

RECONNECTING WITH CITIZENS – FROM VALUES TO BIG DATA

COMMUNICATION OF GOVERNMENTS, THE EU AND POLITICAL
PARTIES IN TIMES OF POPULISM AND FILTER BUBBLES

EDITED BY DARIJA FABIJANIĆ, CHRISTIAN SPAHR, MANUELA ZLATEVA



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Konrad
Adenauer
Stiftung

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Foreword

Christian Spahr

Director, KAS Media Program South East Europe

The manner of communicating a message is equally important as the message itself – whether we agree or not. In today's rapid and intertwined world of communication, we can even get the impression that the presentation has become more significant than the information. On the other hand, an opposite trend can also be observed: recipients have an increasing number of opportunities to get to the bottom of what is said.

Governments and political parties are facing even greater communication challenges in times of profound technological and societal changes. In the digital era, people have more information on every aspect of their lives at their fingertips but, at the same time, it has become more difficult to identify that, which is true and truly matters. Both citizens and officials can express their opinions publicly in an ever-increasing number of ways, expecting more feedback from each other. Voters are asking for more transparency and opportunities for participation in political life.

However, a growing number of voices, channels and platforms goes hand-in-hand with reduced attention spans audiences can dedicate to each message. Before the internet, many politicians enjoyed a lot of attention and moral authority as a matter of course. Nowadays, political stakeholders can't take status and loyalty for granted; citizens have become more pragmatic and often sceptical where it comes to policies. Trust is harder to earn.

Thus, communications teams need a high level of commitment in order to make their voice heard – and they have to be at the forefront of technological advances. After social media, 'top or flop' in many scenarios will be decided by big data. Simultaneously, campaigners have come to the conclusion that 'door-to-door' and 'face-to-face' will never be outdated – but traditional ways to approach voters can be brought to a new level with the help of data mining.

The digital revolution and consequent changes in lifestyle pose a challenge to communicators worldwide, politicians in Europe are challenged to convince citizens and global audiences of the benefits of their political model. Democratic participation, civic rights and open societies – many achievements of the European Union and the Western world in general need to be defended in a context of international crises and populism on the rise.

Opponents of the European values frame simplified messages and several invest heavily in disinformation. Meanwhile, the EU needs to find new ways of communicating with civil

society – at a factual and emotional level alike – in order to explain its principles in a compelling way and, last but not least, send clear messages to those interested in joining this union of values.

This book has been inspired by the work of Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung (KAS) with the spokespersons of governments and political parties in South East Europe. In the younger EU Member States and candidate countries, both the professional and geopolitical challenges of communication have become particularly prominent. The further development of democratic practices requires political leaders to become more dialogue-oriented, transparent and open to advice. At the same time, citizens in this part of Europe still need to agree on the fundamental political direction in which their countries wish to develop. Therefore, the success of politicians depends on first-class counselling in communications. The role of PR strategists within civil service and the political parties needs greater attention. KAS workshops and conferences, as well as this book, aim at showing ways to make the steering function of spokespersons and advisers more effective – in line with today's professional, ethical and democratic standards.

Distinguished authors from the Balkans, Germany, the Netherlands, the UK, the USA, and Brussels have contributed to this publication. They show us, among other things, how to better understand audiences, use strategic communication models, run digital campaigns and evaluate outcomes. They also discuss the best ways of reaching out to citizens, countering populism and propaganda, and yet again making Europe as a 'brand' more attractive. A strong focus lies on practical questions related to the day-to-day work of communication specialists in government agencies and political parties, complemented by an outlook to future developments.

Happy reading!





GOVERNMENT COMMUNICATION

Giving added value to the profession – government communication in South East Europe

Vuk Vujnović

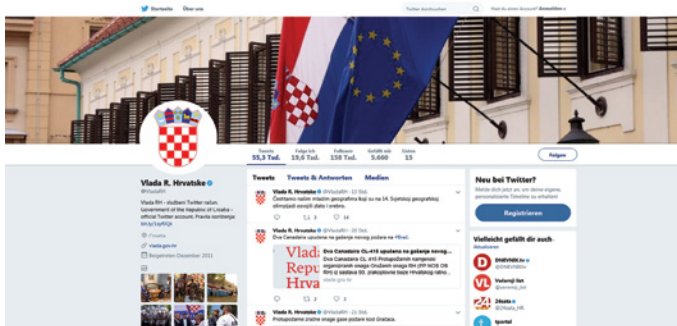
The forces of globalisation and the surge in the popularity of new media are causing a fundamental change in the dynamics of relations and communication between governments and citizens worldwide. At the same time, the current rise of populism, nationalism and isolationism on both sides of the Atlantic is bringing back bad memories and striking a familiar chord with the political ghosts of the past in Europe's South East. This inevitably complicates the region's social and political environment and puts additional strain on the already complex job of government communication.

On the other hand, the values of pluralism, non-discrimination, tolerance and solidarity still lie in the very heart of the proclaimed policy goals of South East European governments, manifested, in particular, by their commitment to closer European and/or Euro-Atlantic ties. Since the end of the Cold War, pro-Western governments in South East Europe have looked to the West, not only for policies and values, but also for political messaging and government communication styles. The West has long since been embedded in the region's public consciousness as a role model for political and economic system.

It is therefore no surprise that, in the years of growing global enthusiasm for direct interaction between governments and citizens in late 2000s, the new political communication tools and practices introduced in Europe and the United States, and the accompanying trends towards greater government transparency and accountability, had a big impact on government communication in the region. By 2012, virtually all the countries of the region had joined the Open Government Partnership, a global initiative aimed at making governments more transparent, more participatory and more accountable to citizens. This advent of new technology, global transparency and public engagement trends pushed government communication in South East Europe towards more direct interaction with citizens, through social media and other interactive communication tools.

Some countries of the region were even at the forefront of the game. Back in 2012, in Moldova, for example, all central government departments had an active and responsive Facebook presence. In the same year, the Montenegrin government launched the region's first e-petitions system¹, inspired by the 'We the People' platform introduced by the White House the year

¹ Open Government Guide (2013) 'Montenegro has established an online petitioning system: the Citizens' Voice e-Petitions platform'. <http://www.opengovguide.com/country-examples/montenegro-has-established-an-online-petitioning-system-the-citizens-voice-e-petitions-platform> (13 March 2017).



The Twitter page of the Croatian government which was recognised as Europe's most active government on this platform in 2012.

before. A year later, the Government of Croatia was recognised by Twiplomacy as Europe's most active government on Twitter², due to its strong engagement with citizens, while Bosnia and Herzegovina launched an online platform³ to encourage public reports of misconduct and corruption in the country's military.

In 2011, there were voices in academic circles arguing that government propaganda was no longer possible, due to a huge diversity of independent information sources and governments' inability to control the flow of information.⁴ Around that time, there was also a prevailing feeling among communications professionals and ICT enthusiasts that new technology, which allowed people to interact with each other and their political leaders at an unprecedented speed and scale, was somehow intrinsically 'progressive' and 'ethical' in a liberal democratic sense.

However, we soon realised that propaganda was very much possible in the social media era, as new technology was quickly embraced by radical militant groups and 'rogue states'. Finally, in 2016, we saw that the phenomenon was by no means limited to extremists and authoritarian rulers, but could also affect the very strongholds of Western democracy.

Today, the region still very much looks to the West for its government communication practices, with the important difference that, nowadays, it doesn't seem too difficult to come across mainstream political communication styles that depart significantly from the proclaimed core values of the Western civilisation. To people in South East Europe the recent phenomenon of 'post truth', as defined by the Oxford English Dictionary (which declared this term Word of the Year in 2016⁵), sounds only too familiar, as the concept

² Croatia Week (2013) 'Croatia's Government Most Prolific in Europe on Twitter'. <http://www.croatiaweek.com/croatias-government-most-prolific-in-europe-on-twitter> (16 March 2017).

³ Etička Linija, Anonimna prijava nepravilnosti [Ethic Line, Anonymous registration of irregularities] (2013), <https://etickalinija.ba>.

⁴ Anholt, Simon (2011) 'Keynote speech at EuroPCOM 2011'. European Committee of the Regions, Brussels, 20 October, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=baxr91e0zqg> (16 March 2017).

⁵ 'Post truth' is an adjective defined by the Oxford English Dictionary as 'relating to or denoting circumstances in which objective facts are less influential in shaping public opinion than appeals to emotion and personal belief', <https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/word-of-the-year/word-of-the-year-2016> (14 March 2017).

does not really differ that much from the communications styles of some of the Balkans' war-time leaders of the 1990s. The concern is that even for the current generation of politicians in the region this 'modern' approach to communications might be too tempting a concept to resist, if only it proves politically successful enough in the West. In this sense, this year's elections in France and Germany could potentially have a major impact on public communications trends in the region, as did the recent US presidential elections or the Brexit campaign.

Therefore, it becomes clear that government communicators in South East Europe are facing two distinct challenges. First and foremost, they share common government communications trends and pitfalls with the rest of the world, including the constant decline of public trust in government institutions and the ever more complex communications environment. In addition, they are facing a number of threats associated with the woes of young democracies and the region's specific geopolitical, economic and social circumstances.

Let us, therefore, try to identify and understand the most notable of these region-specific tendencies, which threaten to undermine the credibility and effectiveness of government communications in South East Europe, perhaps to a greater extent than elsewhere in Europe.

'Broadcasting' vs. 'communicative' style



Informing the public via traditional media such as TV stays important, but in addition citizens are looking for more dialogue and interaction.

Traditionally, the key responsibility of government communicators in South East Europe (as in many other parts of the world) is not really to 'communicate' with citizens. The job is much more about 'informing the public', 'public' often being understood to mean 'traditional media'. Although things have changed significantly in recent years, this dissemination-driven approach still prevails in many government communications offices in the region. In fact, the notion of 'informing the public about the

work of the executive branch', described one way or the other, is still seen as the central responsibility in the official job descriptions of most government communication offices in South East Europe. On the other hand, there is hardly any reference to interacting with citizens, listening to them and taking in their feedback or engaging them in policy-making. Also, press relations still seem to be the predominant or preferred communications method. In

many cases, most of the tasks performed by government communications offices are related to traditional media, and some of the offices still have the word 'press' in their official title.

A fundamental problem with a communication style that is predominantly or exclusively focused on broadcasting messages to the public is that, nowadays, people's attention has become a scarce commodity and people are increasingly less receptive to 'good news stories' about government policies. In addition, governments (and even the traditional media) are no longer the exclusive source of government news, meaning that they no longer have the luxury of simply imparting information.

This by no means implies that people have lost all interest in public policy or that governments are no longer capable of getting people's attention. On the contrary, governments now have access to a major new communications asset. They have the unprecedented possibility of connecting directly with citizens and getting them involved in public policy, a role that nobody else can fulfil. Therefore, although citizens may not have much interest in hearing about the policy success stories of their political leaders, they are certain to care for opportunities to have their voices heard by decision-makers and to engage, in a meaningful way, in the policy issues that affect them personally, their families or communities.

Career stepping stone or 'real profession'?

Government communications is still a young profession in the region, with a workforce that is extremely diverse in terms of professional background and experience. It is not rare that very senior government communications posts are occupied by people with little or no experience in public sector communications or even in public administration.

Commonly, government communicators are recruited from the ranks of former journalists. Although this often brings an invigorating outsider's perspective and refreshing narratives to stale institutional communications, it can also lead to putting too much focus on press relations and eventually losing citizens from the communications equation.

Furthermore, the profession is marked by extremely high staff turnover in general, especially at top level.⁶ This underlines the dire need for continued training, professional development and peer exchange among government communicators. A recent survey done in Bosnia and Herzegovina⁷ revealed that more than half of state institutions did not have communications

⁶ Fifteen of the founding members of the South East Europe Public Sector Communication Association (SEECOM), who in 2012 occupied top posts in government communications (as heads of government communications, chief government spokespersons or advisors to prime ministers) in nine countries of the region, left the profession by 2016.

