as Frankental argues (2001)?

Therefore, the overall purpose of this chapter is to examine the links between communicating CSR and public relations both from a theoretical and practical perspective in order to foster the debate over current issues and assumptions on this topic. The inherent complexity of CSR communication will



be discussed in three phases. First, emphasis will be placed on the evolution of CSR by focusing on the dialectic relationship which has always been present among activist movements, government regulation and business discourse and action. This will require a particular focus on Sharon Beder's (1996, 2001, 2002) critical vision on the genesis of the environmental question. Then, a bibliographic review about PR in CSR will be provided with the intent of highlighting communication dangers and dilemmas in CSR policies. Finally, particular attention will be paid to an empirical study developed in Portugal on the perception of PR practitioners in relation to their role in organizations and society. This is also where the previously raised questions on PR and CSR communication will be discussed.

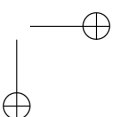
“Communicating and informing more is crucial for the Portuguese society to have greater awareness on the theme of Social Responsibility”. This was the main conclusion of the study carried out in 2004 by Sair da Casca, the first Portuguese consulting company specializing in sustainable development and social responsibility.<sup>2</sup> In addition to emphasizing on CSR communication, the present chapter mainly aims to analyze the contribution of PR to the decision making process in relation to what, how and when to communicate CSR policies, thus offering elements for a better understanding of this important professional field in the process of the relations organizations have with society.

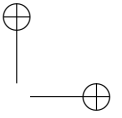
## 1. CSR, activism and public opinion – a dialectic relation

According to the most well-known manuals on public relations (e.g., Cutlip, Center & Broom, 1986; Grunig & Hunt, 1984; Lesley, 1991), up until the 1950s the action of corporate public relations was centered on the dissemination of information, and on unidirectional communication models, without any consideration for the feedback from the public or audiences. After the 1950s, due in part to the appearance of television – a mass media able to strongly influence audiences, as set by the early mass media effects theories – the communication models promoted by public relations start to be bidirec-

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<sup>2</sup>Available from [www.sairdacasca.com](http://www.sairdacasca.com). Accessed May 2, 2013.



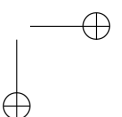


tional. Edward L. Bernays is representative of this evolution by focusing his attention on and researching the public. He also got feedback from audiences and evaluated the attitudes of the masses. The concept “engineering of consent”, title given to one of his essays (Bernays, 1955), at the time served as a synonym for the power of PR advice: “one who would prescribe for a client the most effective ways to navigate an increasingly complicated, often hostile, social environment” (Ewen, 1996, p. 163).

It is precisely at the beginning of the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century that the anti-business sentiment gains momentum in the United States followed by Europe a bit later on. Nuclear power, the abuse of civil rights, the women’s rights movement and consumer rights movement are some of the examples that contribute to the tension between businesses and society. Due to public activism and skepticism, the consensus in public opinion was at risk and companies needed new management and communication skills.

In this context, it is natural that the concept of CSR evolve exponentially. In accordance with the synthesis developed by Carrol (1999, p. 270) in the 1950s, the concept of CSR enters the modern age with the publication of *Social Responsibilities of the Businessman*, by Howard Bowen (1953). As the title indicates, the author questions the obligations of business leaders in the sense of pursuing “policies, to make those decisions, or to follow those lines of action which are desirable in terms of the objectives and values of our society (Bowen, 1953, p. 6). According to Cochran (2007), it is in the 1960s and 1970s that the concept suffers one of its most interesting evolutions which is visible in William Frederick’s (1978) frequently quoted text: *From CSR1 to CSR2: The Maturing of Business-and-Society Thought*. This is when companies stop being involved only in the academic debate about ethics at the different levels of CSR and start responding, quite pragmatically, to various social pressures. This means that as activist groups improved their highly mediatized pressure measures, companies also reacted with new management and production policies.

In the last decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the level of company response to activist pressure has grown dramatically with the environmental movement being a paradigmatic example. Environmental questions, as a widespread concern, appeared after World War II with the movements for disarmament and against nuclear experiments and their respective public demonstrations. Later on, for example, there was the foundation of Greenpeace in 1971-72







(Schmidt, 1999) which were against the French nuclear experiments in the Mururoa atoll and the American experiments on the island of Amchitka in Alaska.<sup>3</sup>

For Sharon Beder (1996), the environmental movement also results from the proliferation of interest groups that challenged corporate power and demanded greater government control over businesses. The protests focused on the social and environmental impact of business activities and environmental degradation was attributed to unbridled industrial growth.

During this period, many governments responded with new environmental legislation in order to limit the sources of pollution (Beder, 1996, p. xii). Consequently, throughout the 1970s, many companies became extremely active politically, working towards the promotion of an anti-regulation agenda and financing public relations and advertising programs with the aim of restoring the public's faith in a company that would be free from governmental regulation. In accordance with Beder (2002, p. 21), large North-American companies developed a real "new corporate activism" that was visible in the creation of public affairs departments and in the application of billions of dollars for the advertising and sponsorship of one sole objective: to improve the company's image and reputation.

The efficacy of the pressure from corporate and social activism on governmental regulation would be challenged with greater force in the late 1980s. With the Bhopal, Chernobyl and Exxon Valdez disasters, environmental movements gained strength. Simultaneously, the public's concern with the environment is also strengthened by scientific discoveries related to the ozone phenomenon and global warming. The theme of sustainable development enters the global agenda in an inevitable way. "Our common Future – the Brundtland Report" from the World Commission on Environment and Development (1987), is pointed out in the literature as the text that gave the most impetus to the sustainability movement. In it you may find the most consensual definition of sustainable development as progress that "meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs" (p. 43).

As environmental concerns grow so does the distrust in relation to com-

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<sup>3</sup>For more information on the foundation of Greenpeace see: [www.greenpeace.org](http://www.greenpeace.org). Accessed June 20, 2012.





panies – they are seen as the biggest polluters of water, air, forests, soil, etc. Perhaps as a response, green communication increases and becomes more sophisticated. The peak of this advertising trend is in 1990 with the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Earth Day – “one-fourth of all household products that came on the market . . . advertised themselves as ‘recyclable’, ‘biodegradable’, ‘ozone friendly’, or ‘compostable’” (Thien, 1993, p. 18).

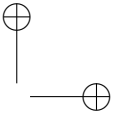
During the 1990s, there was an explosion of the application of public relations techniques that involved environmental concerns. At the service of large companies, lobbyists, think tanks, and specialists in environmental public relations made efforts to influence the increasingly tighter regulations on the company’s responsibilities towards the environment and pollution indexes (for example, the *Clean Air Act* in the USA and certain legislation in the European Parliament). According to Beder, “Environmentalism was labeled ‘the life and death PR battle of the 1990s’ and ‘the issue of the decade’ by public relations personnel” (2001, p. 9).

By the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the accusations of greenwash – understood as a pseudo-action of CSR that allows organizations to create an image of respect for the environment – becomes recurring in the literature on this subject (see Athanasiou, 1996; Greer & Bruno, 1996; Beder, 1996, 2002; Lubbers, 2002):

The key to *greenwashing* is manufactured optimism, which comes in many forms – as images, articles and books, technologies, and even institutions. Anything will do, as long as it can be made to carry the message that, though the world may seem to be going to hell, everything is in good hands (Athanasiou, 1996: 3).

Evidently, it is the big multinational companies such as Shell or BP that are first put in check. This is due, in particular, to their involvement in complex public affairs and PR strategies aimed at contradicting the growing environmental regulation and public interest in this matter. These strategies are always evident when there is a significant difference in an organization’s rhetoric. In other words, when that which is communicated and the actual behavior is different (see, e.g., Sagar & Singla, 2004). Framed by skepticism about business ethics, there are many who mistrust a business discourse centered on respect for the environment or public interest. Bakan (2004) looks at the CSR





narrative discourse as being insincere per se (Bakan, 2004) and others see it as a mere invention of public relations at the service of business interests, many of which are not very ethical (Frankental, 2001). Journalistic discourse itself follows this tendency. Despite being open to positive news coverage, media reports on CSR issues are largely negative in tone and the tension inherent to “Corporate Social Irresponsibility” tend to stand out (Tench et al. 2007).

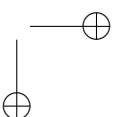
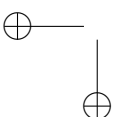
Gilles Lipovetski’s essay clearly illustrates that critical tone against CSR which provokes skepticism on the communication of that issue, as is discussed in point three of this chapter:

It is not ethics that governs a company’s communication; it is communication that imposes and administers it internally and externally. Ethics functions first of all as a lifting and a company’s offensive-defensive line: ethics, of an imperative category, converts itself into a strategic vector of business communication coerced by public relations, the business instrument of the brand (1994, p. 261). [my translation]

## 2. Communication and CSR – a dangerous liaison?

In recent decades, the corporate world has become public enemy number one due to financial scandals, environmental disasters and human rights violations. Inevitably, the public’s trust with regard to decisions made by companies decreased and corporate activities are increasingly scrutinized by activist groups and NGOs and magnified by real-time news coverage in online media.

Stakeholder demands have led organizations to communicate their social viewpoint in a more strategic manner in order to gain and maintain legitimacy. Organizational legitimacy can be understood as the congruence between public expectations and organizational actions and values (Suchman, 1995). Legitimation is therefore an essential process for all organizations, even to such a degree that it forms the core of all strategic communication practice (Metzler, 2001). However, the role communication plays in the management of organizational legitimacy is not consensual. Corporate communication is viewed with suspicion, that is, as a strategic approach to instrumentally manipulate and deploy evocative symbols in order to garner social support (Suchmann, 1995, p. 572).



It has been argued that the management of CSR shares similarities with public relations once both developed from public information to reputation and issues management during the late 20<sup>th</sup> century and both seek to enhance relationships with key stakeholder groups in order to respond to society's demands (Clark, 2000). By analyzing trends and patterns in public relations literature about CSR (between 1998 and 2007), Goodwin and Bartlett (2008) concluded that the current status of the literature suggests that public relations scholars have broadened their approach to CSR from one of solely comprehending communication management, as proposed by Clark (2000), to one that incorporates the management function and relationship management components of contemporary public relations thought.

CSR and public relations as a management function predominates in research dedicated to the planning process. As Goodwin and Bartlett (2008, p. 11) stressed, "research on CSR shows that public relations professionals are often responsible for CSR activities, demonstrating a direct correlation to their involvement in other themes such as ethics, CSR reporting and organization reputation". The management function was one of the roles for public relations in CSR identified by Kim and Reber (2008) as the "significant management role". The "significant management role" implies that the PR practitioner's responsibility is to strongly advise clients or advocate management on behalf of CSR issues. To educate clients about CSR, in other words. Nevertheless, in their empirical study, the authors also find out that, in some cases, the PR practitioner may have no role in CSR.<sup>4</sup>

In regard to public relations as a communication management approach to CSR, the literature centers its attention on the strategic understanding of the flow of information. According to Goodwin and Bartlett (2008, pp. 12-13), CSR reporting is the most popular theme in public relations literature, presented usually in three key ways: (1) as information dissemination (Golob &

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<sup>4</sup>Along with the "significant management role", Kim and Reber (2008) identified the philanthropic, the value-driven and the communication role in PR practice. The "philanthropic role" means that public relations is important to promote human welfare such as, making decisions about charitable giving, encouraging and facilitating volunteering, promoting community relations and health and safety issues. In some cases, working as pro-bono, for instance, for NGOs. The "value-driven" role implies that public relations is based on ethical standards, the mission or values of the organization and serves as a corporate role model. The "communication role" for CSR is mainly linked to the practice of publicity.

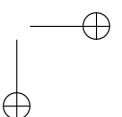


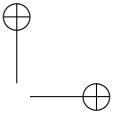
Bartlett, 2007; Esrock & Leichty, 1998), which suggests that CSR is essentially a communication technique; (2) as a two-way communication mechanism (O'Connor, 2001; Capriotti & Moreno, 2006). This approach discusses the role of the internet in CSR and public relations, in particular, with the advantage that the new and social media improve the relationship between an organization and its stakeholders, through transparency and accountability.<sup>5</sup> And (3) the interactive approach to CSR that highlights how organizations must nowadays engage in dialogue to meet stakeholders' concerns (Bartlett, Tywoniak & Hatcher, 2007; Tench, Bowd & Jones, 2007).

Concerning CSR and PR as a relationship approach, the nature of the relationship itself is analyzed in the literature. Sagar and Singla (2004), for instance, discussed the importance of organization-public relationship dimensions using a number of cases studies (Enron, Arthur Anderson, Xerox, etc.) to demonstrate how negative developments have led to the erosion of trust in businesses globally. They stress that the role of public relations is to generate trust through CSR, which means to utilize it as the social face that leads stakeholder relationships. Moreover, these authors declare the importance of public relations consultants to be serious about relationship management and hence bridge the gap between trust and CSR initiatives. Jones and Bartlett (2009) also state that the value of public relations is in its ability to aid relationship management. This should be considered in terms of corporate strategy as opposed to a communications-output perspective which is quite common in public relations practice. Thus, the authors understand CSR as a facilitator of relationship management, which is capable of building support networks for the organization, as opposed to viewing CSR as a set of activities that act as vehicles for building organizational legitimacy through the management of perceptions.

Furthermore, it is worth emphasizing that a communication management approach, that is, a communicative-output perspective to a public relations role in CSR leads to a "CSR promotional communication dilemma" (Coombs & Holladay, 2012, p. 110): stakeholders want CSR information, however, corporate messaging may generate repercussions when stakeholders see it as an excessively self-promotional strategy. In other words, although corpora-

<sup>5</sup>For an analysis of CSR reporting in Portugal from a theoretical framework of organizational communication see, e.g., Freitas & Lobão, 2011.





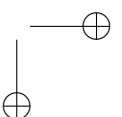
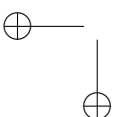
tions want stakeholders to see them as socially responsible, they are reticent about communicating their actions, fearing criticism and wary of creating expectations (Schlegelmilch & Pollack, 2005).

Therefore, despite the importance of communicating CSR policies, it can be stressed that there are in fact specific challenges which includes skepticism towards company messages and potentially hostile reactions from the media, activists and in more general terms, from public opinion (see, e.g., Dawkins, 2004; Schlegelmilch & Pollack, 2005; Ihlen, Bartelett & May, 2011; Coombs & Holladay, 2012).

Within this scenario several authors have tried to prescribe a solution to this communicative dilemma. Schlegelmilch and Pollack (2005: 278-280), for example, list three factors that can lead to success in CSR communication, namely, (1) the source credibility of the communicator, (2) honesty of the statements and (3) involvement of the audience with the topics that are being communicated. Ethics awards, reports from independent ethics audits, evidence of contributing to NGOs, and news coverage of the company's ethical affairs can also be used as evidence to enhance source credibility (Pollack, 2003).

Companies must also be aware that they are perceived as hypocritical and dishonest when they spend more on advertising the action than on the CSR action itself. The "marketing of good corporate conduct", as stated by Stoll (2002: 123), implies a very special case of publicity that needs to be carried out in an especially responsible fashion. Goodman (1998) also argued that whilst CSR communication is often channeled through corporate advertising, web sites and CSR reports, external media coverage has greater credibility among consumers and the general public than communication from the corporations themselves.

Inspired by Grunig and Hunt's 4 models of public relations and following a sense making approach, Morsing and Schultz (2006) presented three CSR communication strategies which companies should be able to employ in a combined way: "the stakeholder information strategy, the stakeholder response strategy and the stakeholder involvement strategy". The "stakeholder information strategy" is based on one-way communication, indicating that organizations are concerned with "talking" and not "listening" to stakeholders. This means that the purpose is to inform stakeholders of their good intentions and actions in relation to their CSR efforts without any use of third party en-





dorsement. In this manner, the company has full control of the communicative effort.

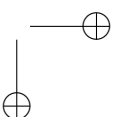
On the other hand, the “stakeholder response strategy” is a two-way asymmetric communication strategy since it gives stakeholders the opportunity to respond to CSR communication. The overall aim in engaging in dialogue with stakeholders is to determine if the company’s CSR actions are accepted. The feedback is then used to plan a better way to create a positive image which satisfies the demands of stakeholders. This kind of dialogue is therefore merely instrumental – companies “listen” in order to be able to “talk” better.

According to Morsing and Schultz (2006) only the 3<sup>rd</sup> strategy offers an opportunity for dialogue, participation and involvement. The “stakeholder involvement strategy” is based on a symmetric, two-way communication model that allows for the stakeholders and the company to influence each other through dialogue. As a result, the stakeholders are not just the receivers in the communication process but become proactively involved in it, which enables corporations to continuously understand and live up to the stakeholders’ changing expectations. The 3<sup>rd</sup> party endorsement, that is, the use of the opinions of external stakeholders, is a common way to involve stakeholders.

Overall and after a review of key literature in the field we might conclude that whether we look to public relations as a management function, a communication management function or a relationship management role, the transversal question seems to be whether to communicate or not CSR activities. This will be debated in the last part of this chapter by using the Portuguese case as a starting point. For this debate we adopt, as Ihlen et al. (2011, pp. 10-11), a social constructivism epistemological view (Berger & Luckman, 1966). Since our knowledge of the world is socially built through communication, we believe that it is through the analysis of CSR communication that we may be able to understand how the meaning of CSR is implemented in organizations and how its meaning is socially constructed.