⁷ Aličković, Azra and Faladžić, Vedrana (2016) *Rezultati istraživanja o profilu komunikatora u javnoj upravi Bosne i Hercegovine [Research results on the profile of public administration communicators in Bosnia and Herzegovina]*. Sarajevo, BIH, <http://spi.ba/wp-content/uploads/2016/10/Rezultati-istra%C5%BEivanja-o-profilu-komunikatora-u-javnoj-upravi-BiH.pdf> (16 March 2017).

or public relations units, while none of the government communicators included in the survey were members of a senior management team. The situation is similar throughout the region.

This unclear institutional position of government communications makes it very difficult to build and sustain strong government communications capacity, which in turn undermines the reputation and credibility of public institutions and the effectiveness of government policies.

Political vs. institutional communication

The line between political and institutional communication is often blurred throughout the region. More often than not, government communications efforts are much more centred on political figures than on building long-term trust in public institutions. Consequently, top government communicators are overwhelmingly political appointees. Although this normally ensures better access to political decision-making circles, one of the unfortunate outcomes can be a lower level of credibility and confidence in public communication.

The 2016 Balkan Monitor survey argues that 'credibility of public institutions is low' and that 'practically along all dimensions, public institutions get low grades'⁸. Still, according to Eurobarometer, Europeans clearly tend to have more confidence in the apolitical civil service than in the openly partisan layers of the executive branch. As many as 48 percent of EU citizens have trust in public administration as such, while only 31 percent trust their national governments⁹. Therefore, any investment in the credibility and good reputation of public institutions is bound to have a positive effect on the public perception of their political masters. By the same token, politicising institutional communications is likely to undermine public trust in administration, which then negatively affects the popularity of their leaders.

'Science' vs. 'art' of communication

According to an internal survey done for a recent training event of the South East European Public Sector Communication Association (SEECOM), in eight out of the nine countries included in the survey, central governments did not have any explicit communications strategy.

In reality, this lack of strategic planning often pushes government communicators towards reactive and predominantly press-centred communication. The absence of systematic strategic planning not only makes for a problematic use of public resources in public

⁸ Turbedar, Erhan (ed) (2016) *Public Opinion Survey – Balkan Barometer 2016*. Regional Cooperation Council. Sarajevo, BIH, http://www.rcc.int/seeds/files/RCC_BalkanBarometer_PublicOpinion_2016.pdf (16 March 2017).

⁹ Eurobarometer (2016) 'Standard 86 – Autumn 2016'. December, <http://ec.europa.eu/COMMFrontOffice/publicopinion/index.cfm/Survey/getSurveyDetail/instruments/STANDARD/surveyKy/2137> (17 August 2017).

communications. More importantly, it calls into question the actual impact and effectiveness of the job altogether. In cases where there are no clear communications objectives, where those objectives are too vague or not measurable, where there is no adequate audience insight, where activities are not planned in detail, or where implementation is not supported by adequate resource allocation, it is very difficult to say what kind of 'return on investment', if any, government communication is achieving.

In the absence of strategic planning, government communication often relies on the personal 'art' and 'talent' of political leaders and government communicators, rather than the 'science' of a well-structured strategic approach to communication, which involves clear and measurable goals, well-researched audience insight, well thought-out activities and adequate resources.

What role for government communicators in South East Europe?

Considering the numerous challenges facing government communications as a profession and the increasingly complex and intimidating global communications environment, as described above, one may wonder about the actual practical use and value of government communications for the political class and the citizens of the region.

If we are talking about the government communication style that focuses on broadcasting messages in a politically biased way, without much strategic thinking or expectations of quantifiable results, and without offering any opportunities for citizens' engagement in public policy-making, in today's world, that kind of communication effort is definitely ineffective, if not counterproductive.

What, then, should the role of government communicators be?

Clearly, their primary role is to help their political leaders to implement key government policies; policies that improve people's lives, create jobs, protect the environment and drive all sorts of positive changes in their societies. In doing so, government communicators should never forget that they serve, first and foremost, the general public. The responsibility of serving the public gives government communicators a sense of purpose and lends substance and credibility to their work.

'Selling' public policies or political leaders to the public, as if there were commercial products, is clearly an altogether different objective, which should have no place in public administration, as it is incapable of serving the public and building long-term trust in public institutions. Even in the case of a poorly conceived policy, although there may not be much that government communicators can do to 'make the sell' to the public, they can still help make the policy work, by providing valuable audience insight and feedback suggesting improvements to policy-makers. In this way, government communicators act as 'the voice of the people' within their own institutions and facilitate a public-minded dialogue that will create policies that are better suited to people's actual needs. This is why it is absolutely

vital to keep government communicators in the policy-making loop, rather than involving them only in the implementation phase.

Finally, in the historically volatile region of South East Europe, government communicators have yet another major social role to play, one that far transcends the formal remit of their profession. In this part of Europe, a complete lack of trust in public institutions, combined with the absence of avenues for citizens to influence government policy, has been known to deepen social and political divides to the point of serious civil unrest or even violent conflict. Nowadays, frustrated with the lack of opportunity for meaningful participation in public policy or dialogue with decision-makers, citizens are likely to take refuge in populist and isolationist political movements, as they seek validation for their misconceptions, concerns or fears.

Therefore, while a hugely important role of government communication is to help implement government policies, good government communication is also a policy in its own right, since dialogue and interaction between public authorities and citizens is irreplaceable for building social cohesion as a key precondition for security and progress in the region.

Not only speaking, but listening: SEECOM as first European public-sector PR association



The groundwork for the SEECOM association was laid at the first South East Europe Government Communication Conference, organised by the Government of Montenegro, the Media Program South East Europe of the Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung and the United Nations Development Programme, in the coastal town of Budva, Montenegro, in September 2012.

The conference, which brought together a large group of senior government communicators from nine countries of South East Europe, adopted the so-called Budva Declaration, Europe's first transnational manifesto of key professional and ethical principles of government communications.

The declaration, which established a forum for government communicators in the region, proclaimed that it is the responsibility of public spokespersons and PR managers to keep governments open, accessible and intelligible to citizens, to attract public interest in government work, enable direct communication between government and citizens and encourage citizen participation in policy-making.

The idea behind the declaration is based on the belief that if a government communicates in a way that provides people with easy access to information, presents public policies in simple and comprehensible language, fosters two-way communication and encourages public participation in policy-making, then the quality of governance and policy-making will be improved and, as a result, democracy in the country will benefit.

In 2013, in partnership with the Media Program South East Europe of Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung, the United Nations Development Programme in Montenegro and the Regional Cooperation Council, and with the support of the Club of Venice, the United States Embassy in Podgorica and the US National Association of Government Communicators, this peer exchange forum was formally established in Budva, Montenegro, as Europe's first non-profit international professional association of public sector communicators.

In the coming years, SEECOM continued to organise annual plenary conferences, bringing together government communicators from the region with their peers and experts from both sides of the Atlantic, while also holding regular workshops and conferences on the region's pertinent issues.

In the spring of 2014, SEECOM partnered with Dokukino, a civil society NGO, and the US Embassy in Bosnia and Herzegovina to organise the Government 2.0 Conference in Sarajevo. The event discussed the role of new technology and two-way communication in fostering public participation and citizen engagement for more effective public policy, while also showcasing a number of best practices from the region.

Later that year, in an effort to advance its commitment to greater participation in policy-making, SEECOM partnered with the Montenegrin Ministry of Finance, British Embassy Podgorica and the civil society foundation Fund for Active Citizenship (fAKT) to initiate and develop a public engagement platform aimed at eliminating redundant regulations and improving the local business environment. Over the past few years, through this platform, Montenegrin citizens and businesses have provided significant policy input, enabling the government to cut red tape, improve administrative procedures and create a better regulatory environment.

In order to advance its mission and goals in South East Europe, SEECOM soon adopted two key programmes. The first, 'Transparency, Accountability and Public Participation' programme (TAPP), seeks to provide public sector communicators in the region with knowledge and skills on how to promote government transparency, accountability and public participation in policy-making through effective communication practices. The objective of the second programme, 'Communicating European Integration Affairs', is to improve the knowledge and skills of public sector communicators in South East Europe on how to inform, educate and engage citizens best in European integration affairs.

In September 2015, SEECOM’s annual plenary conference in Sofia, Bulgaria, showcased the best European practices with regards to how meaningful public dialogue and citizen engagement can improve public policy. The event also discussed ways to utilise South East Europe’s rich and diverse cultural heritage as an asset to build the region’s international reputation and uplift local economies.

In 2016, SEECOM held its first annual plenary conference outside the region. Senior public communicators from South East Europe met with their peers from across Europe, EU



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SEECOM conference 2016 in Brussels

officials and civil society activists at SEECOM’s 5th annual plenary conference in Brussels, co-hosted by the Media Program South East Europe of the Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung, in cooperation with the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions.

Soon after the 5th annual conference, SEECOM partnered with the UK Government Communication Service to organise the first Inter-

national Communications Academy for government communicators in South East Europe. During the vigorous two-day training programme, public communications managers from nine countries in the region learned about advanced methodology and best practices in the planning and delivery of public campaigns, public communications and media relations.

Though all those professional development events and other smaller thematic meetings and debates over the past years, SEECOM has grown to include 55 members from 13 countries in South East Europe.

In the past five years, in which the world of communications and the world in general has changed significantly, SEECOM’s founding values have stood the test of time. The collective belief of its founding members, that good government communications should not only speak, but also listen, while making governments more transparent and accountable and enabling public engagement in policy-making, still very much holds true today.

Today, the association continues to work with a growing number of international and local partners and stakeholders, in order to provide government communicators with learning, exchange and networking opportunities that will help them improve the way governments and citizens communicate in South East Europe.



Vuk Vujnović graduated from the Faculty of Philology at the University of Belgrade, Serbia. Over the past ten years, Vujnović occupied a number of senior positions in government communications, including as Head of the Montenegrin Government's Public Relations Office. He currently works as Public Affairs Specialist at Montenegro's Mission to the European Union in Brussels. He is also a co-founder and Secretary General of the South East Europe Public Sector Communication Association (SEECOM). Vujnović developed a number of initiatives promoting citizen engagement in policy-making, including the Citizens' Voice, South East Europe's first government e-petition website. He also designed and managed the public engagement campaign 'Be Responsible' winning the Open Government Partnership's Golden Award in New York in 2014. In recent years, he spoke on the topics of public communication, good governance and public diplomacy at events in the United States, Great Britain, Belgium, Italy, Turkey and throughout South East Europe.

Understanding audiences: paving the way to successful messages

John Verrico

A government official opened his speech to a group of environmental activists with a joke about eating endangered species. Not only was this in bad taste, but the audience rebelled against everything he said afterwards. He lost their respect and alliance.

In a media interview, a scientist publicly expressed his admiration for the 'amazing' mutating abilities of a scary microbe that was killing fish and making people sick. Not only did this accelerate the spreading fear, but amplified it with doubts that scientists were truly pursuing a solution. He lost their trust.

A keynote speaker lauded the virtues of bacon to a room full of people whose religion forbids them from eating pork. He lost their attention and his own credibility.

These may be extraordinarily obvious examples, but they happened in real life. The wrong words to the wrong audience can be devastating. It destroys credibility, reputation, and trust.

For communication to be successful, the communicator must know about the audience. Who they are, what they already know (or think they know), what beliefs or perceptions they have, and even basic demographics, such as age, gender, and culture. All of these may influence how they receive the message. Or whether they will receive it at all.

If the audience and what motivates them are not clearly understood, they won't listen, will reject the message, or worse, actively oppose what one has to say. Before launching a communications campaign, a speech, an article, or a press release, analyse the target audiences, know who they are, know what makes them tick. Ask the questions: **What would motivate them to listen? Why would they take the desired action?**

Communications must be strategic to address the motivations of the audience members. Recognise them as individuals, acknowledge their beliefs and concerns, know and address their needs, be clear about what is being asked of them to do, anticipate their resistance, and use the appropriate communication channels to reach them. **The underlying foundation for success is understanding the audience's motivations.**

What is motivation?