### 3. CSR and public relations – the Portuguese case

Portugal centered its attention on CSR a bit later than the majority of industrialized countries. However, since the turn of the millennium there are numerous manifestations that the theme is present in the media, academic debates and



company practice. Studies at a national level have pointed to the following trends: more and more organizations have profiled codes of ethics/conduct; the support of social causes and volunteering has risen; the publication of sustainability reports (especially from companies in the stock market) has skyrocketed; several companies integrate today international CSR networks and adhere to international principals of conduct (e.g., BCSD Portugal, linked to the World Business Council for Sustainability; or RSE Portugal, a partner of CSR Europe); an increasing number of companies, even if modest, obtain environmental and/or social responsibility certifications<sup>6</sup>; there are more prizes and awards in the social and ethics areas; and some companies, even if a scarce number, integrate sustainability indexes (Rego et al., 2006, p. 295; Rego et al., 2003: chap. 5). Another indicator of the increased popularity of CSR in Portugal may be understood with the introduction, even if hardly representative, of post-graduate courses dedicated to this subject.

On the other hand, as Rego (2006) stresses, it is also true that many of the Portuguese companies' activities are occasional as CSR is often confused with "simple" acts of philanthropy and "many actions and events are fundamentally acts of public relations – that are not well permeated in the companies' 'way of being' and whose positive effects tend to evaporate over time" (Rego et al., 2006, p. 297) [my translation].

The state of development in Portugal regarding CSR can also be associated to the fact that society itself and Portuguese consumers are not sufficiently aware. According to the study "A percepção da RSE em Portugal" [CSR Perception in Portugal] (Sair da Casca, 2004), Portuguese citizens are still unfamiliar with the concept and consumers do not assume the "activist" mentality that exists in other countries. This is something that may change given the attention that the media give to reporting news pieces on social irresponsibility, thus creating even more debate on this theme.

In the last few years much attention has been given to CSR mainly from a

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<sup>6</sup>The certification of companies arrived in Portugal at the beginning of the 1990s, and initially only involved Quality Control. Environmental certification (ISO 14001) and social certification (Social Accountability – SA 8000) arrived in the country in the late 90s. Novadelta was the first Portuguese company to be certified in social responsibility – SA 8000, in December 2002. It is internationally known for its work in implementing sustainability practices in East Timor and is an international case study, not only in the coffee sector, but also in CSR communication (see for example, Gonçalves, 2004).





management perspective, both in the business and academic fields (Rego et al, 2006). Nevertheless there are few studies on CSR from a PR perspective focusing specifically on the Portuguese realm (Vau, 2005; Gonçalves, 2009). The practical aim of this chapter is therefore to investigate public relations consultants and directors' perceptions in regards to CSR communication policy. In the light of this overall aim, a small-scale empirical research was carried out in Portugal to review the existing practice and PR practitioners' self-awareness of their professional role in organizations and in communicating CSR. The sample consisted of 29 interviewees made up of 13 in-house communication directors in private companies, 7 from public companies and 9 from public relations agencies).

All interviews were conducted and recorded in the participants' workplaces and lasted around 50 minutes. The interviews were transcribed and the data was analyzed qualitatively in order to answer the following research questions:

RQ1. What is the key role of communication professionals in organizations?

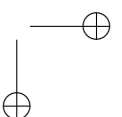
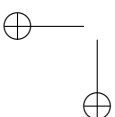
RQ2. What are the underlying goals of CSR communication?

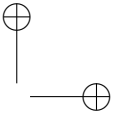
RQ3. How to communicate CSR?

### 3.1 The strategic role of a PR professional

Public relations activity has gained credibility and prestige in Portugal by being presented as an activity that aids the administration of organizations. Not only has the position of communication managers gained hierarchical importance but external consulting services in communication are also increasingly valued (APECOM/OJE, 2009). The communication department should be directed or "reported to the president or director of the organization" (E17) and the external consultants should have a "direct connection to CEOs or the companies' executive committees" (E28).<sup>7</sup> The importance of this presupposition is expressed in the possibility of a PR practitioner to develop or not that

<sup>7</sup>All of the expressions or concepts in quotation marks mean that they are an "*in vivo code*" (Corbin and Strauss, 2008, p. 65), that is, that they are expressions taken *ipsis verbis* from the interviewees' speech. Whenever relevant, the quoted excerpts from the interviewees are presented here numerically (E1, E2, E3... E29).



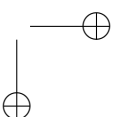


which is considered to be his/her fundamental mission in accordance with the interviewees – “strategic advice”:

I think that for the communication area to be successful, it depends 90% of the times on the relationship of trust that is established between the decider and the technical support that exists in that area (be it in the office or through an advisor). It is based on this relationship of proximity and trust, which is vital, that one can participate more or less in strategic management ( E23).

The practice of this “strategic advice” is defined according to the following characteristics:

- “*Know how to listen*” (E4.) The capacity to “hear the signs of society” (through studies or informal observation) and “interpret and inject those signs” (E4) into the organization, thus contributing to either its reaction or adaptation to what their stakeholders expect of it.
- *A panoptic and global vision.* Public relations occupies a “transversal function” (E27) in the organization thanks to the access to the high quantity of information and a wide range of knowledge on the different sectors of the organization and its inter-connections. Since all sectors need communication, it is up to the communicator “to find the synergies that should work at a strategic level” (E17).
- *More and better information.* A company’s growing openness to society is shown through the increase of information made available on the economic and social pillars of the organization: “Communication has to be something that corresponds to a reality. If we don’t know our reality, we simply create noise” (E24). This openness translates into communicational pro-activity.
- *A builder of relationships.* Any communication strategy should start from a “stakeholder mapping” (E17) with the goal of establishing long-lasting relationships of trust. Those relationships are at the basis of all strategies and are put to the test, especially when facing crisis situations.





- *The voice of conscience.* A PR professional is concerned with “propagating values” and “assuming causes” (E2) contributing for companies to affirm themselves for what they do “be it for their social responsibility, their ethics, or their compliance with regulation” (E11).

### 3.2 Real objectives, effective strategies

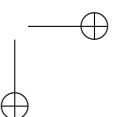
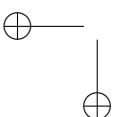
When asked about the main objective underlying CSR communication, the agents immediately highlighted the contribution towards the company’s image and reputation. This is an objective that may be understood as either negative or positive. On the one hand, many of the interviewees showed that they were conscious of the fact that much of the communication in CSR is still only “cosmetics, being good” (E5), or “giving to charity” (E17), which leads to an exaggeration in the communications. In other words, the company is “faking that it is doing it; says that it is doing it and then nothing changes” (E3).

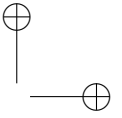
On the other hand, all of the interviewees stressed the fact that CSR communication is a positive contribution to an organization’s image and reputation not only for “humanizing the company” (E25), but mainly for legitimizing the organization’s action in society vis-à-vis its entire public. In this sense, the majority of respondents highlighted the importance of CSR communication in being strong and clearly linked to the organization’s own mission and identity:

It has to be an attitude that comes from deep within because if it is not real, if it is not part of the DNA, then it won’t propagate. When it is something that is made without criteria and that is not assumed by the company then it doesn’t make sense. It is only a publicity scheme. (E2)

All of the interviewees defend the importance of communicating policies of corporate responsibility. The main reasons given are as follows:

- *Company positioning.* CSR communication allows the company to position itself in the current competitive market and accompany international trends in terms of social and environmental intervention and economic sustainability.





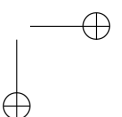
- *The public has a right to information.* CSR communication is closer to information than advertising: “We have the duty to make society aware of what we do, just as society has the duty of denouncing our misdeeds” (E14).
- *Be an example.* Through communication an organization shows its competition and other companies that it’s possible to successfully apply CSR policies. It is important to draw attention to good CSR practices.
- *“Communicating is always an act of corporate responsibility”* (E24). Communication transforms companies in that it demands a foundation on what is real. For example, if one intends to elaborate a sustainability report, it is necessary to do some previous work on the organization concerning those matters.

### 3.3 Well-balanced communication

“To do something well and not say it is dumb. . . it’s a lost opportunity. But of course, without exaggerating so that it doesn’t become ridiculous” (E19). The affirmation from the agent interviewed clearly points to the main problem of CSR communication: what, when and how much should be communicated. In other words, knowing to which extent communicating about a company’s action is acceptable without the message generating suspicion in the receptors and consequently becoming counterproductive for the company’s own image and reputation.

Through an analysis of the data gathered from the interviews, we identified some of the principles or rules for communication that were determined in this topic. This is in harmony with the authors discussed in point 3 of this article and is listed below:

- First do it, and only then communicate it;
- Don’t spend more in communicating than in doing, that is, develop a discrete communication and not a “*comercialona*” (hugely commercialized) one (E1);
- Practice a “well-balanced communication” (E14), that is, don’t always talk about the theme of corporate responsibility. Do it only when there





are reasons to be proud of something (for ex., you are in the Dow Jones Sustainability Index ranking, or obtain a social responsibility or environmental certification such as Norm SA8000 and the Eco-label);

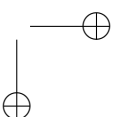
- Don't exaggerate with advertising, but rather resort to media relations;
- Develop many interpersonal communication plans and events (for example, meetings, conferences, award ceremonies);
- Don't communicate everything that is done in corporate responsibility, only what is of interest for the general public;
- Let others talk about what the company does (partners, such as NGOs or the media itself).

### Concluding remarks

The concept of corporate social responsibility (CSR) seems to have found a “new mantra” in the business world (Munschi & Kurian, 2005, p. 414). However, there are many that only see a mere propagandistic technique in this corporate policy. In fact, often times, CSR communication has no foundation since the only objective lies in improving a company's image and reputation.

The development of this communicational choice on behalf of a large variety of organizations was mainly influenced by pressure from civic movements, for example, ecologists, that alerted public opinion towards contradictions from many multinational companies – between saying and doing. Without a doubt, the development of activist movements generated clear changes in the way companies interacted with society and, consequently, in the way they communicated with society. Nowadays, marketing objectives are certainly one of the main explanations for the explosion of green communication. Therefore, the question that prevails is of an ethical nature. In other words, to which extent has CSR communication developed in a transparent and responsible way, or the contrary, has it been merely instrumental with the overestimated communication of a green image, for example, for corporate success?

In the opinions of the communication and public relations professionals who were interviewed and work in the Portuguese market, the strategic role that communication occupies in companies does not seem to leave any doubts





– it is important to communicate about the responsible positioning of organizations, but in a well-balanced manner. For CSR communication not to become a “*communication externe en boomerang*” (Libaert, 2010, p. 93), meaning, a perverse communication that turns against its own messenger, certain basic principles should be taken into consideration. First of all, take the decision to communicate only when the subject of CSR is at the heart of the organization’s mission; Secondly, communication should be developed humbly and moderately, especially without resorting to gigantic advertising investments; and finally, try to find the messages about the organization’s action that could be endorsed by opinion leaders or NGOs. As a whole, the adoption of these basic principles will help affirm not only a level of responsibility that underlies CSR communication, but also the fundamental role of the communication professional in the strategic management of communication in organizations and in the construction of long-lasting relationships with different publics.

Despite the immanent limitations in this exploratory study, we hope that the data here discussed may serve as a starting point for further and more comprehensive research on the limits and peculiarities of CSR communication in the perspective of public relations and therefore contribute to a strategic communication that is designed to be effective but also public and socially responsible.

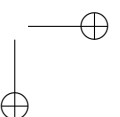
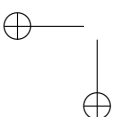
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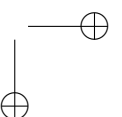
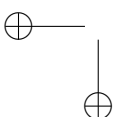


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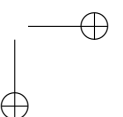
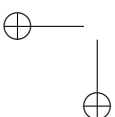
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## Government communication in a post-conflict society: Contest and negotiation in Northern Ireland's consociational democratic experiment

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**Abstract:** Democratic governance in Northern Ireland is consociational (i.e. power sharing is mandatory). The role of Special Advisers within *mandatory* coalitions has received little attention from scholars, despite the fact that consociationalism is increasingly prescribed as a solution to fragmented conflict ridden societies across the world. Drawing on data from elite interviews with Government Information Officers, Special Advisers and journalists, this paper utilises a discursive framework to analyse their perspectives on the impact and role of Special Advisers in Northern Ireland's devolved, power-sharing government. In particular, we consider how Special Advisers impact on the communication of departmental and Executive policy. Initial findings suggest that while Special Advisers function similarly to those working elsewhere in Westminster model democracies, the post-conflict and politically volatile consociational context in Northern Ireland adds additional complexity to their role. SpAds not only articulate issues to the media but also play an important diplomatic role in inter-party negotiation and conflict resolution between the five ideologically opposed parties in government. Special Advisers in Northern Ireland therefore not only communicate their minister's political priorities and policy decisions, but also play a crucial role in the development and maintenance of internal and external working relationships across the consociational governing administration. This paper adds to our knowledge of Special Advisers in democratic societies by evaluating their role in what is, by Western European standards, a relatively unique political system.

**Keywords:** government communication, democracy, post-conflict, Northern Ireland, consociationalism.

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## 1. Introduction and background

THE employment of Ministerial Special Advisers (SpAds) in Western liberal democratic governments is now an acknowledged element of contemporary political culture in these societies (McNair, 2007). The impact of SpAds on government functioning has therefore become an issue of interest, particularly their role in government communication (Eichbaum and Shaw, 2010a). In the UK (and Northern Ireland), two distinct groups handle government communication; Government Information Officers (GIOs) and increasingly, Special Advisers. The role of the GIO is designed to be apolitical, in that they assist the government of whichever political persuasion in the areas of information management and media relations in an impartial civil servant capacity. The SpAd is *de facto* a temporary civil servant who is personally appointed by a government minister to assist him/her in a political capacity, while working within a civil service department (Gay, 2000). The Special Adviser is therefore a link from the minister's government department to their political party, aiding the minister with departmental/policy work and its media presentation. The role of Special Advisers and their relationships both with GIOs and journalists has received considerable attention in recent years, with SpAds being depicted as powerful policy influencers, vital news sources and 'Spin Doctors' (Gaber, 2004; Negrine, 2008). It has also been suggested that it is: "... increasingly difficult (if not impossible) to formally divide the 'official' work of civil servants from the 'political' work of special advisers" (Fawcett and Gay, 2010:49), prompting concerns about the 'politicization' of the UK civil service.

The role and impact of Special Advisers on the communication of government is an important issue, given the civil service ethos that communication should be apolitical, transparent, and provide a public service by ensuring citizens have adequate access to information on public policy issues in a democratic society (Fairbanks et al., 2007; Somerville and Ramsey, 2012). There are also therefore broader democratic concerns of how information from government is controlled and used strategically to exercise power (Bennett, 2001:16). This study investigates the role and impact of SpAds on the communication of departmental issues in Northern Ireland by analysing the perspectives of GIOs, political journalists, and SpAds themselves.



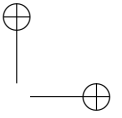
### 1.1 Special Advisers and government communication

Although the SpAd role in the UK is well established (Gay, 2000), their role became particularly contentious during the New Labour government when numbers increased dramatically (Gay, 2010). Various research has associated this rise in the number of Special Advisers with a politicization of the civil service and a culture of ‘government by spin’ (Gaber, 2000; Fairclough, 2000; Franklin, 2004). SpAds have since been documented as possessing significant power over departmental functioning given their “privileged institutional position”(Fawcett and Gay, 2010:30) which carries the authority of their minister and arguably little corresponding accountability (Gay, 2010). The role of Alastair Campbell in the New Labour government was highlighted as a clear example of the influence of Special Advisers on government policy and the public communication of this policy. Campbell attracted substantial attention over his control of communications channels and of the media with his aggressive ‘spinning’ of the government agenda to journalists (McNair, 2007). It is argued that the power which SpAds assumed during the New Labour government confirmed the existence of a hierarchy amongst ‘normal’ civil servant officials and Special Advisers (Public Administration Select Committee (PASC), 2002; Winstone, 2003). While such perceptions prompted an internal review of government communication and several recommendations for change (Phillis Review, 2004), concerns remain around the negative impact of SpAds on the impartial and transparent communication of government (Gregory, 2012).

At the same time, it has been argued that Special Advisers are a valuable: “informal sounding board for a Minister’s ideas or anxieties”(Neill Committee, 2000; cited in PASC, 2001:3); and: “a useful counterweight to what is sometimes perceived as civil service inertia”(PASC, 2001:3). Others have viewed the rise of SpAds as a product of broader contextual changes. Fawcett and Gay suggest that a combination of factors have led to the increase, such as: “the professionalization of politics; a lack of confidence and trust in the permanent civil service; and the need to respond to a 24-hour media environment” (2010:37). Wodak further argues that in modern day politics Special Advisers: “have become ever more important, increasingly taking on the role of ‘mediators’...linking the fields of politics, administration, media” (2011:2).

The majority of the research on SpAds has been carried out in the UK



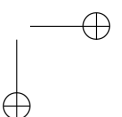


Westminster administration or other majoritarian democracies. This leaves a significant knowledge gap into how Special Advisers impact on government communication in other political systems. What little research has been carried out on political coalitions has emphasised that SpAds play an important role in facilitating inter-party communication and negotiation (Connaughton, 2010; Eichbaum and Shaw, 2010b). This study investigates the role of SpAds in relation to government communication in Northern Ireland's consociational government. Our investigation is timely given the lack of research into the role of SpAds within mandatory coalitions, at a time when consociationalism is increasingly advocated as a solution to the fragmented conflict ridden societies of sub-Saharan Africa. Indeed it has already emerged as a political system in divided societies such as Bosnia and Herzegovina, Switzerland, India, Macedonia, Lebanon, Belgium and Northern Ireland (Lemarchand, 2007).

## 1.2 Northern Ireland context

As a result of widespread public unrest and political conflict over religious and civil rights, from 1972 to 1999, Northern Ireland was governed by 'Direct Rule', that is, administered by the British government from Westminster. The British government officially devolved powers to Northern Ireland in 1999, but in the period up to 2007, governance was characterized by boycotts, controversies over weapons decommissioning, and a general lack of political progress. However, since the signing of the *St Andrew's Agreement* in 2007, a complex but functioning devolved, power-sharing administration has governed Northern Ireland. The political make-up of Northern Ireland government includes ideological extremes; on the one hand there are Unionist parties who wish to remain an integral part of the UK and on the other, Nationalist parties who strive for a United Ireland with no constitutional ties to the UK. At present, there are five political parties (*Democratic Unionist Party*, *Sinn Fein*, *Social Democratic Labour Party*, *Ulster Unionist Party*, and the cross community *Alliance* party) which make up the governing coalition and there is no official opposition party.

As a constitutional part of the United Kingdom, Northern Ireland's administrative set-up is based on the Westminster design, but with a fundamental difference. Northern Ireland's democratic governance is consociational (i.e. power-sharing is mandatory) and therefore substantially different from







the majoritarian electoral system which characterises most Western democratic societies. Consociationalism has been advocated as a form of democracy which can reconcile post-conflict societies fragmented along ethnic, religious or linguistic lines (Lijphart, 2008). Lijphart (2008) notes several key features of the consociational system. Firstly, to ensure socio-political stability, *grand coalitions* between the key groups are the norm, secondly, *mutual veto* is also typical so that a simple majority is never enough in decision making processes and thirdly, *proportionality* is usual. Proportionality means guaranteed representation based on population in, for example; political office, the civil service, the police, to ensure widespread confidence in civic institutions. Consociational power-sharing governments therefore result in a different and distinctive political sphere compared to that of traditional democratic governments.

### 1.2.1 Northern Ireland and 'Party Fiefdoms'

While Northern Ireland remains deeply divided along sectarian lines and there are sporadic outbreaks of violence, it has clearly entered a post-conflict phase. Nonetheless, significant problems exist in the current context. A fundamental problem facing Northern Ireland governance has been the fact that it operates without any official obligation for collective responsibility from the parties which make up the Executive (Birrell, 2012). This has significant implications for the workings of the Executive, particularly in the competition rather than cooperation which ensues between ministers, and for the resulting communication which comes from government. For instance, Birrell explains that:

"without collective responsibility ministers were able to disagree in public, in the Assembly and its committees and in the media, both with the declared Executive policy and with other ministers...the parties in the power-sharing Executive could parade their differences at will with no consequences for their place in government...Ministers have continued to feel free to openly criticise each other's decisions, budget decisions and Executive decisions and have had difficulty in making decisions by consensus on core issues"(2012: 55).

In fact, the open competition which exists between government ministers has meant that the departments which make up the Northern Ireland Executive have been labeled 'party fiefdoms' (Wilford, 2007), where ministers focus on





differentiation rather than inclusiveness (McEvoy, 2006); and Kenny's (2011) research suggests that departments are communicated in this party political manner. Other research conducted during a less politically stable period in Northern Ireland indicates that there were problems in centralizing communication in the multi-party setting immediately after the devolution of powers (Fawcett, 2002). These findings support the wider criticism from political science scholarship that consociational government formalizes and entrenches division by dividing power along the (ethnic or religious) lines which caused the conflict in the first place (Samuels, 2009:182). In a similar vein, centralizing communication and presenting a unified image of government to the public in consociational systems elsewhere has been found to be especially difficult (Center, 2009; Meyer, 1999).

### 1.2.2 Northern Ireland's Special Advisers

Special Advisers to local ministers, operating in an official capacity, are a relatively new phenomenon in Northern Ireland emerging alongside devolution (Knox, 2010). In the current Northern Ireland Executive, there are nineteen Special Advisers: three each for the First and Deputy First Minister and one each for their junior ministers; and one SpAd each for the remaining eleven ministers (Belfast City Council, 2011). Carmichael and Osborne (2003) explain that post-devolution, new locally elected ministers were distrustful of civil servants who had possessed significant influence during Direct Rule governance and so were keen to "demonstrate their new authority" (p214). The emergence of SpAds could in this way be viewed as a part of the overall growth in power of government ministers and their support network since devolution (Knox, 2010).

### Ministerial Appointments and Accountability

Nonetheless, there has been some media and government attention recently directed towards Northern Ireland Special Advisers regarding their appointment and accountability arrangements. Though the Code of Conduct for SpAds in Northern Ireland is largely the same as the UK Westminster arrangements (see Cabinet Office, 2010), it differs in an important respect. As in Westminster, ministers appoint their Special Advisers on a personal basis, free from



the merit principle which affects the rest of the civil service. However, the government's First and Deputy First Minister<sup>1</sup> are from ideologically opposed political parties (*DUP* and *Sinn Fein* respectively), so they do not have the ability to authorise or prohibit Special Adviser appointments as would be the case for the UK Prime Minister in Westminster or the First Ministers in Scotland and Wales (Gay, 2000). A recent review of the appointment of Special Advisers in Northern Ireland states that: "each Minister, and the Minister alone, is the "Appointing Authority" for his/her Special Adviser" (Department of Finance and Personnel (DFP), 2011:3).

This issue was brought to the forefront during 2011, when controversy arose after the *Sinn Fein* minister Caral Ni Chuilin appointed Mary McArdle as her Special Adviser. McArdle had previously been in prison for her part in the IRA paramilitary murder of a young woman during the Northern Ireland conflict and was released under the terms of the *Good Friday Agreement*<sup>2</sup>. The appointment attracted much media attention and though the public *Sinn Fein* line was that those involved in the conflict should be allowed to be part of political progress, McArdle was later moved to another position within the party<sup>3</sup>. While the appointing minister is herself an ex-prisoner, the key issue was that McArdle was not democratically elected yet the position was financed by taxpayers, some of whom were victims of the IRA's campaign of political violence. Subsequently, a review<sup>4</sup> suggested more stringent and mandatory procedures for appointing Special Advisers, which included introducing criminal record checks and applying them retrospectively. A bill to officially enact changes has since been proposed to the Assembly but is subject to cross-party agreement which is yet to surface and shows the trademark party political disagreements inherent in the Northern Ireland Executive. Special Adviser appointment and accountability procedures exemplify the political sensitivities and the complicated machinations of government, which remain in a post-conflict consociational context. In few contemporary (Western European) administrations are there government actors who have begun

<sup>1</sup>The Deputy First Minister is actually of equal standing to the First Minister.

<sup>2</sup>A political peace agreement signed by parties in Northern Ireland which indicated a commitment to power-sharing and non-violent democratic politics.

<sup>3</sup>See BBC (2012), available at [www.bbc.co.uk](http://www.bbc.co.uk).

<sup>4</sup>*DFP* (2011) 'Review Of Arrangements For The Appointment of Ministers' Special Advisers'. Available from: [www.dfpni.gov.uk](http://www.dfpni.gov.uk).



their roles during periods of violent political conflict, or have in fact been directly involved in that conflict. This relatively unique environment clearly has important implications for the role of Special Advisers.

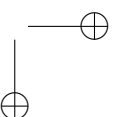
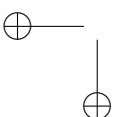
### 1.3 Research questions

The overall aim of this paper is to investigate the role of Northern Ireland's Special Advisers in communicating departmental information and policy. Therefore, we examine relationships between those most involved in this process: GIOs, SpAds and journalists. In light of this overall aim, and after a review of key literature in the area, the following research questions were developed:

1. How do SpAds perceive their role and working relationships with GIOs and journalists in Northern Ireland?
2. How do GIOs perceive the role of SpAds and their working relationships with SpAds in Northern Ireland?
3. How do journalists perceive the role of SpAds and their working relationships with SpAds in Northern Ireland?
4. How does the role of the SpAd and their working relationships with GIOs and journalists impact on the communication of government issues?

## 2. Methodology

A combination of purposive and snowball sampling techniques were employed to target people who are involved in the communication process and relevant to the research questions (Bryman, 2012; Tansey, 2007). The sample consisted of 33 interviewees made up of 9 senior Government Information Officers (GIOs) (69% of the total number), 8 SpAds (42% of the total number) and 16 journalists. All were senior level or experienced employees; GIOs interviewed held the rank of *Principal Information Officer* in the civil service and like the SpAds who participated, they worked in a number of different departments and spanned all five coalition government partners. The political





journalists interviewed were from the main press and broadcast organizations in Northern Ireland.

Interview protocols were piloted prior to their implementation with a government communicator and a political journalist. Interview questions focused on probing participants on their daily work routines of producing and disseminating government information and policy, and their interactions with the other participant groups. McEvoy's (2006) advice on interviewing elites in divided societies was noted and consideration was given to framing questions in a manner which avoided inciting political sensitivities or identity issues. All interviews were conducted in the participants' workplaces and lasted around sixty minutes; interviews were audio recorded and later transcribed in full. All participants provided informed consent.

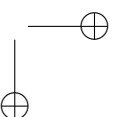
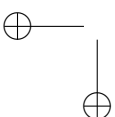
The analysis of interview transcripts employed a broad thematic discourse framework, where findings were based on the recurrent themes, patterns and categories which surfaced in the discourse (Deacon et al., 2007). Conclusions were derived by combining and comparing the thematic findings from all participants groups (Davis, 2009). The representative quotations provided are presented in italic type and have been edited (i.e. repetitions, stutters and non-verbal sounds removed) for ease of understanding, to a narrative form.

### 3. Results

#### 3.1 The Special Adviser role: SpAd perspectives

As has been found in other research contexts (e.g. Fawcett and Gay, 2010) the Special Adviser role in Northern Ireland involves several distinct functions. SpAd interviewees outlined a range of activities as comprising their role which depended largely on their minister's specific needs and their own expertise. One SpAd response exemplifies the breadth of work which Special Advisers undertake:

*"I do provide advice to the minister and on behalf of the minister on policy matters so I would have a strong sense of [minister's] personal policy priorities but also the...party's policy priorities and the job of the SpAd has been traditionally to make sure the party's agenda is delivered in government...I put the political content into [minister's] speeches, which officials aren't allowed to do...so there's that kind of advisory role, I do a lot of work as a sort*



*of communications channel between the minister and the officials, between the minister and the...party, and as I say between [the department] and other ministers' Special Advisers. And also between the minister and other external organisations."*

Comments of this kind show SpAds are clearly integrally involved in all aspects of their minister's work in both a departmental and political capacity. SpAds' descriptions of their role in communicating their minister's policy repeatedly revealed a strong presence in strategic communication, as is demonstrated below:

*"Everything that goes on around here, whether it's Executive policies, whether it's presentation of speeches, whether it's new policy initiatives, whether it's you know event organisation, whether it's out to meet and greet you know I am looking with one eye to, where does that leave the...minister's profile, where does that fit in with a communication strategy that we will have rolling forward...that will follow through in terms of speeches, you know distribution of speeches, mundane things such as press releases, Q and As you know, meeting and greeting sectoral groups."*

### **3.2 Working with SpAds: GIO and journalist perspectives**

It is clear from GIO and journalist comments in respect to their relationships with SpAds, that both groups often viewed Special Advisers as a constraint on their own role. For example, there is a clear perception that SpAds have increased their control over government communication at the expense of GIOs. The emergence and increasing dominance of SpAds since the devolution of a power-sharing government, has reduced the autonomy of the GIO's role which is exemplified by the fact that usually SpAds have the final say on what information could be released to the media. One GIO stated: *"every media enquiry we receive needs to go through the adviser... Nothing goes out without their approval"*. Another noted: *"Whatever he says goes, simple as that, I can't over-rule him"*. Some SpAds themselves acknowledged that their role often constrained GIOs. For example one suggested the GIO in his government department: *"may well say that fella tells me what to do, when to do it and how to do it"*; another said: *"I think they're [GIOs] much more aware of the need to get out good messages than what was the case previously, they're much*



*more accountable obviously now. . . in the old system they didn't have to work to advisers. That might be a sore point".*

While most GIOs described a broadly positive working relationship with their SpAd in spite of the restrictions they often caused in their work, a number of GIOs complained that SpAds sometimes liaised 'off the record' with journalists, providing exclusive or 'better' information to that of the GIO, for party-political rather than departmental gain. According to GIOs, this means they appear as a less valuable source to journalists which undermines their position. This situation often causes GIOs to feel frustrated and powerless in their role, as the following quote illustrates: *"they would leak an awful lot of stuff that they shouldn't really leak at all. So, it's unhelpful when they do speak to journalists because I'm in one room trying to sell something and he's in a room just over there talking to the same journalist about something else, it makes us look. . . moronic. . . but they all do it. . . it's just something we're faced with"*. Some commentators suggest that 'leaking' has become a common means of disseminating information in democratic governments (Flynn, 2006). Interviewees from all three participant groups in this study commented that leaking was a frequent way of disseminating information from the government because it avoided the protracted process of the Executive Information System (EIS), which requires information to be politically neutral and often to have cross-departmental/party agreement. With fraught relations existing at times between the five parties in the Executive, leaking can be used strategically to both quickly disseminate information and to undermine rival parties' positions.

Interestingly, it seems GIOs accept SpAds' decisions and operate as if they cannot effectively challenge the SpAd, even though the Special Adviser Code of Conduct explicitly prohibits them from 'managing' or 'directing' civil servants (Gay, 2010). One GIO put it this way: *"the Special Adviser will have the mind of the minister better than any other civil servant right. So, a Special Adviser can give the press officer like me really good advice and say they'll run with that, he'll not go with that"*. It is debateable whether this kind of interaction illustrates 'advice', or rather instruction or permission. This finding arguably bears out Mumby's analysis of how organizational power works. He notes: "A particular group's interests will be best served if those interests become part of the taken-for-granted social reality that structures organizational life. Once these interests become part of the organizational structure,



then that structure simultaneously mediates in and reproduces those interests” (Mumby, 1988:67). This situation illustrates how occupational identity works to bolster Special Advisers’ influence by virtue of the associative power which they bestow from their minister (Fawcett and Gay, 2010), who now have more influence over organizational decision making than in pre-devolution times (Knox, 2010).

### Access and Sources: SpAds and Journalists

GIOs’ perceptions of SpAds as supplanting them as the primary departmental communicators is supported by journalists who tended to speak of SpAds as more productive sources than GIOs. Journalists understand that as close confidants of ministers, Special Advisers had more ‘inside’ knowledge on political issues and due to their role being free of political impartiality restrictions, they could reveal the ‘political’ information which tended to be more revealing of government dynamics and more newsworthy. Typical comments were: *“when you’re speaking to the Special Adviser you know you’re speaking to the minister... they can be more helpful in sort of steering you...to stories that are in their advantage”*, and: *“they [Special Advisers] can be very useful, if they’ll talk to you about what’s really going on. But civil servants don’t really like them... they get in the way I suppose for the civil servant to get the minister’s decision”*. These findings diverge from research elsewhere, for example Gaber’s work on the UK Westminster system finds that: “Journalists speak with senior press officers on much the same basis as they speak with special advisers” (2004:368). Moreover, it is obvious from journalist comments such as *“civil servants don’t really like them... they get in the way...”*, that they recognize a tension between GIOs and SpAds in terms of communicating departmental business.

Additionally, the ability of SpAds to override GIOs’ dissemination of information affects journalists’ own access to information. Journalists explained how SpAd power could be used in a malign manner; by either ‘spinning’ the information to promote a departmental or party agenda, or by blocking them from accessing information. For example, one journalist exemplifies this issue as follows: *“we were blocked by [names a party] SpAds...a straight forward press enquiry was held up for about twelve days...because the civil service press officer had to get clearance to release information, straight forward in-*



formation...the Freedom of Information request subsequently showed that the SpAd had vetoed the release of the piece...it's political office at the end of the day, it is the parties who are in charge so therefore...even the SpAds are his [GIO's] masters". There was also agreement among journalists that Special Advisers were predominantly concerned with protecting their ministers, acting as powerful gatekeepers around them and restricting media access to government. For instance one journalist stated: "*Special Advisers would be quite aggressive...in a small country...power and influence is disproportionate, so you have to be very careful...these guys are powerful people, and there's a battle there...they [politicians] will use the Special Advisers as the attack dogs if you like*". Similarly, several journalists questioned the dominance of SpAds over the civil service in Northern Ireland government given their sometimes limited experience and the personal nature of the appointments.