There are many theories trying to explain motivation, or what drives an individual to certain behaviours or actions. Motivation in others is not always easy to predict or understand, and most people would not even be able to explain their own motivations. Understanding this has been the eternally elusive golden fleece of salespersons, supervisors, corporate executives, advertisers, political leaders, and parents of teenagers since the beginning of recorded history.

There are three basic principles of motivation that are essential to know:

1. **One person cannot motivate another.** Motivation is individual, personal, and comes from within. It cannot be forced, bribed or created. It can only be encouraged by providing everything needed for them to make the desired choice.
2. **All people are motivated.** Everyone is motivated to do or not do something as their own choice. Their motivations may not be evident nor obvious to others, but the motivation is there. Motivation *not* to do something is still motivation.
3. **People do things for their own reasons.** People will not do things because someone else wants them to, but because they have their own reasons for doing so. A spouse may do something their partner wants them to, but only because 1) they love their spouse and want to make them happy or 2) they do not want to upset them.

People are not motivated by external factors, but by how they interpret the impact of those external factors on themselves, and what values they place upon the various potential outcomes. Their reasons may make no sense to others based upon someone else's values, but make perfect sense to them because of theirs.

There is a behavioural science behind this. First posited in 1964 by Victor Vroom, a professor at the Yale School of Management, what has become known as expectancy theory¹: It states that an individual decides how to behave or what to do based on what the expected outcome would be and the desirability of the outcome.

Although individuals are different, they can be motivated if they believe that:

- there is a positive correlation between efforts and performance
- favourable performance will result in a desirable reward

¹ Vroom, Victor H. and Deci, Edward L. (1983) *Management and Motivation*. New York: Penguin Business (originally published in 1970).

- the reward will satisfy an important need
- the desire to satisfy that need is important enough to make the effort worthwhile

Understanding this theory will help communicators better connect with their audience and have a better chance of successfully achieving their goals.

Knowing your audience

There are several questions that need to be asked about the audience before one can be a successful communicator.

7 Things To Know About The Audience

- 1 Who are they?
- 2 Why would they care?
- 3 What are they worried about?
- 4 How can you address their needs?
- 5 What do you want them to do?
- 6 Why might they resist?
- 7 How should they be reached?



Give the audience a face. They are real people.

1. Who are they?

Who are the people that make up the target audience? More than just basic demographics of age, race, religion, gender, and socioeconomic factors – what makes them unique? Try to understand who they are. What is their life like? Where do they come from? Why do they do the things they do? Take a walk in their shoes to understand what their life looks like each day.

Marketing experts use psychographics² to understand target audiences on a personal level. Different from demographics, psychographics look at people's choices, how they live, what they believe in. It helps to better determine what they are likely to buy, vote on, or act upon.

Visualise the audience. Give them a face. Don't think of them as a generic blur, but as a group of real, individual people. If one forgets who they're speaking to, there is great potential to communicate the wrong message.

² Meredith, Alisa (2013) 'How to Use Psychographics in Your Marketing: A Beginner's Guide'. HubSpot, 26 December, <https://blog.hubspot.com/insiders/marketing-psychographics> (16 March 2017).

In a farewell communication to his workforce of career government employees, an appointed government official mentioned that he was looking forward to ending his civil career and returning to the private sector so he can make real money again. He said that when he received his first pay cheque as a high-level cabinet secretary, the amount was so low he thought it was a travel reimbursement. This was disrespectful to the hardworking government workers who have made a voluntary choice to work in public service, struggling from pay cheque to pay cheque on a government salary. No matter what good he may have accomplished during his time in office, he left in his wake a feeling of dejection and belittlement that could negatively impact the morale of those still employed.

Recognising people, acknowledging them as individuals, knowing who they are and being sensitive to their issues, is a way of giving them respect. People who feel respected are more open to discourse and discussion. People who feel disrespected will turn away.

2. Why would they care?

'Why' may be the most critical of all questions. Why would the information have any value for them? Why should they want to participate and what do they expect to get out of it? Why did they come to an event or read an article? Are they willing participants or mandatory attendees?

People won't take action or even pay attention unless they know why they should. This is commonly referred to as the 'What's in it for me?' or 'Why should I?' factor. Every successful communication strategy addresses the **why**, especially when trying to encourage action.

Knowing **who, what, when, where**, and even **how**, are all pieces of information that help to illustrate or categorise a thing, event, function, or request. But people will not take action until they know **why** they should.

The premise of an ancient proverb will help to illustrate this point:

'Give a man a fish and you feed him for a day. Teach a man to fish and you feed him for a lifetime.'³

While this statement is very profound, the thought is incomplete. When providing information, the basics include the **who, what, when**, and **where**. Explaining these details about catching fish to the fisherman provides him information that he may or may not know how to act upon. Including an explanation of **how** is considered training. Teaching him **how** to bait the hook, cast, and set the hook provides training. So now the fisherman knows what to do and how to do it for himself. But this still does not mean that he will be fed for a lifetime.

The critical missing element is **why**. Without understanding **why** he should fish, there is no motivation for him to put his new skills to work. Teach him, however, that fish is food and that he

³ Quote Investigator (2015) 'Give a Man a Fish, and You Feed Him for a Day. Teach a Man To Fish, and You Feed Him for a Lifetime'. 28 August, <http://quoteinvestigator.com/2015/08/28/fish> (16 March 2017).

would starve unless he catches his own fish to eat. Now the fisherman has all the information he needs, he can understand it, relate to it, and make his own decisions about how to use it.

3. What are they worried about?

Everyone has an issue of concern, a fear, or a pain point. What is the audience afraid of or concerned about? It is important that the communicator understands those issues of greatest concern and cares about them. Empathy and compassion can be the greatest assets.

It is certainly true that people have an expectation that whoever is providing information to them has some level of expertise in that topic before they will pay attention to. But more importantly, they want to know that the individual cares about the topic and about them.

As a matter of fact, according to crisis communication expert Dr. Vincent T. Covello, founder and director of the Center for Risk Communication, more than 50 percent of what people look for in a messenger is empathy. The next 25 percent is honesty. One can see that the expertise of the individual is a very small percentage of why people are motivated to pay attention to another.

What People Look for in a Messenger



People want to know that you care before they care what you know.

America’s 26th President Theodore Roosevelt, who served 1901-1909, has been attributed with saying, ‘Nobody cares how much you know, until they know how much you care.’ Covello put it this way: ‘People want to know that you care, before they care about what you know.’⁴

⁴ Covello, Vincent T. (2014) ‘Risk Communication: Linking Science with Society’. Presentation to the International Atomic Energy Agency International Experts’ Meeting on Radiation Protection after the Fukushima Daiichi Accident: Promoting Confidence and Understanding, 19 February, p. 72, <http://www-pub.iaea.org/iaeameetings/cn224p/Session9/Covello.pdf> (16 March 2017).

Either way, one needs to show the audience that one cares if there is any hope of making a connection.

This is what went so awry with the scientist who in media interviews and newspaper articles referred to a shape-shifting microbe as 'amazing,' 'remarkable,' and 'fantastic.' Meanwhile, the (previously thought to be harmless) algae-eating microbe was transforming itself into a deadly flesh eater, leaving hundreds of thousands of dead fish rotting on the shores of America's Chesapeake Bay. Fishermen who encountered this microbe and inhaled or ingested it were suffering immune deficiencies, blindness and other illnesses. By expressing his fascination with the foe, instead of concern for public health and safety, his comments only exacerbated public fear. To make matters worse, he initially denied that the microbe was involved in either the fish kills or the human illnesses. The whole thing sparked a media frenzy⁵ and destroyed public confidence in the government's desire and ability to find a solution.

Conversely, in another scenario where the government was conducting tests of new biological detectors in a metropolitan subway system, the local health department knew that the local citizens were concerned about the bacteria that were going to be used in the subway as part of the test. In a public hearing prior to the tests, the health official expressed his understanding of their concern, reminded them that he himself travelled in the subway every day, and allayed their fears with a simple, easy to understand analogy. 'What we're using is as safe as if we were throwing a bunch of yogurt in the air. But less messy.' People were relieved and trusted the safety of the tests.

4. How can you address their needs?

What's in it for the audience? Remember in Vroom's expectancy theory, people are motivated by their needs, how important those needs are, and whether or not solving that problem is important enough to them.

The key factor is to understand what their needs are, or to make them aware of a need they perhaps didn't know they had. This is the core of traditional marketing. In the private sector, nearly 80 percent of start-up small businesses fail within their first 18 months.⁶ The primary reason is that there is no established need for their product or service.

So, to be successful, one must address an existing need or convince the audience of a need, and then offer a solution.

⁵ Fincham, Michael W. (2007) 'The Frenzy over Pfiesteria: How Did a Media Storm Get Started?'. Chesapeake Quarterly Online. Vol. 6, No. 1, <http://www.chesapeakequarterly.net/v06n1> (16 March 2017).

⁶ Wagner, Eric T. (2013) 'Five Reasons 8 out of 10 Businesses Fail'. Forbes, 12 September, <https://www.forbes.com/sites/ericwagner/2013/09/12/five-reasons-8-out-of-10-businesses-fail/#246ed7ce6978> (16 March 2017).

Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs⁷ shows the practicality of ensuring basic physiological needs, such as food and shelter, and safety and security needs, are met before people look for belonging, sense of community or self-worth.



When food supplies are threatened, lives are at risk, or base needs are endangered, people tend to pay more attention. A communicator who offers solutions to these problems will more likely connect with the affected public than one who ignores the fears and concerns of the audience. The impact may be different for different audiences and the communicator needs to be aware of this as well.

5. What do you want them to do?

The underlying goal of any communication is usually to encourage others to take some sort of action. Buy a product, vote for or against a policy, behave a certain way, take medications, eat or avoid certain foods, apply for government services, volunteer, pay taxes, obey the law, evacuate a disaster area, answer your question, or clean up their room. There is always a subtle call for action.

In order to encourage people to take that action, communicators must put themselves in the shoes of their audience, so to speak. Ask: If you were your audience, why would you want to listen to you? Why would you be interested in reading what you posted? Why would you be motivated to take the action you ask? It's the 'What's in it for me?' factor from the perspective of the audience.

⁷ McLeod, Saul (2007/2016) 'Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs'. Simply Psychology, <http://www.simplypsychology.org/maslow.html> (16 March 2017).

When crafting communications, address these factors. To do this successfully, communicators must:

- Detach themselves from their own message, product, company, organisation, and even their own social standing. Remember the error of the outgoing government official who could not relate to working for a government pay cheque.
- Forget their own goals and whatever benefits that would be gained if the message and action have the desired effect.
- Ask others. Ask friends or relatives completely non-associated with the topic. Better yet, ask people from the target audience.

6. Why might they resist?

People have preconceived notions, or familial, personal or religious attachments or prejudices that affect their perceptions. They may have read an article or social media post, or been educated on a topic and, whether the information was correct or not, they may have formed an opinion based upon that information. If one hopes to communicate with others, it is necessary to understand what their stance already is. What argument might they raise against adopting one's desired position? What would keep them from taking the desired action? What do they know, or think they know, about the issue? Are they in favour of the issue, or opposed to it? Do they dislike a candidate, a policy, or product?

This is very much like preparing for a media interview. One should know what the reporter may have written before on similar topics. By putting oneself in the position of the reporter, one should be able to anticipate what likely questions will be asked, including the hard questions and the potentially hostile ones.

A communication plan should similarly anticipate these hard questions and opposing positions to an issue, and be prepared in advance for them. Similar to preparing for an interview, conduct a 'murder board' where the communicators are tested against 'hostile' role players asking very tough questions, preparing for as many contingencies as possible.

Again, keep in mind that resistance is not necessarily opposition to an issue. There could be many reasons for non-compliance: finances, religion, personal ethics, time commitments, availability, denial, disbelief, or disinterest. These must be anticipated in advance to the maximum extent possible.