### 3.3 Roles and working relationships: SpAd perspectives

#### Facilitating Public Communication

SpAds perhaps unsurprisingly, discussed their role in the government communication process quite differently. Though SpAds did acknowledge the impact of their actions on GIO work (as outlined previously), several SpAds stressed that sanctioning departmental communication was an important and legitimate part of their role in terms of accurately portraying their minister's agenda. For example a typical comment was: "*I wouldn't want anything done or said that would embarrass the minister or be contrary to his political values...I would have rewritten quite a few of the quotes from the minister. But again that isn't being political, I think I'm more accurately reflecting what he is going to be saying*". Further, some SpAds explained their role in communication in terms of compensating for the impartial nature of civil service communication and to a large degree, the limitations which exist in the Executive Information System. SpAds (and in fact GIOs and journalists) commented on the lack of centralisation between departments as a hindrance for communicating via the EIS, which results in ineffective and decentralised communication. One recurring reason provided for this, was the consociational government system and the competition between ministers from different parties. Several SpAds discussed the 'silo' mentality of the EIS, where each department has its own

press office, with one naming it: a "*replication of the political structure which sits above it*". According to our interviewees, this structure does not enable GIOs to disseminate coherent and unified information, as one SpAd explains below:

*"it's one thing for a press officer, you know at a UK level to push a particular line and clearly they've constraints as well against the opposition, it's another thing to push a particular line against a minister and they're sitting at the Executive table to whom you're you know at least in part accountable to...So it's a difficult system to operate, I guess like all of that in essence reduces them to, sort of event management, and fairly you know mundane press releases...as opposed to a considered communications message which sort of sells the overall achievements...and that may just be a function of the way government is organised here. Because it's not like...in England where, or UK as a whole where there's a single party government...or a coalition with a single agenda...whenever you've four or five parties in the Executive, each of whom may have competing interests, it's hard to get one clear line that you know a government press officer is comfortable putting out...it does blunt the capacity to deliver that message".*

Several SpAds commented that as a result of this situation, the most important communication work is often done via the party route. For instance one stated: "*most of the things which are of any interest... isn't put out by the government press office. You know I would have written it, [the minister] would amend it and then you know gone out through the party*". It seems that Northern Ireland's power-sharing government encourages an increased caution within the civil service which constrains GIOs from communicating effectively and strategically with journalists on important issues. A journalist commenting on this situation noted, that while there may be an official government information service: "*it does the basic press releases and the road safety campaigns and the, don't set fire to your grannies this winter all that sort of stuff but, the really big shouts, the really big decisions are invariably taken by the parties*". Thus there seems to be a distinction, emerging among SpAds and journalists, between important *political* news and less important *government* news. This perception produces a situation where the 'everyday' functioning of government is not actually 'news', with higher news value attached to controversial issues and political scandals; a situation hardly unique

to Northern Ireland but nevertheless problematic for current democratic institutions (Flinders and Kelso, 2011; Wodak, 2011).

SpAds' perspectives on their interactions with journalists also revealed quite different evaluations of their role in facilitating access to departmental information. SpAds, and indeed GIOs and journalists, agreed that the traditional tensions between government and media actors in terms of access and agenda setting (Lee, 1999; Wolfsfeld, 1997) were heightened by the post-conflict power-sharing context in Northern Ireland. Several SpAds perceived journalists to be "*shaped by the conflict*" and so are overly interested in constitutional issues or political disputes over everyday government business. Media coverage of this nature is viewed as particularly detrimental to the image of politics in Northern Ireland, given its still fragile peace. Some SpAds even suggested journalists act like an unofficial opposition to the government. A typical comment from one SpAd noted: "*the press here, because there's no formal opposition at Stormont probably take the view that they effectively are the opposition. Which creates a culture where people tend to think little or nothing's been achieved which can be a bit damaging for the political process... the difference is in the UK as a whole, you would have some of the large national papers be broadly sympathetic to one party some sympathetic to another, most of them are just generally hostile here*". However, most journalists disagreed with the perception that they behave as an opposition and many in fact commented that SpAds were too quick to use the history of conflict to prevent the media actively scrutinising politics in Northern Ireland. One journalist summed up this perception: "*they will play the peace process card... say you're being too negative you're gonna damage this fragile plant that we have carefully nurtured... but you can't stop asking questions just because of that, if... a bit of hard-nosed journalism brings the whole thing down then it isn't very stable to begin with*".

Special Advisers contended that as many journalists had been 'socialised' to journalism throughout conflict periods and political instability, many actually lacked the competencies to report on detailed policy matters in a peaceful society. Such perceptions mean that SpAds are selective in regard to which journalists they disseminate information to. Consequently, a group of 'elite' journalists are frequently given exclusives, 'off the record' briefings, and greater access to government information by SpAds. This is either because they are trusted, from the SpAd point of view, to be competent and

fair, or are viewed as having the power to influence the public by virtue of their large public audience. Accordingly, one SpAd admitted: “*some will say to me... there’s a golden hierarchy here, some people get better access than others and to a certain extent that’s probably true*”. This is a situation which is deeply resented by several journalists that we interviewed.

### **Cross departmental communications: Negotiation and relationship maintenance**

The consociational structure and post-conflict context produces a particular set of communication management issues within the Northern Ireland government. In the Northern Irish system, Special Advisers have become particularly valued for their inter-party communication role as parties try to control communications in the context of a grand coalition. Almost all SpAds explained that a significant part of their role involved negotiating with SpAds from other departments to agree on cross departmental issues. One SpAd explained: “*we are the negotiating contact with other parties...when there’s cross departmental issues, where there’s areas of controversy, where there’s blockages, special advisers are the people that are sent in to try and resolve those issues...that’s how that’s worked through day to day issues right through to the big, big peace stuff*”. These findings are supported by research on other coalition governments such the Republic of Ireland where political advisers were found to play a negotiating, centralizing role (Connaughton, 2010). In Scotland there was an increase in SpAd appointments during periods of coalition government to try to limit internal problems (Fawcett and Gay, 2010) and the same thing has occurred in the current Conservative-Liberal Democrat coalition in the UK (Paun, 2011).

There are of course additional issues to manage in the Northern Ireland situation given that there is a stark lack of, as one SpAd put it: “*philosophical agreement on many areas*”. The post-conflict context was perceived by interviewees (from all groups) to impact on the ability of parties to work and communicate collaboratively. For example, interviewees explained that there was a lack of trust between the parties, as acknowledged in past research on Northern Ireland (Birrell, 2012; Wilford, 2007). Inter-party working cannot however be avoided given there was, as one SpAd noted, an “*unnatural separation*” between departments meaning: “*almost everything is cross-cutting*”.



This was explained by interviewees to be due to the need to facilitate the various political parties in government roles in line with the consociational design. Comments from SpAd interviewees however indicate that this inter-departmental communication between SpAds was not always straightforward and could itself cause problems. A recurring topic was that having eight Special Advisers in OFMDFM<sup>5</sup> slowed down decision making and even caused internal wrangling between SpAds from the same party. In addition, SpAds did not openly acknowledge that they can sometimes contribute to the lack of collective cabinet responsibility and inter-departmental work in the Executive by their input into ministerial decisions. However their discourse often revealed this, for example one SpAd explained:

*"the minister...he's already been on to all the councils, to be ready on a sort of war footing for the [funding] freeze that's coming this year, and I might have warned him before he started just going into it doing a lot of media on it, wait a minute...things like footpaths and roads, are the responsibility of DRD and not our responsibility...So he could weigh into that heavily to show that he's doing good things and making good preparations and he could buy the problem...the public would think, the whole freeze up is [the minister]...you do have to step back and say well before you just nail yourself to the cross...you just have to think it through what way's this gonna go if, when things do get difficult...there'll be loads of issues of that nature."*

Thus Special Advisers may at times actually fuel the antagonistic relations between government ministers of different political parties in of Northern Ireland, and indeed they also play a key role in perpetuating the idea that the government department is a party fiefdom rather than part of a unified administration.

#### 4. Discussion and conclusions

Our findings indicate, that the pre-devolution 'dominant coalition' (Berger, 2009) in respect to government communication in Northern Ireland has been overturned to the detriment of the previously powerful civil service, and to the advantage of SpAds who increasingly control government communication. It is important to note that this shift in the balance of communicative power from

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<sup>5</sup>Office of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister.



GIOs to SpAds, is most certainly linked to broader structural changes resulting from the devolution of government administration to Northern Ireland. Power has moved from civil servants, to ministers and their support network, who now have more influence over decision making and organizational matters than in pre-devolution times (Knox, 2010). In this sense Northern Ireland mirrors other 'normal' democratic societies where the increased power and influence of Special Advisers has been noted within political systems (Blick, 2004; King, 2003). In particular, our results may reflect broader changes in the UK political system which has seen power ebb away from civil servants and flow to ministerial advisers (Winstone, 2003). This change is encapsulated by one journalist's comment, who noted that: "*Special advisers are becoming increasingly important and this is something new... they're becoming more professional, more powerful, and that's one of the most interesting aspects of the way our politics is evolving*". In this sense the growing dominance of SpAds may actually be an indication of the 'normalizing' of Northern Ireland's government system. Nevertheless, the speed of the rise of the SpAd to central controlling influence in the communication nexus in Northern Ireland's government is remarkable.

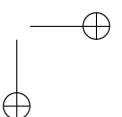
It is however clear that Northern Ireland's political context and especially its consociational governmental structure makes government communication, and the role of the SpAd, particularly complex. The post-conflict situation and the resulting consociational power-sharing mechanisms which enable inclusive politics do not necessarily facilitate cohesive government, and this impacts negatively on efforts to develop policy and to disseminate information on policy issues. The emergence of departmental party fiefdoms has resulted in the frequent occurrence of public disagreements. This is understandable on a political level given the remaining distrust between parties and the recognition that voting remains 'tribal' in Northern Ireland (Evans and Tonge, 2009). Indeed, perpetuating the deep community divisions in Northern Ireland may be considered vital by some parties for their longevity and their re-election prospects. It should also be noted that the media arguably reinforce this division by sometimes focusing on partisan and politically controversial issues at the expense of more mundane government issues. Nonetheless, the problems of inter-departmental frictions which have been found even in the UK Westminster system (Gaber, 2004; Gregory, 2012), are intensified by, as one



GIO put it, the 'built in flaws' of the Executive Information System which is arranged around the consociational multi-party political structures.

The result is that SpAds seek to protect their minister's 'fiefdom' and yet are required to facilitate cross-party communication. They compensate for what they view as the ineffective information system by sanctioning departmental communication and strategically disseminating information, often by liaising with journalists themselves via 'off the record briefings'. Similarly, journalists often neglect GIOs in favour of SpAds who have the power to speak more freely. These developments matter not just for the individuals involved but are important issues to consider in debate's about democratic accountability. The idea of an impartial civil service communicating with society in a transparent manner is a key component of the Westminster democratic model. Our GIOs spoke of a strong sense of responsibility to the public in terms of informing people on government matters and even in facilitating a transition to a shared society. However, having government communication dominated by SpAds with a party political agenda has implications for the communication of government with the danger that the day to day important policy work that goes on in the power-sharing government may be displaced by the cultivation of controversial issues and antagonistic politics. As other studies have argued (Flinders and Kelso, 2011) this may have a detrimental effect on the public's view of government. Building public trust is perhaps even more important in a society recovering from a violent conflict where a lack of unified and politically impartial communication from government may result in sustaining and even increasing division.

Eichbaum and Shaw's comments seem to be pertinent to the Northern Ireland context, they state: "Clearly, in some jurisdictions, the constitutional context, and specifically a transition to multi-party Government, opens up institutional spaces that. . . political staff in particular, may be required to fill" (2010c:199). The SpAd role in Northern Ireland is complex in that they at times encourage inter-departmental competition by way of their strong focus on ministerial priorities and by their power to dominate departmental decisions. SpAds on the whole are viewed, by GIOs as negatively impacting on their role and the autonomy of civil servants in general, and unfavourably by journalists in controlling their access to government information. On the other hand, they can and do play a useful role in coordinating inter-party working relationships and maintaining the multi-party government coalition. SpAds are paradoxical-

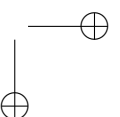




cal political actors in Northern Ireland, they are important in maintaining the very existence of the Executive, but do little to combat the overall lack of collaboration between the parties and the consequent silo approach to public communication. Our findings highlight that when analysing the Special Adviser role, it is essential to take account of the particular political context in which Special Advisers operate. At this crucial stage in the development of its democratic institutions, it is imperative that both GIOs and SpAds build working relationships with each other and with the media, which promote the post-conflict era of politics in Northern Ireland and effective, collectively responsible political communication. The lessons from this paper are especially important at a time when we see coalition, consensus and consociational governmental institutions increasing throughout the democratic world (Hueglin, 2003).

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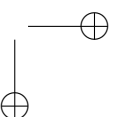
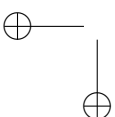
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## Crisis communication under terrorist threat: A case study of the counterterrorist operation in Chechnya

Elena Gryzunova

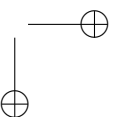
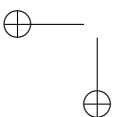
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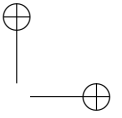
**Abstract:** The dramatic societal changes such as globalization and information revolution transformed terrorism into a huge security challenge at the turn of the millennium. Modern terrorist groups have access to unprecedented mechanisms of data monitoring, finance collection and recruiting all over the world. Though 9/11 is usually perceived as the dividing line, Russia started experiencing a large-scale terrorism-provoked societal crisis several years before that notorious date.

Today's widespread global terrorism is a product of the information age because terror is a communication act, a means to transmit messages to the authorities through the mass media and the key audiences. That is why media relations are one of the most important actions in anti-terrorist policy. This paper presents a multidisciplinary analysis of terrorism as communication and a social crisis. Most crisis researchers classify terrorism as a crisis of malevolence and a conflict-type crisis. Crisis management expert Paul Shrivastava (2005) qualifies terrorism crisis as a particular crisis type that needs special research and response strategies. This study analyses crisis communication and media relations of the Information Policy Department of the President of Russia for years 2000-2004 during the counterterrorist operation in the Chechen Republic. The findings are based on internal governmental documents regulating terrorism-related communication policy.

By the year 2000 when the Information Policy Department was created, Chechnya was under the control of terrorist and criminal groups with their own successful propaganda though the Republic was still legally a part of Russia. The Chechen crisis was a large-scale creeping crisis which consisted of different micro-crises such as: terror acts, armed raids, incriminations, rumors and disinformation, social protests. By practicing the principles of speaking with one voice, openness and

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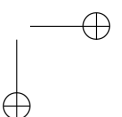


efficiency the Information Policy Department coped with the crisis and won the confrontation with the terrorists on the information field.

Keywords: media relations, crisis communication, strategic management, counterterrorism, sense-making.

## 1. Terrorism as communication: the role of traditional and new media

**T**ERRORISM is not a new phenomenon. However, the characteristics of modern terrorism transformed it into a huge security challenge to national states as well as to the global community at the turn of the millennium. Terrorism can be defined as violence that consists in itself a threat of more violence designed to cause social disruption, panic and victimization within the community for the purpose of political change. One of the world's most renowned counter-terrorism experts Brian Jenkins (1974) calls terrorism "theater". In terror acts the show itself is the most destructive weapon, not the bombs. "The symbolic character of the terrorist act had fused with the amplifying potential of new information and communication technologies to create a new and highly visible form of political struggle" (Freedman & Thussu, 2012, p. 10). Terror acts do not reach their aims if they do not become notorious. As American philosopher and sociologist Douglas Kellner (2002) notes, "September 11 could also only be a mega-event in a global media world, a society of the spectacle where the whole world is watching and participates in global media spectacle" (p. 152). Terror is a "communicative act" (Hoskins & O'Loughlin, 2007, p. 9), a means to transmit messages to the authorities. British psychologist and sociologist B. Richards (2004) draws a parallel between terrorism and public relations. His research shows that terror groups mostly use spectacular form of "power-based PR" which "constructs an audience that is awestruck, whether in fear or admiration" (Richards, 2004, p. 175). Terror acts are usually widely broadcasted because they represent "the media event par excellence" (Richards, 2004, p. 170), the ideal media product which merges sensation, conflict, alarm and grief. According to William Biernatzki (2002), "sensationalism attracts audiences, so the media are especially vulnerable to manipulation by terrorists who are willing to use violence to publicize their causes" (p. 22). Apart from terror acts themselves as "propaganda of the







deed” (Picard, 1989, p. 21), terrorists widely use conventional media relations in different forms of “direct contacts with the media” (Picard, 1989, p. 12), including press releases, press conferences, provision of visual materials and interviews. As case studies show (Somerville & Purcell, 2011), both tactics were used by the Irish Republican Army (IRA) and their political wing Sinn Féin in support of their separatist activities. The Chechen militants also combined spectacular terror acts with traditional media relations performed by the so-called Ministry of information and press of the Chechen Republic Ichkeria.

The target audience of terrorists is the authorities whose decisions they want to manipulate. There are also several key groups (or groups of influence) in the audience of terror communications. One of the key groups is a sympathizing group that can be divided in two subgroups. The major subgroup does not support terrorists’ methods but find their aims justified. By pointing at so-called objective reasons of terror acts (for example the right of national self-determination) they socially legitimize terror through general values. The other subgroup which totally identifies itself with terrorists and realizes their success as its own represents the recruiting base for terrorists. The largest key group of terror is the victimized group which sees the terror as a threat to their life and wellbeing. These people are the object of victimization which causes either destabilization of social behaviour leading to social disruption (like panic or violence) or joining the sympathizing group in their demand of concessions to terrorists. There is also a special key group of international governments and transnational organizations that can influence the authorities of a terrorized country in a way advantageous to terrorists.

Major factors that influenced the characteristics of terrorism at the turn of the millennium are connected to the drastic changes such as technical progress in general, information revolution and globalization.

Information revolution and the creation of the cyberspace provided terrorist organizations with unprecedented mechanisms of information monitoring (from open resources as well as from closed ones by hacking them), money collecting, recruiting all over the world and creating ramified networks of internal communications with the possibility of staying anonymous and external communications by broadcasting audio, video and text content to large audience (Thomas, 2003). In case of such notorious organizations as Al-Qaeda and similar groups the messages are usually duplicated by the traditional media. The Internet also gives terror groups the possibility to launch disinform-





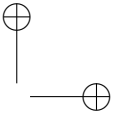
mation campaigns within the community in the guise of independent opinions using the tools of “mass self-communication” (Castells, 2009, pp. 63-71) such as blogs, forums and social networking websites.