7. How should they be reached?

This final issue is one that is often overlooked. All too often a beautifully crafted message or communication plan completely misses its target audience because it was not delivered via the right channel or to the right audience. Not only must one examine the available

communication channels; one must also determine the ones that are most likely to be used or preferred by the audience we are trying to engage.

What television or radio stations do they watch? Which newspapers or magazines do they read? Where do they gather? What social media do they use? Which of these, if any, would they pay the most attention to?

Also, it's critical to know who their trusted messengers are. Is it a local official, teacher, preacher, newscaster, supervisor, doctor? Work through those messengers. Sometimes, people don't trust information that comes directly from the government, but prefer to see that information validated and balanced by an unbiased third party. Other times, they may want completely unfiltered information directly from the source. They may prefer face-to-face access, or the safety and anonymity of a Twitter post.

An important note is that this wisdom also applies to internal communication. So many organisations have come to rely on email as a primary form of communication from senior management to the workforce. In one organisation with a more than 75 percent blue-collar workers who did not have computers, the senior management wondered why no one seemed to acknowledge their messages. They had previously done away with the organisation's internal newsletter, bulletin boards and all-hands meeting, in favour of simply sending out information via email. Deadlines were missed, events unattended, orders ignored. There were accusations of insubordination, and several attempted personnel actions, before they realised that they were simply using the wrong channels to communicate.

A final case study

Consider this communication issue that involved multiple audiences, each with different concerns, and requiring their own specific strategy.

The issue

Although decades-old environmental regulations have ensured that contaminants like mercury and other chemicals have been kept out of the waterways, legacy levels of these poisons from more than 50 years ago are still present in the environment today, and still can be found in fish. Yet, nutritionists have for many years touted the benefits of eating more fish as part of a healthy diet. When environmental officials realised that people were, in fact, eating fish more often, they became concerned about the potential health risks of accumulation of these contaminants in the human body. They wanted to issue warnings telling people to limit the quantity of locally caught fish that they consumed.

It is important to note that the issue was not an acute danger, but an increased chance of developing cancer after long-term consumption (over 30 years) of large quantities of local fish.

Different audiences were impacted in different ways and at different levels on Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs (see above).

The audiences

People who didn't eat fish didn't care, and those that only ate fish occasionally barely paid attention. This didn't hit any of their hierarchical needs.

Environmentalists were interested because this validated their concerns about pollution and thus was a prestige need in their hierarchy of needs. They used the opportunity to publicise 'I told you so' types of messages.

Commercial fishermen who made a living catching and selling fish to consumers were facing a potentially significant impact on their livelihood. They were concerned that people would not buy their fish. This impacted their security needs.

Most significantly impacted however was the fisherman from the previously discussed proverb, who relies on fish as his principal source of food. How could he limit his family's intake of fish and still survive?

The strategies

Health officials recognised that families who subsisted on locally caught fish should be their primary audience and messaging was designed to specifically address their concerns. Communications expressed concern for their welfare, assurances that it was still okay to eat fish in varied assortment and quantity, provided easy to understand guides and signage on how to make good choices, and offered medical evaluation and advice.

The request was for them to eat less locally caught fish, or to do so in more variety in order to reduce potential accumulation of chemicals in their bodies. Pregnant or nursing women were advised to avoid some species or fish from certain bodies of water altogether, but similarly told which ones would be safer.

Local health officials, medical clinics, primary care physicians, reporters, and faith-based community leaders were all partners in the messaging campaign warning people to curtail consumption of locally caught fish. By receiving the message from multiple sources, people were more likely to trust the message.

The secondary audience included the commercial fishermen whose careers were potentially impacted by anticipated reduction in sales of their catches. The request to these fishermen was to properly label their catches with the body of water the fish were caught in order to help people make smart choices. They were also asked to not take certain species from certain bodies of water, and taught which ones they could harvest instead.

To help allay their concerns, a representative group of fishermen was consulted to assist in formulating the public messaging so as not to panic people away from purchasing fish altogether. By being included in that messaging, and by 'doing their part' by labelling their fish to protect public health, the commercial fishermen were lauded for their efforts and their business actually fared better. There was little perceptible decline in fish sales.

Summary: It's still their choice

Before undertaking any attempt at communication, one must know the audience and understand the motivation of that audience. Frustrating as it may be, one cannot motivate someone else to do something they don't want to do. **But what can be done is provide all of the information necessary for them to make an informed decision, especially the why.**

Ask all the questions, know who they are, why they would care about the issue, what their concerns are, what problems you can solve, what you want them to do, how they could resist, and where to reach them.

Whenever possible, get them involved in the process and let them feel ownership of the idea. **People will motivate themselves if they feel that the choice is still theirs.**



John Verrico is the Immediate-Past President for the National Association of Government Communicators in the United States and has more than 35 years of experience as a public affairs professional in federal and state government agencies, and the military. A retired US Navy Reserve Master Chief Journalist, Verrico served in various public affairs posts, working extensively in media, community and employee relations. He was also a former freelance journalist and a communications and marketing consultant for small businesses, and currently is a professional trainer and consultant on communication and leadership. Prior to being elected as NAGC's president, Verrico previously served in various roles on the association's Board of Directors as the Director of Professional Development, Education, and Communications over the past decade. He also served on the leadership boards for the Federal Communicators Network and the US Navy Public Affairs Alumni Association, and is an honorary member of the South East Europe Public Sector Communication Association (SEECOM). Verrico earned his Master of Science degree in Organisational Leadership from Norwich University and a Bachelor of Science in communications from the University of the State of New York. He has received many awards, including the Public Relations Society of America's Silver Dome Award for community relations, and was named one of the Top 5 Event Managers of 1998 by Exhibitor Magazine.

Communicating policy best practice: approaches to strategy, coordination and evaluation

Alex Aiken

Role and aims of government communication

In the UK, the Government Communication Service (GCS) is the professional body for all people working in communication roles across government. Our aim is to deliver excellent communication campaigns that support Ministers' priorities, improve people's lives through effective information and support the operation of our public services. Successful government communication also protects and enhances the reputation of a country at home and overseas.

In the British public civil service, staff who work in communications work for both a government department and the GCS. This allows staff to be an expert in their area both in terms of their organisation's priorities and an expert in communications.

Communications as a main lever of government

Alongside legislation, regulation and taxation, communications is one of the four main levers of government. When done well, its contribution to delivering government policies is profound and it should be no surprise that communication is one of the major professions within the UK Civil Service.

Behaviour change is the lever that communications uses to deliver on behalf of the government. Within government, behavioural change tends to focus on social psychological and behavioural economic thinking. Behavioural models are designed to help us better understand our audiences by looking at underlying factors influencing the individual or group. By applying behavioural theory, we can design more effective communications to influence how people act for the public good. Behavioural economics combines insight from economics and psychology to generate principles that show how people's decision-making can be less rationale.

All communications should be developed to encourage or dissuade behaviour, be that smoking cessation communications or rights to shared parental leave. Talented and passionate government communicators don't just inform the public, they create change. Their work helps build the economy, save lives, protect the vulnerable, and promote a country's reputation in the world.

To ensure government communications are effective, we aim for all our communications to be audience led. This means, in the development of campaigns, that communicators need to listen to our audiences, investigate their concerns, observe their behaviours and find out what policies mean to them. Communicators need to use the channels they use and the language they use, and avoid being too technical or acronym heavy and look to use the voices trusted by our audiences to communicate our message.

Integral to any successful communications is its alignment with policy development. Governmental policies must be developed hand-in-hand with communications teams. This ensures we are planning communications and policy aims and processes in conjunction with one another.

For us to be able to communicate to our audiences effectively and ensure that policies are developed in the most appropriate and applicable way, we need to plan, coordinate across departments and evaluate our work to see what has worked and what we need to do differently.

Audience-based strategic planning

The best way to inspire a change in behaviour by communication is to know who we're talking to and what they think and feel about that change or the underlying issue. This assessment of who our audience is, and what we already know about them, is part of the communications planning process and should be the starting point for any project. A communications strategy or plan is more likely to achieve its objectives if an audience has been segmented and audience insight developed.

Market segmentation is the process by which customers in markets can be grouped into smaller segments. Simkin defines it as being individuals, groups or organisations sharing one or more similar characteristic that causes them to have similar needs.¹

One way to segment an audience is to gain insight on demographic data. This could include age, nationality, ethnicity or gender. Communications professionals may also want to segment around channel preferences. Some groups are more responsive to digital communications, whilst others prefer to receive information via traditional print channels such as letters and leaflets.

We know that if you communicate the right message, to the right person, at the right time, using language they relate to, it's more likely to be heard, understood and acted on. Whilst the overall target audience might be large, audience segmentation works on the principle that there are shared characteristics amongst certain groups.

¹ Simkin, Lyndon (2016) 'Segmentation'. in Baker, Michael J and Hart, Susan (eds) *The Marketing Book*. London: Routledge, pp. 271-294.

Splitting an overall audience into smaller, defined groups makes it easier to understand how they're likely to react to communications. This helps to:

- Develop a communications strategy or plan
- Assess the impact, priority and communication requirements around a piece of work
- Review communications objectives
- Develop messages and select who's best to deliver them
- Communicate tailored messages that resonate with specific groups
- Decide which channels to use to communicate a message
- Understand which stakeholders can support in communicating messages
- Evaluate communications.

Failure to segment an audience means the communication will not be targeted and is likely to end up saying little to anyone and will struggle to change behaviours.

Taking an audience-led approach is vital to ensure the government's messages are joined up and more accessible to people. Most government campaigns aim to reach one of six audience groups:

- **Families:** We communicate with families on topics like health prevention, benefits and entitlements, education choices and caring responsibilities.
- **Young people:** Our priority for younger audiences covers issues including education and skills, preventing risky behaviours and jobs.
- **Working age people:** We communicate with people in work on issues like employment, unemployment benefits, tax and workplace pensions. This includes public sector workforce.
- **Older people:** Health campaigns such as Stay Well This Winter, a campaign aimed to ease seasonal pressure on the NHS, and issues like pensions, benefits and jobs are important for older people and those approaching retirement.
- **Businesses:** Business messages cut across a wide range of activity, including support for SMEs, skills and employer responsibilities.

- **International:** We communicate internationally in relation to foreign affairs, aid, business investment, tourism and trade.

Audience insight plays a critical role in ensuring our campaigns are relevant and effective and we achieve objectives by:

- **Building an evidence base** of what techniques and channels we know work best with different audiences.
- **Sharing knowledge** about our audiences across different government organisations.
- **Replicating communication approaches** that are most effective for our audiences across different campaigns.
- **Better scheduling** of communications with audiences throughout the year to help avoid duplication.
- **Saving money** by commissioning fewer, cross-cutting studies to understand audience habits and using the best channels and techniques to reach our audience.

Recent insight, for example, found that new technologies and a more fragmented media landscape are giving certain audiences more control over when and how they access content. Deloitte's Media Consumer report highlights that technology such as smartphones, 4G coverage and social media have proliferated and changed media consumption.²

The average amount of time UK residents watch TV fell from 225 minutes per day in 2010 to 193 minutes in 2014. Audiences are shifting to on-demand services such as BBC iPlayer, an internet streaming service in which people can watch television and radio services on electronic devices at their convenience. Younger people aged 11 to 24 currently consume only half their video content live on TV. Up to one fifth of younger people prefer to view shorter content via channels such as YouTube, Snapchat and Facebook.

There are also greater time pressures and competing demands on our audiences than ever before, meaning our communications have to be as relevant, timely and engaging as possible to ensure we get cut through. Societal factors such as longer life expectancy, changing family make-up, household structure and shifts in traditional life 'stages' now demand more sophisticated segmentations of our audiences.

Future trends such as big data, behavioural science and demographic change will also impact how we communicate to our audiences. Communication must be built around the citizen,

² Deloitte (2015) 'Media Consumer 2015: the signal and the noise'. http://www.deloitte.co.uk/mediaconsumer/assets/pdf/Deloitte_Media_Consumer_2015.pdf (20 March 2017).



The Government Communication Service conducts regularly surveys. Here the Cover of 'The Future of Public Service Communications Report and Findings', published in July 2015.

delivering information to them in the way that they want, not broadcast at them in the traditional model. To quote one participant in a survey the UK Government Communication Service (GCS) undertook as part of its Future of Public Service Communications report: 'Go to where the audience is, because the audience, not the government chooses the communication tools.'

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Unless we can meet this key challenge, public service communications will fall behind the curve and risk decline in the public's trust with government and its institutions. In this sense, future communications will be about the application of science, not artistic interpretation. To ensure we are keeping pace, we have developed the 'Modern Communications Operating Model'.

Coordinating teams within government

The Modern Communications Operating Model (MCOM) was introduced in 2015³ and allows the GCS to meet the constantly evolving challenges we face in increasing understanding, building trust and changing behaviour for the public good. With an organised structure and the right staff capability, this has resulted in a more skilled and unified profession that is innovative, more efficient and more effective. Embracing this model has helped to improve the impact of communications whilst providing value for taxpayers' money.

The model incorporates an approach whereby teams are integrated, digital by default and use data and audience insight to produce communications with real demonstrable impact.

Setting up the new Modern Communications Operating Model required a step change across government. To do this, the GCS adopted five principles:

1. All government communications must be insight-driven, digital and integrated by default, and fully evaluated.
2. We will audit communications requirements, focusing on audiences first, rather than policies.

³ The Government Communication Service (2015) 'The Future of Public Service Communications'. https://gcs.civilservice.gov.uk/wp-content/uploads/2015/09/6.1048_Cabinet-Office_comms-future-document_v2_print_web.pdf (22 February 2017).

3. We will pool and move resources to where they are required to deliver the Annual Government Communications Plan.
4. We will ensure people have the right skills.
5. We will evaluate and share the outcomes.

These principles demonstrate what is required of staff across government communications and what in return communicators can expect from the GCS.

All communications teams are signed up to the MCOM approach and, to ensure they are delivering, are structured along the following areas:

- **Strategic Communications:** Undertaking horizon scans for the whole department and providing the plotline for the core narrative. They look at what is coming up both internally and externally and how this might impact on communications. This team also focuses on gathering insight and evaluating work, to ensure communications are focusing on the right areas and are delivering what we need them to.
- **Media and Campaigns:** Producing publishable content rather than simply distributing press releases. They will plan reactive and proactive content to ensure that departments are responding to media queries when needed and that there are planned and sustained communications for our key policies. This team can flex according to the latest needs of a department. For example, moving from a media bias to a marketing bias as policy creation shifts to operational implementation.
- **Strategic Engagement:** Building alliances with partners and third parties to disseminate messages and share content. The teams managing these relationships sustain them over weeks, months and often years so we know what our stakeholders think and feel. This allows us to know when we can ask them to support communications or when if they need more engagement on a topic. We know that our audiences often trust the external voices that they know more than government, and so where possible, we look to work with them to reach our audiences.
- **Internal Communications:** Working in partnership with leaders to engage staff in delivering the Government's and departmental priorities and supporting organisational and cultural change. We cannot communicate externally unless we know how to communicate internally with our own staff and ensure they understand the priorities, what is expected of them and how the organisation supports them to deliver.

All staff should have demonstrable skills across a range of areas, including in data analysis to understand audiences, the creation of content, the theory and practice of behaviour change, and building alliances to make a case. They may have a primary specialism in one area, for

example internal communications or strategic engagement, but must also have capability in core areas, particularly marketing, digital skills and evaluation. It is this multidisciplinary approach which allows us to plan our communications in strategic and engaging ways.

Case study: Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy (BEIS)

BEIS used the merging of two government departments, the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills (BIS) and the Department for Energy and Climate Change (DECC), into one new department in July 2016 as an opportunity to introduce the Modern Communications Operating Model (MCOM) into its restructured communications directorate.

Implementation took place in November 2016 following an intensive period of staff consultation, using this internal model as an opportunity to introduce best communications practice and reorganise the Department's communications into four key teams, each led by a Deputy Director specialising in each communications discipline, and reporting into one Director of Communications.

The new structure allowed BEIS to respond more creatively and innovatively to new communications challenges – for example, by:

- embedding internal communications into the new structure to ensure internal messaging was fully aligned with wider communications
- spearheading the department's Industrial Strategy stakeholder engagement through a Strategic Engagement team, better joining up and coordinating all digital, media and ministerial visits activity
- developing an integrated media and campaigns approach, ensuring campaigns activity around policy areas like the National Living Wage were joined up with any media activity, and vice versa
- using the Strategic Communications team to drive professional development and improvement across the whole directorate, ensuring all communications use a campaign planning technique and run consistent, best practice evaluation of all communications activities that can be shared with Ministers and the Cabinet Office.

Staff and stakeholder responses have been positive so far. Over 85 percent of communications staff reported they were clear on their role in the new 'MCOM' teams, and over 90 percent felt they were able to inform the design of the new teams during the consultation. It also means, as a new government department, BEIS's communications directorate is now compliant with government best practice.



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Campaign visuals from the Apprenticeships 'Get In Go Far' campaign, aimed to inspire young people to consider an apprenticeship.

Delivering communications that are powerful, timely and relevant to our audiences can, for instance, lead to encouraging young people to take up an apprenticeship or encouraging more people to donate blood – and therefore improve people's lives.

The importance of internal coordination and communications

Internal communications are a function to help leaders in a department or agency, inform and engage employees, in a way which motivates staff to maximise their performance and deliver the business strategy most effectively. Excellent practice in internal communications leads to significantly improved levels of employee engagement, and therefore performance.

Internal communications is a key channel in reaching our audiences and achieving communications objectives. When executed effectively, internal communications provides results in a number of ways:

- **It helps the business to deliver its objectives:** Internal communications is important not because we like to give staff interesting things to read and make them feel happy, but because we have business objectives to deliver. Internal communications should have a hard and fast link to business delivery and to ensure that we can demonstrate that through evaluation of everything we do. To do this we have to provide internal communicators with the skills and support to be excellent in their job.
- **It helps staff see the connection between their job and the organisation's vision:** If staff understand and believe in an organisation's vision and values then this can lead to increased staff loyalty and advocacy. It's not about forcing a corporate message

on staff, but helping to get staff to emotionally connect with the vision and be able to easily translate this to the personal offer they make to stakeholders in their day-to-day jobs.

- **It helps to nurture employee engagement:** Employee engagement is about more than job satisfaction. It's about the two-way relationship between the employee and an organisation. Getting it right will have a positive impact on organisational performance, innovative thinking and a commitment to delivery. Understanding and measuring employee engagement is critical to motivating staff to do the best for an organisation where it matters most: at the point where an exchange takes place with a customer. This personal and sometimes emotional experience is where reputations are won and lost, sometimes forever. If it's handled with skill and care it can lead to increased loyalty and future brand advocacy.
- **It helps managers communicate better with their teams:** The single-most influential factor in effective internal communications must be those who have face-to-face contact with staff day in, day out. Leadership is said to account for two-thirds of the impact on employees' attitudes and behaviour. In comparison, the formal channels – where internal communication traditionally spends most of its efforts – account for less than 10 percent of the impact, but takes up the majority of the time and budget. No amount of technological sophistication can replace an honest and meaningful conversation with your manager.

Example: Using multiple channels to target your internal audience

Sport England, a non-departmental public body providing services and funding to sport in England, has carried out internal communications surveys to gain a better understanding of what staff value and where improvements can be made across the organisation. This research and insight has improved the organisation's ability to plan long-term work activity and deliver more effectively. An annual staff conference provides a platform for staff to get together and celebrate successes. Included in the programme is an awards ceremony, a chance for all colleagues in the organisation to hear from the Chief Executive Office about future plans and network with colleagues.

Importance of a framework for evaluation

As government communicators, it is vital that we demonstrate the impact of what we do and ensure that our work is effective and value for taxpayers' money. The GCS helped the Government reduce communications spending by 1 billion pounds (approximately 1.13 billion Euro) during the last parliament whilst ensuring that our communications are effective and that we are continuously improving to deliver the highest quality work.

Evaluation allows us to assess our performance in delivering on objectives such as changing behaviour, improving operational effectiveness, building the reputation of our country and explaining government policies and programmes.

For this reason, we build in plans for evaluation from the inception of our communication. Our approach to the measurement and evaluation of our communication needs to be outcome focused, robust, consistent and of a world class standard. Government agencies need an evaluation framework to ensure their communicators have the tools and resources available to develop 'SMART' (Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Realistic, Timely) communication objectives and Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) and to clearly and consistently demonstrate the effectiveness of all communication and campaign activity.

The framework should build on the latest industry best practice and be endorsed by all relevant Directors of Communications. UK GCS also uses an Evaluation Council, set up in 2013 to support government's continuing commitment to the development, understanding and implementation of evaluation best practice across all government communication activity. The Council brings together expertise from the commercial sector, NGOs, academia, local government and central government.

An Evaluation Framework supports a more consistent approach to evaluation across the government, where communications outcomes are aligned to objectives. It is also meant to reflect the integrated nature of modern communications where all areas of communications have a part to play. The Framework provides a set of valid evaluation measures to collect, analyse and report on for each type of communications activity. It can be used to plan evaluation for low cost and no cost activities as well as paid-for campaigns.

It is for use by all government communicators during the planning stages of communications activities and campaigns. Considering evaluation at an early stage in the communications planning process provides the opportunity to benchmark, track the right metrics and conduct robust and comprehensive evaluation. At this stage we think about what we want the target audience to think or do differently as a result of the activity and how to best show the impact. The framework is split into five areas:

1. **Inputs:** This is what communicators do before and during the activity. Inputs are what communicators put into delivering the communications and could include developing a campaign plan or creating content such as a press release or infographic.
2. **Outputs:** Are what's delivered by communicators or how many of a target audience is reached. Outputs could include the number of partnerships developed, news or blog articles secured. These are a count of what's been achieved but do not show us what people do differently as a result of the communication.

3. **Outtakes:** Look at what the target audiences think, feel or do to make a decision. Metrics could include stakeholder feedback, coverage sentiment or message recognition. This is an interim measure that gives an indication of what people may do differently.
4. **Outcomes:** These are results of the activity on the target audience. Outcomes include third-party advocacy or endorsement, campaign return on investment or behaviour changes. This is the focus of our evaluation, looking at outcomes shows our impact and what has actually changed as a result of our communication.
5. **Organisational Impact:** This is the quantifiable impact on the organisation. For example, a campaign encouraging people to not drink and drive which results in a reduced number of drink-drive cases would provide a positive organisational impact for stakeholders such as the police and the public health services which deal with the impacts of drink-driving.

When planning campaigns, we apply the 8 golden rules of evaluation:

1. Set 'SMART' objectives well before the activity starts (Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Realistic, Timely).
2. Think carefully about who the target audience is when selecting relevant metrics from each of the five framework areas, outlined above.
3. Ensure an integrated channel approach is adopted when evaluating communications activity.
4. Collect baselines and benchmarks where possible, this gives us something to compare our evaluation against and so allows us to see if we have shifted the dial.
5. Include a mix of qualitative and quantitative evidence, both provide information that when combined is more robust.
6. Regularly review performance, it is important to check the results of evaluation and if anything should be and can be done differently as a result.
7. Act on any insight to drive continuous improvement and inform future planning, this is a cyclical approach.
8. Make the link between the activity and its impact on the organisation's goals or Key Performance Indicators (KPIs).

The future of communications

By 2025, there will be a world population of around 8 billion people, compared to an estimated one trillion connected devices. Whilst predicting the future is very difficult, we must start preparing for it. We need to ensure that we keep up with the trends and that we do not get left behind.