Globalization produced the phenomenon of international terrorism characterized by multinational recruits, bases situated in different countries, terror acts prejudicing the world community. There is a process of consolidation and integration of terrorist organizations that are ideologically similar. Terror organizations are not hierarchical structures but global networks. As long as most of the connections are made through the web, including social media, American scientists proposed a simulation model called ‘NetBreaker’ that finds possible terrorist networks using a small amount of information before they commit a terror act. The model is based on both social theories (sociology, complexity theory, organizational theory) and computer science (North & Macal, 2005).

Today’s terrorism is aimed at mass mayhem among the civilian population. Random choice of victims and widespread broadcasting of the crime make the victimization total: no country and no person can feel absolutely safe from a possible terror act.

Modern terrorism has a special tendency of increasing religious motivation as compared to political one, especially concerning the emerging terrorist ideology based on misinterpreted Islamic principles. However, there exist profound studies of the incompatibility of Islam and terrorism from the perspective of Islamic morals, law and history (Capan, 2004) that can be used in the antiterrorist communication among Muslims. The misconceptions are generally connected with two Islamic terms: “jihad” and “shahid”. The term “jihad” is wrongly translated as the “holy war” though there is no such a conception in Islam (war cannot be holy, it can only be justifiable when defensive). “Jihad” means “righteous zeal on the way of God” that can be manifested in many ways. “Big jihad” means self-perfection, “small jihad” can mean defensive war that is regulated by norms prohibiting killing of civilians. “Shahid” means a martyr that was killed heroically for a righteous aim. Suicide is proclaimed a sin as well as killing innocent people (Capan, 2004). Thereby suicide bombers are literally not “shahids” on “jihad” and calling them that way in antiterrorist rhetoric glorifies them instead of condemning which means talking the same language as the terrorist propaganda. Mohamed Chafri (2005), legal scholar, political activist and former Minister





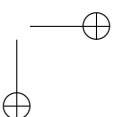
of Education of Tunisia in his major book argues that Islam is actually quite flexible concerning the political sphere and compatible with democracy. The narrow-mindedness of some Muslims who are vulnerable to terrorist propaganda comes mostly from the lack of proper humanitarian education.

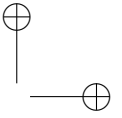
As far as the psychology of a suicide bomber is concerned, there are two opposite positions that both merit attention and further investigation. From the one hand, acts of terror can be described as “a form of psychopathology, indeed as a form of psychosis” (Richards, 2004, p. 171). On the other hand, the research of The Chicago Project on Security and Terrorism (Pape, 2006; Pape & Feldman, 2010) shows that the motivation of suicide terrorists is mostly rational and represents an extreme form of armed resistance.

Sociologists study terrorism from different perspectives. One of them is the view of terrorism as an alternative way of social control “from below” through fear, conflict and victimization of the society (Black, 2004; Chriss, 2007). The goal of terrorism is usually destabilization or even demolishing of the existing mechanisms of social control (informal values and formal regulations) and of the social structure in general. There are four levels of social disruption and its prevention. The governments should use the means of communication on these levels to oppose a manipulation of any kind, including terrorism.

The first social level concerns an individual as a citizen. Any intervention on this level can cause either political extremism or, on the contrary, political apathy. Terror acts can form distrust to the authorities, a wish to change the state system or leave the country. Communications of the state on this level should be aimed at forming patriotism, civil consciousness and confidence in the government. Since political confidence is based on both affective and cognitive factors it is important to combine image making with efficient news making and response to disinformation. Communication channels are: the media, mass culture, educational institutions, social and cultural organizations, especially for young people.

The second level of social disruption is aimed at an individual as a personality. Manipulation on this level can cause serious harm. Terrorists can provoke panic, apathy, spontaneous aggression or uncontrolled mass fear which hampers adequate perception of reality. The level can be protected from any manipulation in general by forming strong ethical values, revival of cultural heritage and improving the people’s educational level through mass-media,





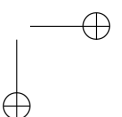
special events, offline and online libraries and other institutions. As far as the terrorism in particular is concerned people should be informed of all its psychological threats and manipulation mechanisms. Ways of personal and mass psychological rehabilitation after terrorist acts should be established.

The third social level concerns groups (social, ethnic, religious and others) and group behavior. Terror activity can cause hostility between groups if some of them are victimized and others are associated in mass consciousness with terrorists. This can lead to conflicts, violence, genocide, separatism and other social convulsions that represent serious threats to national security. The government needs to argue away the terrorists' activity in favor of any social group except for themselves (the Russian anti-terrorist campaign used a motto that terrorism had no nation and no religion). As for the general measures, it is necessary to favor comprehensive dialogue between groups and create consolidating principles that should be pluralistic and based on fundamental values, open for any positive innovation but protected against manipulation.

The fourth social level is the society itself. The control on this level is gained when the complex of the three previous levels is under control. The loss of governmental control on this level can lead to total demolition of a social structure which is manifested most often in revolutions and civil wars. That is why it is necessary to take preventive measures especially against terrorists' manipulation.

## 2. Terrorism as a social crisis

Crisis is an unpredictable "perceived disruption" (Boin, 2005, p. 163) of a social unit which threatens its integrity, reputation or survival, "challenges the public's sense of safety, values or appropriateness" (Sapriel, 2011) and requires immediate action under the circumstances of uncertainty, urgency and increased attention. A crisis is an ambivalent event. It has objective and subjective sides that are interconnected the way that the crisis extends on both. That is why from the sociological point of view a crisis can be studied from different paradigms which represent its two different sides: objective disruptions (structural functionalism) and subjective perceptions (symbolic interactionism, phenomenology and sociology of knowledge). An integrative theory of cultural sociology that rejoins the subjective and the objective sides, recon-





ciling functional analysis with the concept of social performance (Alexander, 2004) is also proposed to be applied to social crises, terrorism-related ones in particular.

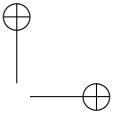
From the objective point of view crises are ‘disruptions of normality’ which happen “when the institutional structure of a social system experiences a relatively strong decline in legitimacy, as its central service functions are impaired or suffer from overload” (Boin, 2005, pp. 162-163). From the subjective perspective a crisis exists in a symbolic field of collective perceptions. “We can only speak of a crisis if the actors in question perceive the situation as a crisis” (Boin, 2005, p. 162) and “stakeholders will react to the organization as if it is in crisis” (Coombs, 2007, p. 3), no matter how serious or not the objective disruption is.

If we take a terror act as an example of this objective-subjective crisis concept we can see that it strikes only once in the objective field (with deaths, injuries and economic losses as its manifestations) but it can strike over and over again in the subjective field with every rumor, every new conspiracy version or new piece of information about governmental security failures. The creeping effects of terror crises can cause further socio-political disruptions such as conflicts or protests. That is why counterterrorist crisis communication is so important.

Most crisis researchers classify terrorism as a form of a crisis of malevolence which happens “when some outside actor or opponent employs extreme tactics” (Coombs, 2007, p. 65). Otto Lerbinger (2012) emphasizes that “terrorist acts committed against governments are the clearest expression of malevolence, with the September 11, 2001, attack on the twin World Trade Center towers as the prime example” (p. 185).

In a distinction between consensus and conflict types of crises American sociologist Enrico L. Quarantelli (2002) considers terrorism a classic conflict-type crisis. However, his colleagues Lori A. Peek and Jeannette M. Sutton (2003) argue that terrorist attack should be studied as a unique crisis type that includes characteristics of both types and also some unprecedented traits. The question is crucial because different types of crises need different response strategies especially concerning communication and media relations. In conflict-type situations mass media’s interest is higher. Conflict makes a thrilling story that is why the press shows both sides of a conflict and depicts their positions. Conflict-type crises disconnect the society and provoke anti-





social behaviour while the consensus crises create rejoin the society in returning to normalcy as soon as possible (though there can be mutual accusations or different opinions, the goals are not contrary), volunteer help and mutual grief. The negative psychological impact of conflict crises is higher. Terrorism is not a typical conflict-type crisis because it can also follow the scenario of a consensus-type crisis. Symbolic interactionist David L. Altheide (2009) shows in his analysis how the mass media content frames crises and puts terrorism into a conflict paradigm through “war programming” (pp. 143-144).

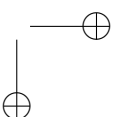
The world’s renowned crisis management expert Paul Shrivastava (2005) qualifies terrorism crisis as a particular crisis type that needs special research and response strategies. Terrorism “crises evolve and emerge as economic, social and political processes over time” (Shrivastava, 2005, p. 67). Deaths, injuries and other physical disruptions are the consequences of terror acts. But the consequences of terror crises are wider and include social disruption, political setbacks, economic/financial losses, war responses, environmental degradation and damage to reputation and image. That is why the design and development of special systems for terrorism crisis communications are needed.

### 3. Crisis communication under terrorist threat

A crisis life cycle includes several stages that require special kinds of crisis communication and media relations strategies. In this paper we use the three-staged approach advocated by crisis communication expert W. Timothy Coombs (2007).

1. The pre-crisis stage means crisis prevention and preparation. Terrorist crisis prevention includes both psycho-social and physical crisis manifestations. Psycho-social crisis prevention means detection and extermination of terror manipulation threats on different social levels using the mass media educative tools. Physical crisis prevention necessitates evaluation of the risks of terrorist attacks and informing the community about them. Communication should be designed to cause alert, not panic.

The primary step of crisis preparation is creating a crisis management team and a crisis communication plan. Governmental crisis communication’s characteristic feature, especially when terrorism is concerned, is that a crisis





team should be inter-agency. It is necessary to facilitate internal information flows and communication over bureaucratic barriers. “As the ample disaster and emergency literature shows, coordination and cooperation requires (after the central authority lays out a meaningful mission and exercises oversight) frequent drills, exercises, simulations, and meetings where diverse agencies get a chance to see each other’s point of view, establish personal contact, and build trust” (Perrow, 2011, p. 96). The authors of “The terrorism crisis communications manual for public authorities” (Shapiro et. al., 2001) recommend the following positions to be represented in the team: crisis manager who is responsible for the decision-making and holds the leadership function; crisis coordinator who is charged with coordination and the correct flow of information; authorized spokesperson who performs crisis communications and answers media questions; crisis team assistant who is responsible for organizational tasks (p. 24). One of the important functions within a crisis team is the role of a spokesperson that needs to be carefully selected and thoroughly trained to communicate with the media and the stakeholders. A spokesperson should be competent and trusted and have good communicative skills. During the pre-crisis period spokesperson needs to go through media rehearsals, especially practicing answering tough questions about a hypothetical terror act under time pressure and lack of data. Crisis plan should include basic organizational and communicational crisis measures, communication channels, draft communication strategies and comments, exact contact information.

It is important to foster alliances with other concerned organizations, the media and expert community and to develop consensus communicational strategies. There should be formed a special loyal terrorism-reporting press pool. Joint media/government trainings and simulations are useful: “exercises such as those conducted by George Washington University and the Technology Institute in Holon, Israel, which bring together government officials and media representatives to simulate government response and media coverage of mock terrorist incidents” (Perl, 1997). Paul Shrivastava (2005) argues that “the public itself needs to be trained in first-response strategies” (p. 68) as well.

The crisis-event stage after a crisis is triggered can be characterized by: threat, urgency, uncertainty, time compression, stress, loss of control, escalation of events, crisis perception, violation of expectations, focus of attention, external interferences. There are several important rules of crisis communication





that can be shortened into a motto: “Be first, be right, be credible” (Reynolds, 2002, pp. 90-101).

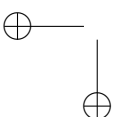
The first crisis communication rule is to make a statement as quick as possible. A crisis creates an information vacuum that can be filled by any kind of information whether provided by the official sources or not. Public attention is focused on a crisis and the media has deadlines to report about it. “If the crisis team does not supply the initial crisis information to the media, some other groups will, and they may be ill informed, misinformed, or motivated to harm the organization. The information void can become filled with rumor and speculation, not facts” (Coombs, 2007, p. 129). Otto Lerbinger (2012) emphasizes that “the first hours or, in quick-moving crises, minutes after a crisis event, are of critical importance for an organization to gain control over the reporting of the event – not only in describing what happened but in framing the event” (p. 46). Silence and “no comment” statements make the media and the public think there is something to hide. There is no need to wait until all the facts are available (it can never happen). During the first news-cycle of a crisis it is enough to generally explain the crisis event and what the organization is doing to normalize the situation.

It is important to dominate the information field during a crisis. The government needs to stay the primary news source and use any occasion possible to show that it keeps the situation under control. It is necessary to explain threats, risks and give recommendations to the community in order to prevent panic and victimization.

The authorities should avoid giving unverified information, especially about the victims or guilty. A mistake can provoke reputational losses and amplify the crisis. This is what happened after the terror act of 11 March 2004 in Madrid of which the government initially accused ETA Basque organization but the information revealed to be false (Castells, 2009, pp. 349-364). Another example is the Beslan school hostage crisis. Getting unverified and wrongly understated number of hostages from the republican authorities was interpreted by some media as an intention to hide the truth by reducing the scale of the event.

There are several communicational tasks during a crisis:

- 1) Setting up the coordination center to elaborate the strategy and control the information flows between different agencies to help the authorities to speak with one voice.







In Russia such an inter-agency crisis communication structure was designed to face different types of crises, mostly terrorism provoked. During the years 2000-2004 it was coordinated by the Information Policy Department (officially established in March 2001, before that – the staff of the Aide to the President) that developed crisis communication strategy for different governmental structures involved in crises and established cooperation with other concerned organizations, the media and experts.

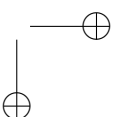
Apart from the main center, the exceptional case of the counterterrorist operation in the Chechen Republic of Russia required the creation of two more regional coordination centers: civil headquarters based on the interim Republican Administration and military headquarters based on the joint forces in the North Caucasus. Thereby, the crisis communication organizational structure during the terrorism crisis in Russia was pyramid-shaped with the Information Policy Department on the top and two regional coordination centers in the base. This was done to make the structure steady.

The government created a strategic multi-functioned communicative construction that consisted of a number of interconnected frames and followed different objectives: argumentation for the counterterrorist operation; condemnation of the terrorists; gaining support of different target groups; managing the reputation of the authorities and of the Russian military forces; responding to disinformation and manipulation.

2) Cooperating with the media. Crisis media center for ongoing press-conferences, briefings and interviews with the spokesperson and other newsmakers should be designated. The place should be equipped with all the necessary conveniences such as computers, Internet, local phones, cafes, free snacks where a journalist could get help and information. If there is a need to report the events from the ground, press tours should be organized. It is also important to be omnipresent in the news-field by regularly sending press-releases and other data to the journalists.

Media relations in a crisis should represent partnership and a two-way communication. By showing concern and helpfulness, the control of the media will be exercised in a soft, not noticeable way. One of the means of soft control is giving exclusive materials to loyal journalists. Refuse to disclose the information without giving reasons should be avoided.

Besides the pool of loyal journalists prepared to report a crisis event during the pre-crisis stage, it is important to create a relationship with all journalists





that the organization communicates with during a crisis and to get feedback from them. The media can be not only a transmitter of the organization's news but also a source of helpful information to the organization, in particular about the rumors and hostile newsmakers.

During a terrorism crisis the government and the media should cooperate to exercise joint control of interpretations (to avoid following the interpretation of the terrorists) and of verbal designations (for example, not calling terrorists rebels). During the terrorist crisis in Russia such a cooperation helped to refrain from the negative and unpopular war terminology (the terms "counter-terrorist operation" and "stabilization of the situation in the North Caucasus" were used instead) and to avoid calling terrorists "Islamists", "Wahhabis" or "Islamic extremists".

The distribution of the following information should be strongly restricted: live interviews with terrorists leaving no possibility to edit them; secret details about the counter-terror or hostage release operations (during the 2002 Nord-Ost siege the terrorists got the information about the operation from the TV); intimidating details that can provoke massive panic, fear and victimization (savoring the tragic facts, showing killed or injured in detail).

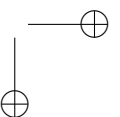
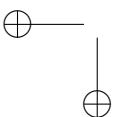
3) Establishing a hotline that provides direct communication to the public by phone, e-mail and specially created Internet site.

4) Communication with the other concerned organizations, elaborating joint communicational strategies.

5) Constant monitoring of the information flows, not only the traditional media but the Internet and the social media as well, giving immediate feedback and correcting disinformation.

### **3. The post-crisis stage should not be underestimated**

Mistakes during this phase can make the crisis relapse and become chronic. And on the contrary, skillful post-crisis communication favours the organization's reputation and promotes its activities and capabilities in crisis management. The post-crisis prompt analysis of the crisis communication and its results is priceless for future cases. Follow-up crisis communications should include the report about the crisis response measures and the results of the investigation of the terror act. The situation should be clear for the public





and the media to avoid further speculations or rumors. The activity of the government to handle the situation should be highlighted. Terrorism crises fade but do not vanish. As long as they cause many long-lasting psychosocial consequences, it is important to launch a public education campaign in the mass media to reduce creeping post-crisis effects and resist terrorist manipulation. The “discourse of renewal” (Ulmer & Sellnow, 2002) as a form of post-crisis communications is important on this stage and may be based on stakeholder commitment, commitment to correction and core values (Ulmer & Sellnow, 2002, pp. 363-364).