The response to this challenge means routinely applying data, developing new relationships with our audiences, building our understanding of behavioural science and building trust through two-way and open engagement. It means creating nimble and responsive media centres which will produce ready-to-publish content, prioritising new technology and developing and retaining talent with a commitment from senior leaders across the GCS. We cannot be complacent, but must move with the times and keep up with a changing media space.

Communicators will increasingly require different and more technical skill sets. They need to be familiar with data analytics, content creation, behavioural change techniques and be adept at building alliances. They must also be confident in this to speak authoritatively to ministers and officials to justify choices that are the best practice. For example, we need to use data to evaluate communications in real time, requiring new levels of flexibility and agility to be able to respond to issues as they change right before us.

The speed of technological change is unrelenting and will only quicken. This virtually unfettered and unprecedented sharing of knowledge and information is already causing significant and complex social change. The scale of this transformation will continue to quicken. Communications teams will have to collaborate with partners, use insight to identify and nudge audiences and communicate across a range of platforms. It is a great time to work in communications, it is a quickly changing communications landscape and an opportunity to be at the forefront of shaping the profession to ensure it is fit for the future.



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Campaign planning and measuring success: a model for governments

Conrad Bird

What is a campaign?

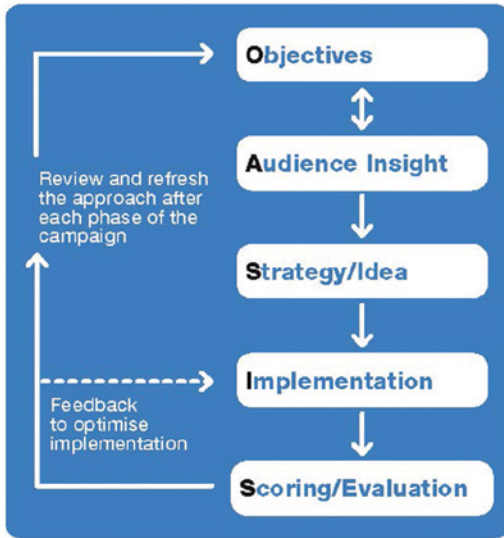
A campaign is a planned sequence of communications and interactions that use a compelling narrative over time to deliver a defined and measurable outcome.

Whether it is to achieve behaviour change or inform citizens about a new policy that will affect them, governments are well advised to view all communications activity in the context of a wider campaign. This is to ensure a drumbeat of regular activity to provide sustained communications with some peaks of activity around key points. All our communications activity must further the priorities of the government, unless we have a statutory duty to communicate. In the United Kingdom, all departments are required to assess where their proposed activity sits within the wider government priorities, and a central team in the Cabinet Office is responsible for signing-off any spend above 100,000 pounds (approximately 120,000 Euro). This allows us to ensure value for money and communicate in a coordinated manner.

It is important that all communications activity is grounded in rigour, discipline and the application of proven techniques. This allows not only for effective delivery but also ensures that we are spending money in the best possible manner and getting the most out of our spend. All communications activity must be underpinned by audience insight and evidence of outcomes, both of previous activity and as a feedback loop. We have to make our decisions using an evidence-based approach, not simply what we feel to be right. Instead government communicators should base their decisions on what they know and, if they do not know enough, commission research. This approach allows to demonstrate that communications is having an impact on people's lives, thereby supporting government in achieving its goals. Evaluation is also important to show if communications have not achieved what we had intended and highlights that we may need to try a different approach. This evaluation approach is not to prove the worth of our activity but rather assess how impactful our work has been in meeting our objectives.

The OASIS Model

Government communicators should work with a specific campaigning approach. It ensures that all work links to clear objectives and the impact can be easily evaluated. To ensure this happens, the UK Government Communication Service (GCS) has developed a simple model that can be used for a range of activity from large scale, high value public campaigns to small-



© UK Government Communication Service

scale activity, such as a media release. The model is referred to as 'OASIS'.

Objectives: This clearly sets out what the communications activity is intending to achieve. You should start with the policy aim and develop communications objectives that will deliver this. You should include the role that communication will contribute to achieving the policy aim and the role that individual activities or channels will play in meeting the communications objectives. Objectives should be 'SMART': Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Realistic and Timely. These should be focused on outcomes (what

people do differently), not outputs (a count of interactions), and related to changing attitudes and/or behaviour. For example, achieve a 20 percent increase in the number of people who pay their tax on time by April 2019.

You should also consider key performance indicators (KPIs). These are the specific targets that the campaign must achieve to demonstrate that it is on track to achieving its goal. For example 10,000 hits to the website per month, 5,000 sign-ups for more information or 500 people attend relevant events.

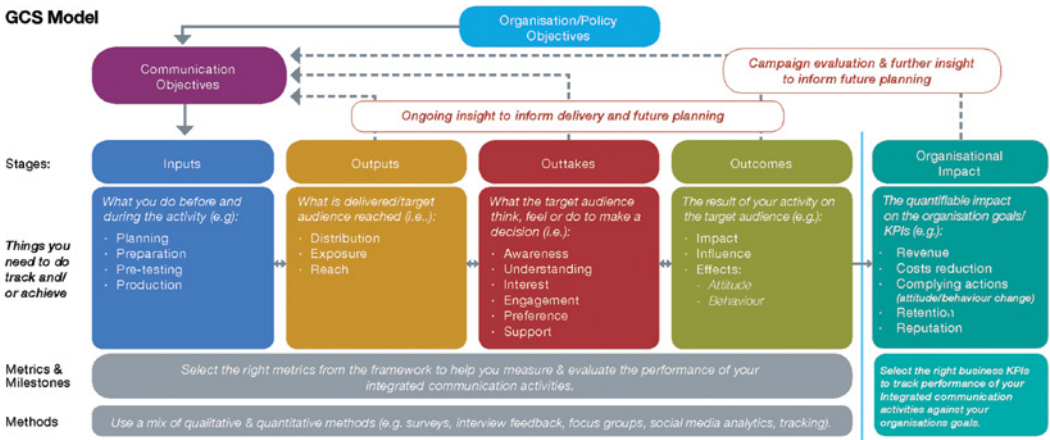
Audience insight: Who is the campaign aimed at? Do you need to change or influence their attitudes and behaviours to help you achieve your objective? Understanding your audience is critical to an effective campaign. You should use your own commissioned research, data from elsewhere in government or publically available information.

For particularly high value campaigns, consideration should be given to the application of behaviour change theories. It is important to know what your audience think and feel about a topic, so that you can design a strategy and implementation process that is likely to succeed in its aims. For this to work effectively, you need to know about your audience.

Strategy/Idea: Audience insight should inform your strategy. This sets what will happen – proposition and concepts, messaging, partners and influencers as well as channels. Understanding the user journey is also important as it will highlight where and when communications interventions should take place to be the most effective. It is good practice to test messaging and concepts on the audience they are intended for ahead of any launch. Running a 'test, learn, adapt' approach throughout the campaign process will ensure learnings are applied and lessons learnt in a reflexive manner.

Implementation: Once an approach has been defined, you should set out how you will deliver your communications and what tactics you will use. You must develop a clear plan that allocates resources and sets out timescales for delivery. Where it is appropriate, bring influencers and partners on board to increase impact and use low cost approaches where possible, particularly PR and partnerships.

Scoring/Evaluation: Campaigns should be monitored whilst they are still live, not just at the end when they are complete. This also means looking at the KPIs and assessing if they have been achieved. The figure down below demonstrates the GCS approach to evaluation. If you monitor progress during the campaign’s life cycle, you can make any adjustments needed to improve the campaign’s performance. You should set intermediate outcomes, or proxy measures, where final outcomes are not immediately available. The final evaluation should be linked back to the original objectives that were set. Regular testing either through survey, online engagement, polling or focus groups with the target audience should be carried out to provide results of the campaign’s effectiveness and ultimately to test if it has achieved its objectives. It is important that you capture lessons about what did work during the campaign as this will feed into any future iterations of the campaign.



Return on Investment (ROI) or Return on marketing investment (ROMI)

In addition to a campaign planning model, it is useful to work out a formula for measuring the Return on Investment (ROI). Sometimes in marketing this is referred to as Return on Marketing Investment (ROMI). Understanding the ROI/ROMI will demonstrate to senior officials or politicians the monetary value of investing resource into communications campaigns.

Return on marketing investment (ROMI) is the measure of the profit returned as a result of marketing activity and its associated spend. The UK Institute of Practitioners in Advertising (IPA) calculate it by: $ROMI = (\text{net profit generated}) / (\text{cost of campaign}) \times 100$

For government or public sector campaigns, you can identify the savings made to taxpayers instead of profit. It is important that communications demonstrate their value so that we can show we are spending taxpayer's money effectively. For example, in 2015 we ran a campaign called 'Power to Switch' to encourage our citizens to change energy providers to save them money and increase competition in the energy market. The ROMI could be worked out by estimating the number of households that switched providers and the average savings they would make. This gave us the net profit/savings generated by this piece of communications of 5 pounds in consumer savings for every one pound of investment, and a total consumer saving of 25 million pounds (around 30 million Euro).

It is not always easy or straightforward to work out an accurate ROMI for a campaign but it is worth looking further into this if financial impact is an important measure for your communications activity.

Case study: The 'GREAT Britain' campaign

The 'GREAT Britain' campaign was launched in 2012 to showcase the best of what the UK has to offer to inspire the world and encourage people to visit, do business, invest and study in the UK. It is the British government's most ambitious international promotional campaign ever, uniting the efforts of the public and private sector to generate jobs and growth for the country.

The UK has a huge amount to offer, with world-class universities, ground breaking research, high tech start-ups and entrepreneurial business people. The British are amongst the global leaders in the creative industries like music, fashion, design and film.

The GREAT Britain campaign captures all this; the best of all that is familiar about the UK, but also what is new and surprising about this country. Our aim is to encourage people around the world to think and feel differently about modern Britain.

To do this, the campaign unifies the international growth promotion efforts of 17 government departments and organisations under the single 'GREAT' brand. Focusing on 13 priority markets, with a range of pan-market activities, the campaign runs in 144 countries worldwide and draws on partnerships, businesses and high-profile individuals to multiply its impact and reach new audiences. Examples of GREAT activity, include a GREAT branded British airways plane, a McLaren formula one car branded 'Innovation is GREAT' and 'Shakespeare Lives' campaign which celebrated the work of Shakespeare across the world 400 years after his death.

Every month there are more than 100 different projects, activations and events led or supported by the GREAT Britain campaign across the world. At any time you can expect: GREAT-branded trade missions to position the UK as China and India's partner of choice in healthcare and infrastructure; highly targeted joint digital activity with Expedia in key tourism markets like the US, France and Germany; a visible, impactful presence to promote the best of British creativity at global moments like the Oscars; awards to recognise outstanding alumni of British universities in Ghana and Turkey and generate interest in UK study among the next generation of the brightest students; celebrations of British culture for business and diplomatic benefit in Mongolia, Burma or Mexico ... The list is a long one.

The campaign's activity is underpinned by the support of some of the UK's biggest brands and best known names. From icons like McLaren and Mulberry, and top corporates like HSBC and PWC, more than 500 companies and high profile people have given their time, energy and creativity to support GREAT around the world. These relationships are crucial to the campaign and demonstrate how the complementary strengths of the public and private sectors can be combined to give a global audience a compelling picture of everything the UK has to offer.

Its activity is tracked and audited from first contact to contract to ensure that GREAT is fulfilling its mission to generate jobs and growth for the UK. To date the campaign has generated 2.7 billion pounds (around 3.2 billion Euro) for the economy, demonstrating the power of high quality campaigning and clear evidence of its return on investment. The campaign has changed target customer behaviour in key overseas markets, increasing audience intention to trade, invest, study in or visit the UK by between 10 to 16 percent.

GREAT is probably the most comprehensively evaluated campaign of its kind in the world, commended by the National Audit Office, and an asset and sound investment for the UK taxpayer.