Governmental crisis communication should be thoroughly analyzed. “Evaluation data comes from the crisis records, stakeholder feedback, organizational performance measures, Internet comments, and media coverage” (Coombs, 2007, p. 152). The primary methods are: 1) content-analyses of external and internal documents, media coverage and Internet comments; 2) surveys, interviews and focus-groups with the stakeholders, including members of the crisis team, representatives of partner organizations, and families of the victims. The data collected is used to modify the crisis communication plan. The crisis communication circle returns to the pre-crisis stage.

#### **4. A case study of counterterrorist operation in Chechnya**

The first Chechen campaign from December 1994 to August 1996 was marked by the disastrous defeat of the Russian government on the information field. The self-proclaimed separatist Republic of Ichkeria created a powerful, well-organized and financially supported structure of propaganda which was called the Ministry of Information and press of the Chechen Republic Ichkeria with Movladi Udugov at its head. The Russian government, on the contrary, did not have coordinated media policy, often avoided any comments and its communications were targeted only at wide Russian audiences outside the Chechen Republic. Meanwhile the separatists’ propaganda was aimed at target audiences in the Republic as well as outside the country where they used democratic rhetoric based on the myths about the genocide of the Chechens. They established contacts with the mass media in Russia that often showed unedited video tapes of war scenes provided by the separatists and used their



false statistics which had negative psychological impact on the audience and discredited the Russian army (Shvets, 2001).

The counterterrorist operation started by the Russian government in 1999 was represented by the separatists as a war against Islam and Muslims using new religious discourse. Depending on the target audience they used different communication strategies: 1) democratic rhetoric and the right of self-determination was aimed at Western audiences; 2) anti-Islamic aggression was a myth for the Muslim counties, the Chechens and other Islamic nationals in Russia; 3) fear and victimization was used to manipulate the general public in Russia.

The following research of the new communication strategy of the Russian government applied during the years 2000-2004 is based on official governmental documents: 1) “Rekomendacii po upotrebleniyu terminov pri podgotovke materialov po obstanovke na severnom Kavkaze dlya opublikovaniya v sredstvakh massovoy informacii” (“Recommendations for using terms in the media publications about the situation in the North Caucasus”), n.d., Moscow; 2) “Rekomendacii dlya podgotovki materialov po informacionno-psihologicheskomu obespecheniyu deystviy Obyedinennoy gruppirovki voysk (sil)” (“Recommendations for preparing materials aimed and informational and psychological support of the activities of the Joint military (force) groups”), n.d., Moscow; 3) “Pravila akkreditacii predstaviteley sredstv massovoy informacii pri Apparate pomoshnika Prezidenta Rossiyskoy Federacii S.V. Yastrzhembskogo” (“The rules for media accreditation by the Department of Aide to the President of the Russian Federation”), n.d., Moscow with the appendix “Porядok organizacii posesheniya i raboty zhurnalistami, akkreditovannymi pri Apparate pomoshnika Prezidenta Rossiyskoy Fedetacii S.V Yastrzhembskogo Chechenskoj Respubliki” (“Regulations of the visits and work in the Chechen Republic applied to the journalists with the accreditation of the Department of Aide to the President of the Russian Federation”); 4) “Predlozheniya po koordinacii deyatelnosti informatcionnyh struktur federalnyh ведомstv, deystvuyushih v Chechenskoj Respublike” (“Proposals for coordination of the activity of the informational structures of the Federal agencies operating in the Chechen Republic”), n.d., Moscow; 5) “Osnovnie zadachi vremennogo obyedinennogo press-centra OGV (s) na Severnom Kavkaze” (“The main tasks of the interim press-center of the joint military forces on the North Caucasus”), 18 November 1999, Moscow; 6) “Pravila raboty pres-



taviteley sredstv massovoy informatsii v zone otvetstvennosti Obyedinennoy gruppirovki voysk (sil)” (“Rules of the work of the media representatives in the area of responsibility of the Joint military (force) groups”), November 1999, Moscow.

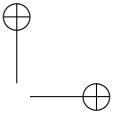
The new counterterrorist communication strategy of the Russian government during the years 2000-2004 was based on organizing an integrated communication system which combined the principles of hierarchy within the governmental structure and the principles of a social net cooperating with other institutions. Sergei Yastrzhembsky who was at head of the Information Policy Department of the President’s Administration had a status of Aide to the President which gave him authority to make decisions at governmental level. The newly created Department was responsible for:

- rejoining the communication structures of all the agencies responsible for the counterterrorist operation;
- cooperation with non-core agencies and non-governmental organizations if necessary;
- framing the counterterrorist operation;
- strategic management of the crisis communication.

Field crisis communication centers were created on the territory of the Chechen Republic: civil headquarters were based on the interim Republican Administration and military headquarters were based on the joint forces in the North Caucasus. The regional centers were responsible for:

- coordination of all the official information flows in the counterterrorist operation’s area;
- primary information monitoring, analyses and sending the data to the top coordination center;
- revealing the threats of disinformation and manipulation;
- primary crisis communication;
- field media relations.





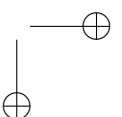
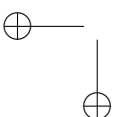
The headquarters were technically equipped (including modern transport and constant Internet access) that let them function effectively. Taking into account the subordination rules in military structures the chiefs of the communication units were promoted to the level of the deputy commanders-in-chief that gave them authority to exercise direction. Civil and military headquarters coordinated their activity.

Effective communication functions were exercised by the interim press-center of the joint military forces based in two spots: the central spot was situated in Mozdok (the Republic of North Ossetia–Alania) and the supplementary one was situated at the Khankala military base which was then was turned into the primary one after eliminating most of the illegal armed groups in the region. The press center's main purpose was assisting the media which included:

- organization of press conferences and briefings;
- distribution of official press releases and messages of the military headquarters;
- informing about the current military operation activities;
- organization of press tours for the journalists around the territories freed from the militants.

The journalists had comfortable working environment. The press-center was equipped with modern communication facilities. As compared to the year 1999 when the working principles of the press center used to have serious flaws (the journalists felt pressure from the military forces, the access to the information was sometimes blocked with no explanation given), the media policy coordinated by the Information Policy Department changed. The press center turned to the tactics of open media relations in order to influence the journalists softly using the embedded press system that was previously successfully applied by the American military forces during the conflict in Panama and the Gulf War (Paul & Kim, 2004).

One of the main communication tasks of the Information Policy Department was framing the counterterrorist operation and the terrorist threat crisis. *Framing* means creating the *frames of reference*, i.e. “interpretative frames





that provide the context for creating and understanding information” (Muhren & Van de Valle, p. 31) and includes the processes of *sense-making* which means determination of “how threatening the events are, to what or whom, what their operational and strategic parameters are, and how the situation will develop in the period to come” (Boin & ‘t Hart, 2006, p. 49) and *meaning-making* which implies getting “others to accept their definition of the situation” because “if other actors in the crisis succeed in dominating the meaning-making process, the ability of incumbent leaders to decide and maneuverer is severely constrained” (Boin & ‘t Hart, 2006, p. 51). Framing, sense-making and meaning-making should be distinguished from manipulation because they are based on facts and are aimed at mutual understanding of the situation equally shared by every side of the communication process, senders as well as receivers. They serve the goal of consensual interpretations for better coordination in the state of ambiguity or equivocality typical for crisis situations.

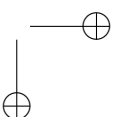
The frame of reference for the Chechen terrorist threat crisis had to solve several tasks:

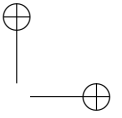
- substantiation of the counterterrorist operation;
- discredit of the enemy;
- support of the Russian government by different target audiences;
- improvement of the Russian army’s image;
- response to any threats in the information field.

In order to solve these tasks several descriptive strategies were elaborated.

1) The first frame was the status of the Chechen Republic as a constituent entity of the Russian Federation, the integral part of the country. It means that the Russian authorities follow the basic principle of territorial integrity of a State. Russia’s actions correspond to the Constitution, national and international laws.

2) The mission of the counterterrorist operation was formulated as: liquidation of the illegal armed groups; ensuring security of the Russian citizens; re-establishment of the constitutional order on the territory of the Chechen Republic. The stationing of the armed forces was explained as an exceptional





measure to stabilize the situation in the region that was not aimed at limitation of any rights and freedoms on the Chechen community.

The concept of “war on terrorism” was not used for many reasons. First of all, the media and the citizens were against any wars and the Chechen war 1994-1996 particularly but they supported, however, the counterterrorist operation as a measure to solve the terrorist threat crisis. Second, the term “war” that is generally applied by political theory and international relations theory provides terrorists de-facto with the status of an equal political actor. As German risk sociologist Ulrich Beck (2009) notes about the USA, “the involuntary complicity is reflected in the formula “War on Terror”: this scattered the terrorist seed over real battlefields where terrorism could achieve its greatest victories” (p. 11). More than that, it is the possibility to be involved in war with the USA that serves as a latent advertising campaign and attracts radicals to Al Qaeda.

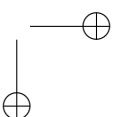
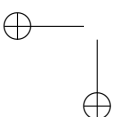
3) As opposed to the first military campaign when the condemnation of the Chechen militants was vague, during the second campaign they were framed as terrorists. Several communication concepts were formulated to support the frame.

First of all, the threats on several levels were formulated and emphasized:

- the threat to the sovereignty and the integrity of the Russian Federation;
- the threat to the security of Russian and foreign citizens;
- the transnational threat of proliferation of terrorism, crime and drug traffic;
- the threat to basic values such as democracy and human rights.

Each of the statements indicated above were sustained by the facts such as documents, data, evidence, statements with special reference to the condemnation of the terrorists on the part of the Chechen Muslim leaders.

From the standpoint of the theory of communicative sense-making (phenomenology of communication), synthesized by Arnoldi (2010) on the basis of the research of Niklas Luhman and Edmund Husserl, sense-making and meaning-making involve classifications and identity attributions that form expectations about the phenomenon, particularly by means of the mass media.







Semantics play a significant role in this process. This theory explains the importance of suggested terms elaborated for the media to describe the separatists. It was recommended to omit from the media messages such notions as “the Chechen army” and “guerrilla war” by replacing them with “armed gangs” and “terrorist acts” (“Rekomendacii po . . .”, n.d.). It was also suggested to avoid calling the separatists “Islamists”, “Wahhabis” or “Islamic extremists” but use the terms “extremists”, “terrorists” or “members of the illegal (terrorist, extremist, criminal, radical) armed groups using slogans of Islam (Wahhabism) as cover” instead (“Rekomendacii po . . .”, n.d.). The campaign had a motto that terrorism has no nation and no religion. This important correction created the base for discrediting the separatists’ incrimination of Russia making war against Islam and for minimizing conflicts between different confessions in Russia and between different Islamic schools in Chechnya. The key point is that the elimination of the religious factor deprived the terrorists of the ideological foundation of gaining support and recruiting. The media politics was aimed at disclosing the connection of the Chechen illegal armed groups with international terrorist organizations which lent them political, financial, technical and ideological support. The international terrorists were framed as criminals that were pursuing their own interests, not that of the Chechen people. Facts of the illegal armed groups’ robberies, kidnapping, arms and drug trafficking, cruelty towards all confessions, including Muslims, were presented.

Russia positioned itself as an unbending fighter against terrorism on the international level. This status helped to gain the world community’s support of the counterterrorist operation because Russian internal problem was thus connected to one of the global threats.

Another important communication task was to improve the image of the Russian army in the Chechen campaign. Russian soldiers were framed as heroes, liberators, protectors of law and order in the Republic.

As we can see, terrorism crises provoke not only physical but also social disruption and damage to political legitimacy. That is why the development of anti-terrorist crisis communication system is needed. The case study shows the example of the communication strategy that helped the Russian government to de-escalate the conflict and reunite the country. Despite the separatists’ notorious Nord-Ost siege in October 2002, Russian government demonstrated trust in the Chechens as the citizens of Russia and turned to the

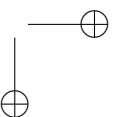
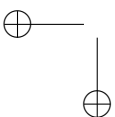




discourse of renewal instead of escalating the conflict. In 2003 two positive newsworthy occurrences were created: the establishing of the Ministry of the Interior of the Chechen Republic of Russia and the Referendum for the Constitution of the Chechen Republic of Russia. These events represented the way to normalization in Chechnya and factual reunion of Russia.

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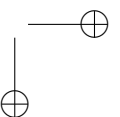
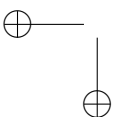
## Media relations in health communication: The sources of information in cancer newspaper articles in Portugal

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*University of Minho, Portugal*

**Abstract:** In Portugal, the use of strategic communication within the public health sector has been growing in the past decade. And the increase of health media relations is part of this process. Public organisations have the task of protecting and enhancing public health. However, this mission has become quite difficult with the growing interdependence of economies and societies, which increases the risks of diseases and other health global issues. This is why a relevant part of the literature on health communication is dedicated to studying the communication of diseases. Within this research area, there is a dominant perspective suggesting that communication aims for risk reduction, prevention and detection of diseases for treatment and survival rates. This approach also highlights the role of the mass media as actors of social awareness development on the most prevalent diseases and on the enlargement of health literacy in general. To which we add, the importance of health media relations activities developed by health organisations, to share relevant information within the health care delivery systems through mass media channels.

In order to know more about health media relations (and health journalism), we have been conducting a systematic study on health news coverage in Portugal. Our research design combines the examination of news content, news production practices and news sources. Each year we select the two most salient diseases covered by the press and we conduct a thorough study that aims to understand the process of health information construction. This study presents the results of 2011's research on cancer news – the most covered disease in that year – following the perspective of the information sources and having as a basis the Strategic Communication framework. The results indicate that health officials and institutional sources are predominant as a result of strate-

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gic communication actions, which gives them a powerful voice as news definers.

Keywords: health communication, cancer communication, health strategic communication, public relations, journalism.

## Introduction

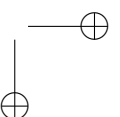
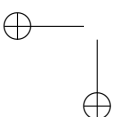
Whereas doctors were once terrified of speaking to reporters, today, many hire public relations agents to help them get their names in the news. The journals, too, compete for media attention—and they get it, especially when their reports involve cancer (Brody, 1999: 170).

**I**N Portugal, the use of strategic communication within the public health sector has been growing in the past decade. And the increase of health media relations is part of this process.

Public organisations have the task of protecting and enhancing public health. This mission has become quite difficult with the growing interdependence of economies and societies, increasing the risks of diseases and other health issues. This is why a relevant part of the literature on health communication is committed to studying the communication of diseases. There is a dominant perspective which suggests that communication aims for risk reduction, prevention and detection of diseases for treatment and survival rates. It also highlights the role of mass media as actors of social awareness development on the most prevalent diseases and on the enlargement of health literacy in general.

According to Kreps, Bonaguro and Query (1998), health communication has different levels of analysis and we have been studying the organizational health communication field, which examines the use of communication to share relevant information within the health care delivery system, namely using the mass media channels. Within this context, public relations (PR) are understood as important communication techniques to help public health institutions to organize “information packages” that are used by the journalists to prepare news contents.

In order to know more about health media relations (and health journalism), we have been conducting a systematic study on health news coverage







in Portugal. Our research design combines the examination of news content, news production practices and news sources. Each year we select the two most salient diseases covered by the press and we conduct a thorough study that aims to understand health information construction. This study presents the results of 2011's research on **cancer news** – the most covered disease in the year – following the perspective of the information sources and having as a basis the strategic communication and journalism frameworks.

Our study was based on a systematic quantitative analysis of three national newspapers, gathering 108 news articles on cancer. Then, the research was carried on in two stages: (1<sup>st</sup>) we tried to find out *who were the sources of information in cancer news*; and (2<sup>nd</sup>) we looked to reveal *how they became news sources* – in order to answer our initial question: *how do healthcare organisations promote cancer information in Portugal?*

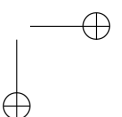
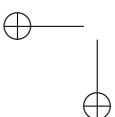
To begin our research paper we review the literature on Health Communication, Health Journalism and Health Strategic Communication.

## 1. Health Communication: the research field

### Cancer news

The meaning of cancer has shifted over the centuries. The public understanding of the disease went through different stages: from a stigmatized disease, to a personal tragedy – that should be managed with privacy and isolation – going through gender association (as for breast cancer) and evolving to a public epidemic that should be discussed and taken care. And the mass media are agents of this transformation process.

In fact, “cancer is an increasingly popular topic in the news”, as stated by Jensen, Moriarty, Hurley, and Stryker (2012: 40). Nevertheless, cancer news coverage has been criticized by Health Communication scholars. Terre (2009: 362), for example, wrote: “unfortunately, despite being a popular source of cancer information, the mass media often privilege coverage of biological risks over modifiable behavioral hazards”. Actually, cancer is often seen by the media within a biomedical paradigm, that view “diseases as a biochemical phenomenon that can be classified into diagnosis categories through technological methods and treated, where possible, according to standardized objectively validated mechanisms” (Cohen, 1998: 2).





However, the disease exists in both material and discursive territories. Some authors argue that cancer is also a cultural construction, as “a way of talking about how knowledge is produced and sustained within specific contexts, discourses, and cultural communities” (Teichler, 1999: 173). Consequently, cancer cannot be understood without the frame of culture or outside symbolic contexts. Symbols and general discursive contexts convey stories that organize human experience suggesting ways of living. So diseases are also culturally constructed. And perhaps the most important discursive contexts, regarding health issues, are the media texts, sounds and images, as they reach large sections of the population.

News constructs, transform and frame reality by defining problems, identifying causes, suggesting remedies or reproducing social relationships. They play an active role in shaping everyday reality. As stated by Dubriwny (2009: 108): “News is a site of definitional struggle”. Regarding the health context, the understanding of a disease is also a discursive process of accommodation, and media offer narratives that help people to cope with the subject. Media coverage develops common identities, diseases’ consciousness, public vocabulary and health literacy.

It is worth noting that literature on cancer journalism suggests the increase of media coverage on the disease in recent years which raises public awareness. When analyzing this abundance of public information on cancer, Dubriwny’s research (2009) found two separate, and at times contradictory, narratives regarding breast cancer news coverage: (1<sup>st</sup>) the narrative of medical success, focusing on the stories of individual patients; and (2<sup>nd</sup>) the counternarrative of medical research, that gives voice to the growing medical and public concern on the prevalence of the disease. And these editorial options often have public consequences.

Cancer is a complex disease that raises a huge number of medical and social challenges. The messages on the subject should, therefore, be prepared carefully, meaning they should be designed and delivered according to the skills, needs and predispositions of the audiences. Hence, the content must be relevant and appealing in order to guide correctly the decision making process of the populations. To understand how cancer is communicated to the general public is therefore important within the Health Communication field.

Kreps (2003: 166) states that “cancer communication research is the study and the application of the process of exchanging and interpreting the array





of ambient and strategically designed messages delivered interpersonally and through selected media that convey relevant health information to targeted audiences”. And different studies (as Friedman & Hoffman-Goetz, 2008; Kreps, 2012a) have proved that health literacy is critical to the development of cancer education. In fact, “the quality of communication in cancer care has been shown to affect patient satisfaction, decision making, patient distress, compliance, and even malpractice litigation” (Frenkel, Ben-Arye, & Cohen, 2010: 179).

Health literacy is a critical resource derived from effective Health Communication. And cancer poses a series of significant health threats that demand valuable Health Communication. Kreps (2003: 161) advocates the powerful potential of using strategically Health Communication “to reduce cancer risks, incidence, morbidity, and mortality while enhancing quality of life across the continuum of cancer care (prevention, detection, diagnosis, treatment, survivorship, and end-of-life care)”.

Indeed, a large body of Health Communication literature has demonstrated the powerful influences of communication on health behaviors and health outcomes. Kreps (2009; 2012a) reports a series of studies showing the influences of intrapersonal, interpersonal, group, organizational and societal communications on health knowledge, behaviors, and outcomes; the positive influences of increased patient communicative involvement in treatment on desired health outcomes; and the affirmative influences of social marketing to adopt important prevention behaviors or to promote lifestyle changes. In a broad review of the literature, Kreps and Massimilla (2002) examined (1990–2000) published research on cancer communication that provided strong outcome data on the effectiveness of strategic communications in cancer control. The research literature is examined in three categories based on the communications strategy used and behavior targeted: 1) strategic communications on adoption of prevention behaviors in diverse populations; 2) tailored communications on promotion of cancer prevention and control; and 3) interpersonal communications on provision of social support to individuals living with cancer. The review of the literature suggests that communication interventions can influence important health outcomes in cancer prevention and control, and that communication is a central process for disseminating cancer information to key populations.

With reference to these cues suggested by the Health Communication fi-





eld, we have been studying the media role on cancer education promotion by analyzing the role of the agents involved in the process, journalists and strategic communication professionals.

### **Health Journalism**

Regarding health journalism, a study by Brody (1999) indicates dramatic changes in the US since the 1990s. Doctors, once reluctant to talk to the media, seem to be more open to speak with the journalists and many hire public relations agents to help them to get their names in the news. Medical researchers, also, seem to be freer to extrapolate on the implications of new findings. Editors easily find space for a medical news story, even when it is a minor development on health research or practice. And media widely recognize an intense public interest in health news.

However, there is the risk of an information overload. According to Brody (1999), radio and television short reports, often prepared by journalists with little or no specific knowledge on medical science, are frequently superficial, distorted or downright incorrect. As consequence, people are bombarded with information they are not prepared to process and, regarding cancer, public confusion on causes and treatments seems to occur. Within this context, Brody (1999) and Hodgetts (2012) suggest that print media (the focus of our study) should bring perspective and depth to news reports about cancer. Newspapers should move towards a more intense reporting, supported by a responsible investigation, with the consideration of different points of view and providing the necessary space.

The framing of health news plays a role in setting, legitimating, sustaining and undermining health agendas and policies (Hodgetts, 2012: 25).

Journalists are, therefore, central to the interface between science, health professionals and the public. The public has often an inadequate understanding of science and health issues, so in some cases the role of journalists is also to educate people. Regarding diseases, Jensen and his colleagues (2012) state that news are a key source of information that have the potential to shape illness representations (namely on cancer) at both individual and public level.





Media templates serve to make sense of those issues and are pointed out as crucial to social relations (Hodgetts, 2012).

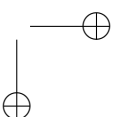
Within such context, research on Health Communication suggests that populations have been audiences to a nearly continuous stream of information about risk factors for cancer and recommended strategies for cancer prevention. And the public health field was the most visible source of such information (Hawkins, Berkowitz, & Peipins, 2010). Other sources were identified though, such as advocacy groups and nonprofit organisations, private industries or manufacturers of medical products. All of them have contributed to the content and quality of information on cancer conveyed by the media.

## 2. Health Public Relations

As noted by Kreps (2012b: 120), “strategic health communication is needed to provide consumers with the information and support needed to reduce cancer threats and improve cancer-related health outcomes”. From this perspective strategic communication refers to the intentional use of communication by public and private health organisations, in pursuit of its objectives or mission, which includes the preparation and delivery of persuasive messages to target audiences with the purpose of influencing opinions, attitudes and behaviours.

However health promotion messages must be carefully designed, and conveyed to be effective. That is why health strategic communication is extremely complex. The central point is to adapt those messages to public needs and to public literacy. Kreps (2012b) advocates the use of a “consumer orientation” to health information and education, by employing tailored communication systems that inform the customized use of messages by each person. But it is also critically important to choose the most effective communication channels to deliver the messages. And the mass media are referred to frequently as very successful conduits for disseminating health information and acting on health behaviours, as they are familiar, attractive and easy for target audiences to use (Brechman, Lee, & Cappella, 2009; Friedman & Hoffman-Goetz, 2008; Kreps, 2012b). And they can be used to carry campaign or informational messages. This second kind of messages is the work of PR departments and it is the central part of our study.

As referred to above (Brody, 1999), health journalism increasingly uses





public relations sources to prepare news contents. And research has been showing evidence that there is a positive correlation between PR activities and the news media agenda (Hodgetts, Chamberlain, Scammell, Karapu, & Nikora, 2008; Len-Ríos, Hinnant, Park, Cameron, Frisby, & Lee, 2009; Ruão, Lopes, Marinho & Araújo, 2012).

This active role of health news sources has been strengthened by the use of strategic communication or marketing techniques that help them gain access to the public sphere. Studies highlight the growing activities carried out by official or specialized sources in the health field seeking to influence debates, agendas, and audiences. Several studies show the increase of public relations campaigns by health organisations, including governments, research foundations, hospitals, and other health care institutions. They seek to produce accessible, reliable, and specialized information as part of a conscious strategy to control news production and the social interpretation of the health reality (Briggs & Hallin, 2010; McAllister, 1992; Miller & Williams, 1998; Zook, 1994).

The need for and use of strategic communication by public health organisations can be detected in different phenomena. Health institutions are experiencing a consumer-driven demand and, as a consequence, are beginning to deal with patients as 'clients'. Health issues have become of high media interest. Public relations costs in health organisations have increased and many communication agencies have created specialized teams in health information (Longest & Rohrer, 2005; Moreira, 2007; Springston & Larisey, 2005; Moreira, 2007; Wise, 2008). All those factors have generated impressive news coverage.

In addition, the power of health public relations was reinforced by some peculiarities of health journalism. According to the literature (Cho, 2006; Tanner, 2004a; Tanner, 2004b), the health information context is different from general news reporting because media are strongly dependent on the expertise of health organisations, scientists, and the medical community in order to cover the stories. This particular requirement of health journalism (shared with science news reporting) is confirmed in several investigations (Cho, 2006; Len-Ríos *et al.*, 2009).

In Portugal, the landscape seems to be very similar. There are few journalists covering exclusively health issues and the lack of training is evident (Marinho, Lopes, Ruão & Araújo, 2012). This absence of specific training,





coupled with the complex nature of the field and an heavy workload, seems to drive health reporters to rely strongly upon the health community and its communication experts. These circumstances can affect health media coverage and could be a source of distortion in the dissemination of political, medical and scientific orientations.

Following this insight, Brechman et al. (2009) made a comparison between the press releases and subsequent newspaper coverage relating genetic research on cancer, from 2004 to 2007. They assumed that inaccurate or exaggerated coverage found in print media (and reported in Health Communication research) was a byproduct of this translation process. They wanted to access the complex negotiation process that occurs among the press, the public information officers and the scientific sources. Their data showed that the intermediary press release may serve as a source of distortion towards deterministic claims in news articles. However, the authors also argued that public information officers and journalists are charged with the task of communicating highly complex material to the audiences of non specialists; they both “sell” their stories to their publics; both economize and glamorize science; both are limited in time and space; and both employ practices that might distort scientific knowledge.

In Portugal, a study by the Portuguese Society of Oncology<sup>1</sup> – on the “Degree of Knowledge, perceptions and behaviors in the face of cancer”, 2011 – also indicates that news media are the primary source of information on cancer (along with family and friends). Considering this information, and our data – that puts cancer as the most covered disease in 2011 – we have carried out a study on the work developed by the organisational news sources on cancer in Portuguese newspapers.

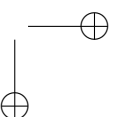
### 3. The Study

#### 3.1 Methodology

To answer the research question – *how do healthcare organisations promote cancer information in Portugal?* – we conducted an analysis of cancer news

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<sup>1</sup>“Grau de Conhecimento, percepções a comportamentos face às doenças oncológicas”, *Sociedade Portuguesa de Oncologia* (in *Jornal de Notícias*, 14/11/2011).





in the Portuguese press, within the strategic communication and journalism frameworks. This involved a systematic analysis of three national newspapers, which published, in 2011, a total 108 news articles on cancer.

The three newspapers were selected according to a set of criteria, which make them typical cases (non probabilistic sampling): different periodicity, distinctive editorial orientations and diverse locations (newsrooms). *Expresso* is a weekly newspaper, based in Lisbon (the Portuguese capital, in the south) and is considered a quality paper. *Publico* is also a quality paper, published daily and its' newsroom is based in Lisbon, although its' Oporto newsroom can be considered the 'strongest'. Finally, *Jornal de Notícias* (JN), is classified as popular daily press, and has its headquarters in Oporto (north of Portugal). These differences will be considered further ahead, as explanatory variables.

Although 2011 is the reference year for analysis, our research has been carried out since 2008, which allows comparative analysis (2008-2011), as well as the identification of some tendencies, namely regarding diseases (cited and most referred to); and news framing (tone, location and moment of the events, journalistic genre, size). These data will be presented and discussed first, followed by a two step analysis: (1st) *sources in cancer news are identified and characterized*, according to a set of variables such as their place of origin, gender, profession and, in the case of doctors, their medical expertise; in addition, we will try to understand to what extent variations in the use of sources can be explained by variables such as the periodicity of newspapers (daily and weekly), editorial tendencies, and the location of the newspaper; and (2nd) we try to explain *how they became news sources* – in order to answer our initial question: *what was the media relations' role on the news coverage on cancer in Portugal?* At this stage interviews were conducted (data collection technique). Interviewees were selected among the most quoted sources, as identified in the previous stage, and among journalists specialized in health issues. Data were examined using content analysis (data analysis technique).

### 3.2 Results

From 2008 to 2011, 6.304 news articles on health issues were published by the 3 newspapers that constitute our sample. From these, 2.206 were on diseases, which represents about a third of the total (35%). More specifically, 433 news





articles about diseases were published in 2008; 868 in 2009 (an increase that can be explained by the amount of reporting on influenza A); 362 in 2010; and 543 in 2011.

From these 2.206 news articles, 344 were about a specific disease. The most referred to every year (with the exception of influenza A in 2009) was cancer. From 2008 to 2011, cancer accounts for 15,6% of the total of news about diseases (81 news articles in 2008; 77 in 2009; 78 in 2010; and 108 in 2011). In 2011, the year this analysis will focus on, cancer represented 19,9% of all diseases.

### The framing of cancer news in 2011

When we look at the period 2008-2011, the most frequent angle (theme) of the news on cancer are *situation portraits* (98 of 344 news), followed by R&D (87), *prevention* (28) and *health politics* (inaugurations, new facilities, etc) (26). If we focus on 2011, as shown by Table 1, *situation portraits and health politics* are the most common, followed by R&D, leaving *prevention* less represented (4,6%). This variation could be explained by the context of economic crisis, which implies restructuring measures and cutbacks on the public health budget, topics intensely covered by the media.

Table 1: Themes of news articles on cancer in 2011

	<b>Público</b>	<b>JN</b>	<b>Exp resso</b>	<b>Total</b>
Situation portraits	13,5%	35,0%	18,2%	25,9%
Politics	27,0%	23,3%	36,4%	25,9%
Research & Investigation	32,4%	18,3%	18,2%	23,1%
Clinical Practices	10,8%	13,3%	27,3%	13,9%
Prevention	8,1%	3,3%	0%	4,6%
Health Economy and Business	2,7%	1,7%	0%	1,9%
Others	5,4%	5,0%	0%	4,6%

When we consider other aspects of news framing, such as tone, location and moment of the events' reporting, journalistic genre and size of news articles, these are the main features of cancer reporting in 2011: the tone is mostly positive, but we can identify a balance between "positive", "negative" and "neutral" (Table 2); the most common journalistic genre is the "news" (86,5% in *Público*; 93,3% in *JN*; and 45,5% in *Expresso*) and the "interview"

is, by far, the least represented (2,7% in *Público*; 0% in *JN*; and 9,1% in *Expresso*), whereas the highest value for “reports” (45,5%), could be explained by the circumstance that *Expresso* is a weekly newspaper and therefore more likely to favor “larger” genres. The most frequent size of news articles on cancer is “medium” (59,5% in *Público*; 60% in *JN*; and 45% in *Expresso*) and the highest value obtained for “extensive” (54,5% in *Expresso*) could be once more explained by the relevance given by this newspaper to the “report”.

Table 2: Angle of news articles on cancer in 2011

	<b>Público</b>	<b>JN</b>	<b>Exp resso</b>	<b>Total</b>
Positive	<b>37,8%</b>	<b>38,3%</b>	27,3%	<b>37,0%</b>
Negative	29,7%	35,0%	<b>36,4%</b>	33,3%
Neutral	32,4%	26,7%	<b>36,4%</b>	29,6%

Still considering other aspects of news framing, events are usually reported as “national” (global country) (25,9% of the total; 32,4% in *Público*; and 36,4% in *Expresso*), but, in the case of *JN*, the most common referred location is the “north” (30%). This could be explained by the fact that *JN* is based precisely in the north of Portugal (Oporto) and has a strong and public editorial vocation to value regional events. Naturally, the second most referred location in all three newspapers is “Lisbon and the Valley of Tejo”, which comprises the capital and its surrounding area, the place where decisions are made and major events occur.

### The predominance of official and institutional sources

After a brief overview of the way cancer news is generally framed, our analysis will now be focused on the identification and characterization of the sources brought into play by journalists, which constitutes the first step of this study, as previously clarified.

We can verify that journalists use sources in their published work: in all the news articles from *Público* and *Expresso* there was at least a reference to one source and that can be observed in 98,3% of the sample from *JN*. The same goes to the issue of identification: the vast majority of sources are identified by the journalist (89,8% in *Público*; 94,8% in *JN*; and 92,7% in *Expresso*).

As for the number of sources, we can detect that in most situations only one source is referred (47,7% of the global), but some differences can be perceived, as shown in Table 3: *JN* uses usually one source (62,7%), but in the case of *Público*, this distinction isn't so clear, because although "one source" is the highest category (32,4%) all the other categories are well represented, creating an equilibrium ("two sources", 21,6%; "three sources", 21,6%; and "four or more sources"). As for *Expresso*, journalists clearly tend to use multiple sources: the most frequent category is "three sources" (36,4%), followed by "four or more sources" (27,3%). In terms of gender, sources are usually male, which is much evident in the case of *Expresso* (41,8% in *Público*; 43,3% in *JN* and 73,2% in *Expresso*). As for the location of cancer news sources, they are mostly "national" (40,3% of the total of the three newspapers), or come from Lisbon (the capital) (14,8% of the total of the three newspapers) even though *JN* exhibits as second most frequent category not Lisbon, but the north of Portugal (24,7%), which could be explained by the fact that its main newsroom is in Oporto and acknowledges a strong editorial inclination to report news that concern the northern region, and specifically Oporto.

Table 3: Number of sources used in news articles on cancer in 2011

	<b>Público</b>	<b>JN</b>	<b>Expresso</b>	<b>Total</b>
One source	<b>32,4%</b>	<b>62,7%</b>	18,2%	47,7%
Two sources	21,6%	18,6%	18,2%	19,6%
Three sources	21,6%	13,6%	<b>36,4%</b>	18,7%
Four sources or more	24,3%	5,1%	27,3%	14,0%

When we look at the "status" of the news sources (Table 4), it becomes evident that the vast majority come from the healthcare area, and, in that category, most of them are "specialized and institutional" (39,8% of the total of the three newspapers), which is very salient in the case of *Expresso* (70,8%). Next, appears the category "media/sites/blogs", outside the healthcare area (14% of the total of the three newspapers), and "official" sources (11,5% of the total of the three newspapers).