Example: The GREAT Festival of Creativity

The GREAT Festival of Creativity in Shanghai in March 2015 is one example of how a campaign brings a range of different strategic ideas together to deliver its overall objective.

It was an ambitious event designed to position and promote Britain as the nation of choice for Chinese entrepreneurs and investors seeking to expand their businesses into Europe.

Led by HRH The Duke of Cambridge (Prince William), UK Government Ministers and business figures, over 300 UK companies and 500 Chinese businesses participated in the three-day Festival at Shanghai's Long Museum. There they were able to attend over 50 keynote sessions and master classes, including those featuring Sir Martin Sorrell (CEO at WPP), Jack M (Chairman of Alibaba), David Heyman (the producer of Harry Potter and Paddington Films) and Wang Jianlin (Chairman of Wanda).

Subjects ranged from innovation in healthcare, life sciences, technology and education to fashion, luxury, design and entertainment.

The Festival resulted in tangible outcomes for Britain, including investment that created an economic benefit, such as:

- estimated 150 million pounds (ca. 180 million Euro) new trade and investment in Britain
- an additional 87 million pounds (ca. 104 million Euro) of creative sector business for Britain
- 200 million pounds (ca. 240 million Euro) of Foreign Direct Investment in Britain directly attributable to the Festival (figures according to an independent audit)
- 60 percent of Festival delegates interviewed made new orders with a British company
- 463 pieces of media coverage (95 percent positive) reaching over 240 million people
- widespread engagement with #princewilliamvisitschina (45 million views) and #GFEST (23.5 million views) on Chinese social media



The Duke of Cambridge (Prince William) opens The GREAT Festival of Creativity in Shanghai in March 2015.

Conclusion

Campaigning is a combination of creativity and science, working hand-in-hand to deliver value for money.

As a campaign such as GREAT is funded by tax-payers money, it is important that it demonstrates its worth and what it delivers for the citizens. Using the OASIS model factors in evaluation from the inception of the activity ensures that a campaign can show its impact and worth.

Demonstrating partnership work between the government and other stakeholders shows that campaigning is about bringing together interested parties in a mutually beneficial relationship delivering outcomes for all parties.

A campaign that is able to use creativity, science and partnership brings together key elements to ensure effective delivery both in terms of ensuring value for money and effectiveness.

As the example in this chapter has shown, governments can obtain a proven track record of delivering successful campaigns aimed at a range of audiences. By including a compelling narrative, a drumbeat of regular activity and ensuring that activity is grounded in a consistent and simple to use framework such as OASIS, it is possible to produce relevant, timely and engaging campaigns which are outcome focused, robust and consistent.



Conrad Bird is Director of the GREAT Britain campaign, based in the Department for International Trade and formerly at 10 Downing Street. While at No 10 Bird's role was extended to include responsibility for delivering major cross-government campaigns, as well as ensuring Government spending on communications was efficient and cost-effective. Previously Bird worked at the Foreign and Commonwealth Office as Head of Public Diplomacy and Strategic Campaigns. He was responsible for a wide range of policies and campaigns, including soft power, the 2012 Olympics and Paralympics, and campaigns in the Middle East, Libya, Afghanistan and Pakistan.

In 2002 Bird joined the Government, initially working with the Central Office of Information on issues that included teenage drugs, consumer rights and international export. He then joined the Cabinet Office to work with the first Permanent Secretary of Government Communication as Director of Strategic Communications. Here he launched 'Engage', a new approach to Government Communication, and was responsible for campaigns to counter terrorism and animal rights extremism. Before joining the Civil Service Bird spent 18 years in advertising, working with a number of agencies on national and international business. During this time he also set up an award-winning communication consultancy which he successfully ran for eight years.

Finding the right voice – dialogue with citizens in times of populism

Erik den Hoedt

'The times are a-changin' ...'



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Bob Dylan and folk singer Joan Baez at the civil rights 'March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom', August 28, 1963.

In 1963, a young man, unaware he would win the Nobel Prize in Literature more than 50 years later, wrote one of the most famous protest songs of all time: 'The times they are a-changin'.' The song gave a voice to young people in America, Europe and many other parts of the world; people who wanted to change the money-driven, conservative societies they grew up in. It was the time of civil rights movements and the start of the hippie era. A time of dreams for a better world. A time of 'populism'. The establishment, including governments,

struggled to adapt – as it is always the case – when a group enters the arena to change the rules of the game. In retrospect one can say that the times really were changing, but to a lesser extent and not always in the direction that Robert Allen Zimmerman, better known as Bob Dylan, and his many sympathisers had hoped for. The hippies became arrivés and many of their sons and daughters became yuppies – well-educated, raised to lead as well as to show solidarity with people in less favourable positions.

... over and over again

The times seem to be a-changin' again these days. Our world has globalised, but not by the force of love, happiness and understanding as the hippies had hoped for, but mainly by the force of money and trade. Indisputably this has brought us more wealth. Over the last 25 years, the number of people living on less than 1.90 US Dollars (approximately 1.80 Euro) a day, the global poverty line of the World Bank, decreased from almost 2 billion to less than 0.8 billion. But not everyone has benefitted. There are still big disparities in wealth between Western countries and developing countries, there are still wars, and even in the part of the world I live in there is a sharp distinction between people who have benefitted from globalisation and people who have not or – worse – have been affected

negatively. We see refugee crises, problems with immigration and whole families in our modern western societies without jobs and afflicted by debt.

Populism

The protest today is not expressed in songs accompanied by guitars. The anger and discomfort is broadcast through Twitter, Facebook and other social media. There is little 'lyrical' in these messages. Once again the establishment and the government struggle. What strikes me in the discussions between policy makers and government communicators is that populism is seen as something that should not exist and that has to be resisted. This is understandable if you focus on the disruptive nature of populism, challenging the status quo. And surely the attitude of 'own people first' and the automatic rejection of unfamiliar cultural values are easily seen to be the first steps on a dangerous road that could lead to an uncertain and unsafe future. But we find no effective answer if we see populism as exclusively bad. Underneath the layer of anger and sometimes even xenophobia lies the passionate drive to be taken seriously and to play an active part in our society. There is an emancipatory element in populism that is often overlooked.

Should government communication adapt to the voice of populism? Yes and no. Let me explain.

Shifts in government communication

The role of government communication is to inform its citizens with sound and relevant information at all times. The way government communicates with the public however has changed over the course of time. In my country, the Netherlands, immediately after World War II the experience with Nazi propaganda led to an allergic reaction to everything that remotely resembled propaganda. Therefore the common opinion was that government communication should be 'open and passive' and should be limited to simply describing government policy. Also, government communication and information should be directed exclusively at journalists – the free media. It was the journalist's task – not the task of the government – to inform the general public. In the sixties, opinions started to shift: the common view was still that the main task of government communications was to announce and explain, but people started to accept that influencing the behaviour of ordinary citizens, thus using communication as a policy instrument, could be acceptable.

There was, however, one very important condition, namely that the policy in question be 'accepted policy', meaning that it be signed off on by both Houses of Parliament. Arguably the biggest change in the way the Dutch government communicates with the public was the result of a commission – consisting of journalists, academics and government officials – that reflected on government communication in 2001.¹ This commission put forward the

¹ Commissie Toekomst Overheidscommunicatie (2001) 'In dienst van de democratie [Serving democracy]'.

view that communication should be at the heart of the policy-making process. By which we mean that we should communicate with the public from the start of the process of policy-making. No longer should communication be restricted to just explaining what the policy consists of, but the public should be actively involved in the development of the policy. And more attention should be paid to giving a clear picture of the motives behind the policy.

Principles of government communication

Last but not least, this commission formulated a set of important principles of government communication, which still serve as a guideline for the way the Dutch government communicates with the media and the public. These are:

- Ministries must observe a number of basic principles in their communications with the press and public. These principles are entirely related to the constitutional system and the relationships between government and opposition and between government and the citizens.
- Government communications must satisfy the citizens' entitlement to communication with and information from central government and the support of good democratic governance. Government communications must always be recognisable as such, must relate to policy and organisation and must not be aimed at personal image-building or campaigning for members of government and of other government organisations.
- The government must actively bring its policy and the reasons and considerations underlying it to the attention of the widest possible audience and must always specify the policy phase to which the information relates. At an early stage it must indicate whether the government wishes to involve citizens in the preparation of plans and measures and, if so, how.
- The government must ensure that it can be easily contacted by the citizens. Furthermore, the government must respond quickly and adequately to requests for information and to complaints. Communications must be truthful, sufficiently accessible in terms of both technology and content, comprehensible, timely and as focused as possible.
- Communications 'overkill' must be avoided at all stages of the policy process. In principle the government must not employ so many means of providing information that an imbalance arises drowning out other parties.
- Central government communications must not become interwoven with partisan interests.

Something is missing

It is clear from the above that the government wants to position itself as a reliable and trustworthy partner of its citizens. And working in government for years I know that our government generally is highly reliable and trustworthy, but as an expert in communication I know that many people feel sceptical about this. Many who support populist parties find themselves in circumstances they consider unfair. They blame the government for not protecting them well enough and for saddling them with a disproportionate share of our economic, social and cultural issues. Anyone who is being criticised harshly feels the urge to respond and many colleagues and political masters are keen to explain their position and try to rebut the criticism with facts. In general this is an ineffective approach to communication. The core of government communication should remain as before: how can we give every citizen access to sound and relevant information? However, there are at least two reasons why we should do more than that. Firstly, it has become more and more apparent that despite all our efforts we don't reach certain groups in society. Secondly, over the last few years we have seen a sharp increase of information accidentally or deliberately false.

Citizens out of focus

Brexit and the recent US President elections are just two examples of major events in which almost all opinion polls were wrong. The main explanation is not that people voted differently in the end than they told the interviewers earlier, but that large groups were not represented in the sample pools of the researchers. Likewise many citizens are out of reach of government services and even communication. Recent research in the Netherlands² showed that almost 20 percent of the persons entitled do not apply for costs-of-living adjustment and rent rebate. Unawareness of the regulations and an assumed or experienced complicated application process were amongst the main reasons. Many people do not respond to official letters, nor do they read newspapers. And they watch television selectively. While the government is for every citizen, we should look for additional channels to reach them. Social media seems an obvious choice. In the Netherlands more than 80 percent of the population participates on one or more social media platforms, Facebook being by far the most popular (56 percent of the population has a Facebook account). These figures might be slightly higher than the European average but it is clear that in all our countries social media is widely used, and not only by young people.

The limitations of social media

Although it is commonly believed that the use of social media contributes to government communication, their role should not be overrated. First of all, it is clear that they do

² SEO (2011) 'Niet-gebruik inkomens ondersteunende maatregelen [Non-use of financial support measures]'.



Social media are gaining importance but haven't replaced traditional communication channels such as websites, mass media campaigns, call centres, letters etc.

be a strong catalyst for other media. Therefore, every government should engage in social media monitoring.

not replace the traditional channels. Websites, mass media campaigns, call centres and letters remain the core of the communication infrastructure. These are the channels the public expects the government to communicate through. In the Netherlands only 14 percent use social media as a major source of information on government and politics. For the vast majority of people the main sources of information and the sources on which people base their opinions are still traditional media like the news on television and radio, opinion programmes, newspapers and websites.³ However, social media can

When social media emerged it was believed that it would stimulate the exchange of experiences, ideas and opinions throughout society. To a large extent they do. However, one thing that has become clear is that social media platforms are not primarily used to meet other ideas and alternative points of view, they are mainly used to communicate with the like-minded. The word 'social media bubble' is often used to describe the phenomenon in which people sharing the same ideas and interest meet on the web. There is little interaction between the bubbles. The debate over the past years was, should government engage in these bubbles by actively posting relevant information and even participating in discussions or should government run their own social media pages, making these fancy enough to attract people who are not reached via traditional channels? In light of growing populism: should the government take an active part in discussions amongst discontented citizens or only create easy accessible webpages?