Table 4: Categories of sources used in news articles on cancer in 2011

	SOURCES	NEWSPAPER S			TOTAL
		Público	JN	Exp resso	
Healthcare field	Official	16,3%	10,3%	4,9%	11,9%
	Specialized and institutional	36,7%	29,9%	70,7%	39,4%
	Specialized non institutional	5,1%	4,1%	2,4%	4,2%
	Documents	12,2%	6,2%	4,9%	8,5%
	Media/sites/blogs	6,1%	2,1%	0%	3,4%
	Patients/family	3,1%	14,4%	7,3%	8,5%
Outside the healthcare field	Official	2%	1%	2,4%	1,7%
	Institutional	2%	3,1%	0%	2,1%
	Specialized non institutional	2%	1%	2,4%	1,7%
	Other documents	1%	2,1%	2,4%	1,7%
	Common citizen	0%	2,10%	0%	0,80%
	Celebrities	0%	2,10%	0%	0,80%
	Media/sites/blogs	14,30%	19,60%	0%	14%
	Other sources	0%	2,1%	0%	0,8%
Non identified status	0%	0%	2,4%	0,4%	

When we look closer at the category “specialized and institutional” sources (in the healthcare area) (Table 5), we can observe that “doctors” are the most represented (24,2%), followed by “researchers” (5,1%) and “patients” (4,2%). PR professionals are much less represented (0,8%), which doesn’t mean, however, that PR doesn’t play a role in the definition and implementation of the strategy by which other individuals and institutions become news sources (this aspect will be discussed in the next section). When we look at “press releases” (in the category documents), we find a higher value (3%), which could indicate that this is an effective instrument. Outside the healthcare area, PR professionals have the same value as in the healthcare area (0,8%). Also, when we look at “medical expertise” (in the case of “doctors”, there’s no surprise in the result: “oncology” is the most represented (47,1% of the total of the three newspapers). Still, an observation: in many situations (17,6% of the total of the three newspapers) the medical expertise is not identified.

As stated before, we must acknowledge that PR theory is, most of the time, developed in the “backstage”, which could explain these values. Our analysis, at this stage, is focused on the sources as presented in the news articles and does not account for the process by which certain individuals/institutions are given by journalists the status of news sources. This is, however, the crucial and most valuable aspect to be considered.

Table 5: Description of sources used in news articles on cancer in 2011

			<b>Público</b>	<b>JN</b>	<b>Expresso</b>	<b>Total</b>
Healthcare field	Official	Politicians	4,1%	5,2%	0%	3,8%
		Administrators/directors of public health units	0%	2,1%	2,4%	1,3%
		Other	12,2%	3,1%	2,4%	6,48%
	Specialized and institutional	Doctors	<b>23,5%</b>	<b>16,5%</b>	<b>43,9%</b>	<b>24,2%</b>
		Researchers	4,1%	4,1%	9,8%	5,1%
		Pharmaceuticals and Labs	1%	0%	0%	0,4%
		Press Officers	2%	0%	0%	0,8%
		Patients	1%	5,2%	9,8%	4,2%
		Other	5,1%	4,1%	7,3%	5,1%
	Specialized non institutional	Doctors	2%	3,1%	2,4%	2,5%
		Researchers	3,1%	1%	0%	1,7%
	Society	Patients/family	3,1%	14,4%	7,3%	8,5%
	Documents	Official	4,1%	0%	2,4%	2,1%
		Specialized	3,1%	3,1%	2,4%	3%
		Press releases	4,1%	3,1%	0%	3%
		Other	1%	0%	0%	0,4%
	Media and sites	Media	4,1%	2,1%	0%	2,5%
Websites/Blogs		2%	0%	0%	0,8%	
Outside the healthcare field	Official	Politicians	2%	0%	0%	0,8%
		Press officers	0%	1%	2,4%	0,8%
		Other	0%	1%	0%	0,4%
	Non-institutional	Businessmen, economists, industrials	1%	0%	0%	0,4%
		Lawyers/Judges	0%	0%	2,4%	0,4%
		Scholars	1%	0%	0%	0,4%
		Other	0%	1%	0%	0,4%
	Documents	Media/ news websites	14,3%	19,6%	0%	14%
		Other	1%	2,1%	2,4%	1,7%
		Common citizens	0%	2,1%	0%	0,8%
		Celebrities	0%	2,1%	0%	0,8%
		Other	0%	2,1%	0%	0,8%
	Others	Non identified status	0%	0%	2,4%	0,4%

Considering that the most frequent sources are, as we have just seen, “specialized and institutional”, it is of the utmost importance to verify to which institutions they belong to. Table 6 displays these results.

Table 6: Specialized and Institutional sources in news articles on cancer in 2011

Instituições	Público	Expresso	JN	Total
Portuguese Oncological Institute	7	5	7	19
Chamalimaud Foundation	13	2	2	17
Ministry of Health	3	1	5	9
National Coordination of Oncological Diseases	3	2	2	7
Portuguese Cancer League	1	3	3	7
College of Specialty on Oncology	3	1	2	6
Portuguese National Board of Health	4	1	0	5
Portuguese Society of Oncology	0	2	2	4
Infarmed - National Authority of Medicines and Health Products	4	0	0	4
College of Specialty on Plastic Surgery	2	0	0	2
Board of Physicians	1	1	0	2

The *Portuguese Oncological Institute* is a well known public hospital dedicated to cancer treatment and research. It is the public institution with most visibility in our ranking (it came out 19 times in our sample). The *Chamalimaud Foundation* is a prestigious private institution, dedicated to the development of programs on advanced biomedical research and clinical care. It is the second source in the ranking (17 occurrences). The *Ministry of Health* is part of the Portuguese government and formulates, executes and evaluates health policy in the country. It is the third most quoted news source in our sample (9 occurrences). The *National Coordination of Oncological Diseases* is a governmental program dedicated to cancer control and it is the fourth source of information in the study (7 occurrences). The *Portuguese Cancer League* is a popular private non-profit organization dedicated to health education and cancer prevention. It emerges also in the fourth place (with 7 occurrences). The *College of Specialty on Oncology* of the national *Board of Physicians* is an official group of specialists that are dedicated to cancer observation and act as official counselors on the disease. It is the fifth news source on the study (6 occurrences). The *Portuguese National Board of Health* is part of the Ministry of Health and it is responsible for coordinating the activities of health promotion and disease prevention, as well as ensuring the development and implementation of the National Health Plan. It comes in sixth position (5 occurrences). The *Portuguese Society of Oncology* is a scientific non-profit association that aims to work closely with public and private institutions with the

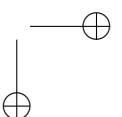


purpose of fighting cancer. It is our seventh most quoted information source on cancer (4 occurrences). *Infarmed – National Authority of Medicines and Health Products* is a governmental agency (accountable to the Health Ministry), whose objective is to monitor, assess and regulate all activities relating to human medicines and health products for the protection of public health. It is also the seventh news source in the sample (4 occurrences). The *College of Specialty on Plastic Surgery* is another official group of specialists, within the Board of Physicians, dedicated to stimulate research and development on their medical expertise. It is the eighth news source (with only 2 occurrences). The *Board of Physicians* is a medical association, recognized by the Portuguese government, with the competence to act as disciplinary authority of the medical practice. It comes also in the eighth place (2 occurrences) and it is our last institutional/specialized news source on cancer within the sample we have gathered.

After collecting data and identifying the main sources in cancer articles – which answers our first research question: *who were the sources of information in cancer news?* – we looked for a deeper analysis in order to respond to our second question: *what was the media relations' role on the news coverage on cancer in Portugal?* To achieve this objective we interviewed the press officers of the most quoted institutions in our sample. Seven interviews were conducted, according to their willingness to collaborate. The institutions that responded positively to our request were: the Board of Physicians, the Champalimaud Foundation, the Infarmed - National Authority of Medicines and Health Products, the Portuguese Cancer League, the Portuguese National Board of Health, the Portuguese Oncological Institute, and the Portuguese Society of Oncology. At the same time, we interviewed Portuguese journalists that deal with health issues in the national media (regarding a wide range of subjects), and we took the opportunity to explore their point of view on media relations in the health/cancer field. Thirteen interviews were conducted and we compared those results with the press officers' responses.

### **How to become a news source on health/cancer?**

The interviews conducted to these institutional and specialized sources were designed around three main information objectives: we sought to find out (1<sup>st</sup>) how do their press offices work, (2<sup>nd</sup>) how do they evaluate media production,





and (3<sup>th</sup>) how do they work with journalists. The analysis of the results allowed us to identify some trends in health/cancer media relations which will be described below:

a) **When framing their activity**, institutional sources. . .

- Advocate the advantages of the development of health and cancer literacy;
- Acknowledge the role that the mass media play in that information process;
- Confirm the increase in health and cancer news coverage in national media, in the last 5 years;
- Report the development of media relations practices in the health sector; and suggest that public institutions are getting close to corporate communication models;
- Narrate problems of health journalism in Portugal, such as the lack of specialized journalists, financial problems (resulting in a lack of research and lack of time), editorial interferences or attraction for controversial issues;
- Believe that the institutional relationship with the media is positive, because the news are faithful to the stories, the journalists seek for the information they need, and there is a reciprocal respect among press officers and journalists.

b) **When describing their activities**, institutional sources. . .

- Confirm the development of communication management practices, such as the following: they have communication departments and they work with communication agencies; they do planning, integrated management, branding, crisis management, media training; and they have a close relationship with top management;
- Report, also, more traditional communication activities related to media relations departments which are reactive, unstructured, and very dependent on the leader;







- Describe the mechanisms that are used in media relations, such as: press releases, press conferences (exceptionally), events, telephone contacts, institutional websites and recently Facebook.

c) **When reflecting on their work**, institutional sources...

- Admit to have a strong power in the information production process, as conductors and translators;
- Acknowledge that there are risks associated with the growing strength of health media relations and the power of health institutions in media production;
- Refer as risks to public health promotion: the lack of qualification among press officers and consultants or the strength of commercial interests;

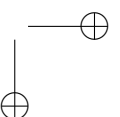
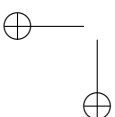
In an effort to confront these testimonies with the other side of the information production process, we also interviewed journalists – from Portuguese daily and weekly newspapers and magazines. In these semi-structured interviews journalists confirmed the previously identified trends:

a) **On mass media thematic selection**, journalists...

- Admit that reporting diseases may not be a priority, unless it refers to R&D (research and development), because currently there are other more important topics in Portugal (such as health policies);
- Confirm that cancer has a special impact in audiences (because it reveals proximity to the population);

b) **On their work**, journalists...

- Admit that institutional sources are very relevant for their work (and they refer specifically to the institutional sources we have interviewed);
- Perceive that institutional sources (and sources in general) are more organised than ever;





- Advocate that sources' organization can be positive, but also negative – journalists use expressions such as “they know who we are” or “they have their own agenda”;

c) **When reflecting on their profession, journalists...**

- Feel that health journalism suffers from the same problems as journalism in general; they refer the lack of resources to do a better news coverage on health issues;
- See advantages in health journalism training (but they are very emphatic about the need for “real training” in opposition to the sessions organized by laboratories and pharmaceuticals which seem to always have commercial interests behind them).

## 4. Discussion

We have been crystallizing the behavior of Portuguese health institutions by framing media relations' models-in-use in the sector. In that context, we could confirm that most public institutions related to cancer follow a *media relations high profile model*, and by this we mean that: they are very proactive when contacting the media; they have created a kind of *brotherhood* with easy access to media channels; they want to inform, get support and goodwill for their causes; in sum, they follow most of the public information model's rules, as described by Grunig and Hunt (1984).

However, we believe that this is changing and public health institutions are moving from tactic (*high profile*) to strategic (*low profile*) media relations (see figure 1). Thus we also found *media relations low profile models*. Some institutions are already developing strategic communication management, with planning and control, brand building, image and reputation promotion; that is, they follow a corporate approach in their relationship with the journalists or the media.

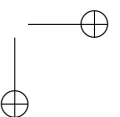
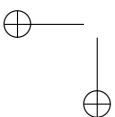



Figure 1. From tactic to strategic Media Relations

Tactic Media relations (classical profile)	Hybrid Media relations (high profile)	Strategic Media relations (low profile)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Reactive</li> <li>✓ Informational</li> <li>✓ Short term</li> <li>✓ Based in actions</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Mixed behaviors</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Proactive</li> <li>✓ Reputational</li> <li>✓ Long term</li> <li>✓ Based in campaigns</li> </ul>



Tactic media relations are reactive, informational, short term and developed through isolated actions. Strategic media relations are proactive, reputational, long term and developed through integrated campaigns. But most of the respondents can be classified as using an hybrid model, with mixed communication behaviors.

## Conclusion

When applying these findings to cancer news analysis, we came to the conclusion that the role of healthcare organisations in cancer news production (our research question) is: (a) to influence the agenda-setting process, by placing the cancer topic as an editorial option; (b) to exert the “expert power” (Len Ríos *et al.* 2009) within health themes; (c) to reinforce their institutional legitimacy as sources; and (d) to act as agent for cancer literacy promotion.

At this stage we have decided to take into account van Ruler’s (2004) advice – about how important it is to public relations to search for communication models that can serve as criteria for the analysis of public relations’ practices – and we have been developing a media relations’ model for the health sector.

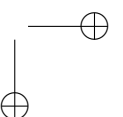
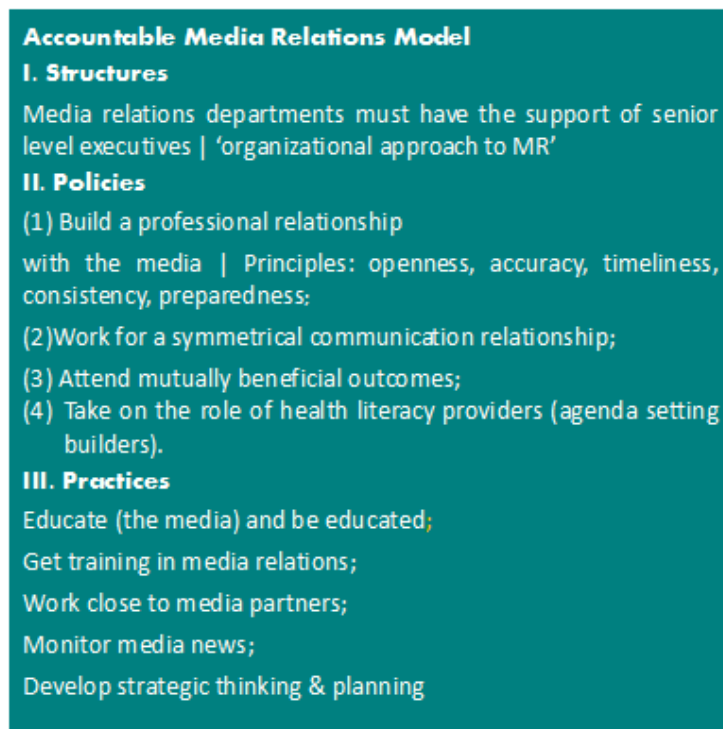
... the question of what’s good and what’s not in public relations practice, is constantly debated. It is unfortunate that as a consequence of the absence of a list of constructed options and criteria, the discussions



never fail to be dominated by strong emotional overtones. As a result, opinions on ‘questionable behavior in pr’ are formulated without any reasonable explanation to justifying this. ... (van Ruler, 2004: 123, 125 )

This ideal media relations model in the health sector was named *Accountable Media Relations Model*. And our proposal is to design a communication model for health media relations that is able: to develop strategies to improve the information exchange; to promote cooperation among agents involved in news production: and to enhance the quality of health information for prevention and control.

Figure 2. Accountable Media Relations Model



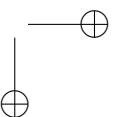
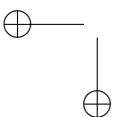


This model is still a work in progress, however it intends to give strategic health communication – and public relations in particular – an orientation on the process of exchanging and strategically designing messages to be delivered to the population, through the mass media, in a way that improves health outcomes. As the study shows the media are relevant information suppliers on cancer-related diseases, and accountable media relations activities can improve information to the citizens thereby reducing cancer threats.

Health/cancer communication research is, thus, an important form of social and political participation.

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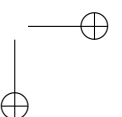
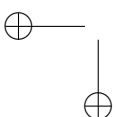


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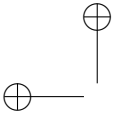
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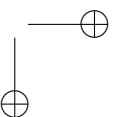
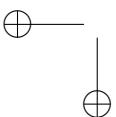






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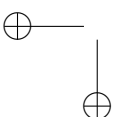
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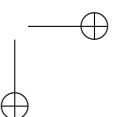
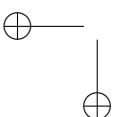
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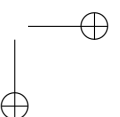
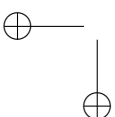
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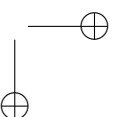
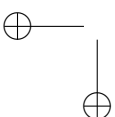
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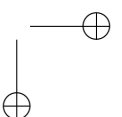
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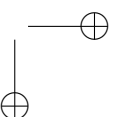


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The diversity represented in this book, not only in respect to author nationality, but also in theoretical and empirical approaches, reflects one of the most salient features of the European Communication Research and Education Association: Organisational and Strategic Communication Section's identity. The spectrum of themes analysed in this collection - crisis communication, government communication, organisational communication and social media, corporate social responsibility, health media relations - demonstrates the range and vitality of organisational and strategic communication research in Europe.



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