In my opinion the presence of government in the social media bubbles should be a restrained one. People do not like to be contradicted by a representative of an institution they are sceptical about. Many of the bubbles are places to express and share emotions. This is not the perfect arena for a government to defend disputed facts. Does this mean that the government should be completely absent from the social media bubbles? Not necessarily, but it does put extra demands on objectives and tone of voice. There are good examples of close cooperation between policy-makers and social media platforms, for example in the field of health issues for youngsters. The online campaign 'Peukie, nou nee' aimed at

³ Veldkamp/TNS (2016) 'Monitor Development Media Use 2015 [Monitor Ontwikkeling Mediagebruik 2015]'.

discouraging youngsters from smoking in the Netherlands was highly successful.⁴ Another example is the campaign aimed at encouraging people to donate their organs after they have passed away.⁵ In some cases influential vloggers are asked to contribute. This form of collaboration can only be successful if the government accepts the independence of the vlogger or social media platform. Furthermore the government should be completely transparent about the relationship and the objectives of its presence on the platform.

Social media are not a substitute for more 'traditional' forms of online communication, nor are they just another channel to propagate the same kind of information. However, creating your own Facebook pages and other landing strips on social media can be a worthwhile addition to government communication as long as the information and how it is presented take advantage of the specific nature of the media: social, fast and cumulatively spread. Just to give a few examples that work: use Twitter to get attention and to generate traffic to websites, events etc. On Facebook, combine factual information with data putting this information in a broader perspective. Show the human side of government. For example, a Facebook page of the immigration service that not only contains factual information on procedures and numbers but that also portrays migration officers and migrants.

Fake news

There is a difference between objective truth and the subjective interpretation of facts. This is nothing new. Considering conflicts of interest and the many questions with regards to which the facts are in debate – think of the effects of climate change, the economic impact of Brexit, et cetera – it is easy to see why there is so much dispute about facts and figures. However, over the last several years we see a strong increase in false information being spread over the internet. Individuals, organisations and even states deliberately spread fake news, trying to strengthen their position by weakening the positions of others through the distrust or even chaos these false or 'alternative' facts create. Many of the issues have a direct or close links to government. This erodes the authority of government and more generally undermines trust in our societies. How should we react to this? There is a role for the government, the press (offline and online) and also for the social media companies themselves.

Many governments do some form of social and media management (webcare). By monitoring the web (who is talking, expressing what sentiments) the government can respond to questions and criticism and detect the spread of false information in an early stage. As stated above, government should carefully limit its own participation in discussion groups. For example, replying 'you are wrong' to an opinion based on false information is less effective than 'I see that you have an interest in Here (link) you find additional

⁴ Trimbos-instituut Centrum Jeugd, 'Naar 18 jaar', <https://www.naar18jaar.nl> (23 June 2017).

⁵ Orgaandonatie.nu, <https://orgaandonatie.nu> (23 June 2017).

information’. Despite the dangerous nature of fake news and false information there is an opportunity for government here: to re-establish itself as a reliable source. This is what people above all expect from government – to be trustworthy.

The role of the press is self-evident. A free press can only survive through total commitment to the truth. Happily, in my country the press in general performs its task with distinction – despite the narrowing financial margins and the growing influence of investors. Of course by putting things in perspective they colour the facts, depending on their political outlook and the audience they are targeting. But there is nothing wrong with that; this is the kind of diversity that all democracies benefit from.

Only recently we see companies such as Facebook and Google assuming a role in fighting fake news, cooperating with news agencies, the government and other organisations. Hopefully these joint efforts will soon lead to an increase in the reliability of information on the internet.

Meeting expectations

As is clear from the above social media can and should play a role in modern government communication and certainly they serve as welcome additional means to reach certain groups and to pick up on sentiments and opinions. But in the light of today’s populism they are only part of the story.

In essence populism is about circumstances and organisations, as well as aspects of government, that structurally do not meet the expectations of citizens. People feel they are losing their grip on their lives and they are worried about the future. Good communication is more crucial than ever before. And because populism has so much to do with expectations we should do our utmost to meet the expectations of our citizens in communication. This is not primarily a matter of the instruments the government uses to communicate, but mainly one of attitude – the commitment to truly serve our people in every respect. And, to be honest, there is reason for criticism. Despite all our good intentions, government communication is at many times too complex, insufficiently focused and insufficiently transparent.

Happily, with the help of smart techniques like customer surveys and user experience research, we are able to organise information and communication more and more from the perspective of the user. We have learned that there is a limit to digitising services and information. Over the years, government has become the back office of our societies, a black box for many. It is my strong conviction that for the past few decades we have been underestimating the importance of the front office. Life is complex, people need help, and often they look for help from the government. We should offer them a clear narrative emphasising shared values and we should offer them good policy, excellent, easily accessible services and sound and relevant information. We should offer them smart online solutions and also people of flesh and blood.

The press



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Politicians should not try to control or circumvent the press as they are needed to a functioning democracy.

One striking element of today's populism are the attempts of politicians to control or circumvent the press. The first is seen in Russia and Turkey, the latter looks to be the case in the United States. But we also see more and more politicians in other countries use the potential of social media to directly address the people. How convenient this may seem to them, at long last it will be counterproductive.

Discussion and exchange of ideas are the fresh air any democracy needs to flourish. Without a robust free press there is an enormous risk that all political communication, including government communication, will devolve into propaganda in the end. This will lead to more dangerous forms of populism.

The press is not the enemy of the political system or the government. Nor is the press their ally. Media are players in their own right. To perform a fair and sustainable role, they should stick to the facts, but they are completely free to look at the facts from as many perspectives as they wish in order to inform or entertain their public.

Freedom of information

In the Netherlands we are currently working on a new freedom of information act regarding government information. The goal is to increase transparency and to provide citizens and the press with easier access to all government information, with the exception of information that should be kept confidential for security or privacy reasons. In times of populism, when it is tempting to circle the wagons and turn away from each other, transparency is crucial. Government is of the people, by the people, for the people. Openness, fairness and a sincere effort to reach every citizen should always be top priority, even more when 'the times are a-changin'.



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Partnerships for the missing middle: reconnecting citizens and governments

Anthony Zacharzewski

At a time when traditional media are under pressure, and trust in governments is low, governments can improve communications with citizens, in both directions, by building partnerships with civil society, and supporting innovative efforts on public participation.

Civil society organisations have two principal modes when dealing with governments: ignoring or lobbying. Most civil society organisations ignore governments most of the time. They are busy in their place or on their issue, and the immediate needs of their members or service users take priority over questions of policy.

Some organisations, though, have campaigning as their core business: Stop accidents, increase environmental protection, decrease burdens on business, and govern in a more transparent way. The government is central to all these questions, and therefore one of the main targets of lobbying. Even if the campaign is primarily about corporate or personal behaviour, government has, in the power to legislate, the power to force people to do what campaigners want.

Civil society organisations, and campaigns in general, play an essential role in democracy. They raise awareness of people's concerns, they articulate causes and ensure that broadly-shared weak interests (such as the benefit of a healthy environment) do not lose out to small groups with strong interests (such as shareholders in coal-fired power stations).

However, there is a missed opportunity in framing this only as opposition – always telling government what it should do better. Structural changes in the political world have made the need for new forms of political communication essential. Governments could do more in productive partnership with civil society, as long as they can avoid getting too close or capturing civil society agendas. Partnerships can replace the 'missing middle.'

The missing middle

The most significant change in the communications landscape in the last twenty to thirty years has been the shrinking of the middle space between government and public – the space where traditional media, trade unions and political parties used to connect policy-makers and citizens. This is seen most clearly in the world of media. Traditional media models based on advertising are being competed away by the internet, at the same time as

the paid-sales model is challenged by advertising-supported free newspapers and online advertising platforms.¹

In a world where information can flow far more freely, it is a lot harder to charge for it. A vastly increased information flow, however, has not necessarily made citizens better-informed. Instead, the 'fire hose' of information is controlled and managed by a range of different sites, some of them traditional newspapers, others social media, yet others partisan sites that provide confirmation of whatever biases you have. These media combine self-sorting, the desire to be with people you agree with, and algorithmic sorting, the desire of Facebook to give you only what it thinks you want to see. The result is a world shaped, partially unknowingly, to bend what it presents to you so it fits your preferences. This is what Eli Pariser has called 'the filter bubble.'²

The media is not the only middle space political institution to be falling apart. Political parties have declined in membership across western democracies. In the United Kingdom, France and Italy, parties lost between a third and two thirds of their members, over a million people, since the late 1990s. Across all established democracies the average membership decline is 50 percent in that period. This means that political parties are no longer representative of people as a whole, or even of that party's 'ordinary' voters.³

Trade unions, too, have declined – a significant loss to political mobility as politicians of the left were often brought through by trade unions. In most countries the percentage of workers covered by a trade union has fallen for over fifteen years, and on average less than a quarter of workers are in a union.⁴

This means that there are fewer routes for the transmission of ideas from public to government, and of information from government to public. At the same time, the increasing quantity of information in general means that there is less attention available for government communications, and important messages can get lost in the noise.

Many different drivers have come together to create this 'missing middle', but one important political change has been the shift from a culture of 'mass compromise' (where parties were

¹ See, among many examples, the data in Angelucci, Charles and Cagé, Julia (2016) 'The Newspaper Ad Collapse: Bad News for Readers'. VoxEU, 26 August, <http://voxeu.org/article/newspapers-times-low-advertising-revenues-towards-decline-quality-information-media-outlet-level> (18 April 2017).

² Pariser, Eli (2011) *The Filter Bubble: What the Internet Is Hiding from You*. New York.

³ van Biezen, Ingrid, Mair, Peter and Poguntke, Thomas (2012) 'Going, going... gone? The Decline of Party Membership in Contemporary Europe'. *European Journal of Political Research*, 51(1): 24-56.

⁴ Fulton, Lionel (2015) 'Worker representation in Europe'. Labour Research Department and ETUI, <http://www.worker-participation.eu/National-Industrial-Relations/Across-Europe/Workplace-Representation2> (31 March 2017).

joined and media consumed on a 'closest-available' basis) to one of 'mass personalisation' (where methods of media consumption and political engagement can be tailored and selected to personal preference). Although untestable, it is surely no coincidence that these political changes have followed, and mirrored, the changing patterns of consumer expectation in the commercial world.⁵

In some ways, this unbundling of politics has been good for civil society. As 'old media' have declined, new tools such as change.org, and new instruments such as the European Citizens Initiative,⁶ have risen to give people more personal, single-issue opportunities to engage, and giving civil society a huge range of new tools. However, in using those tools, there is a risk that civil society contributes to the problem of information overload, and makes their messages less powerful – not more.

The reason is that campaigning messages are still flowing largely in one direction – to politicians. The rise of the email campaign or the petition site has put a burden on the administrations that are their targets.⁷ The consultation that the UK Government ran on its proposals for equal marriage, for instance, gathered a huge number of responses, almost a quarter of a million, as well as nineteen petitions with a total of more than half a million signatures.⁸ This was at the same time a triumph for citizen engagement, and a huge headache for the small team of civil servants who were the 'person in the middle', acting as the connection point between government and public.

Working through networks

The best way to avoid these pinch-points in the information flow, and to build better connection between public and government, is to work through networks. Networks are naturally designed to allow the flow of information through multiple routes to multiple audiences. They are also the main way of working for civil society organisations, who maintain networks of supporters, of academic and other contacts, and of service users.

⁵ See, for instance, Shah, Dhavan V., McLeod, Douglas M., Friedland, Lewis and Nelson, Michelle R. (2007) *The Politics of Consumption/The Consumption of Politics*. Annals of the American Academy of Social and Political Science.

⁶ European Citizens' Initiative, Official Register, <http://ec.europa.eu/citizens-initiative/public/welcome> (24 April 2017).

⁷ House of Commons (2013) 'Public engagement in policy making: second report of session 2013-14'. London: The Stationery Office, 3 June, <https://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201314/cmselect/cmpublicadm/75/75.pdf> (31 March 2017).

⁸ Great Britain (2012) *Equal marriage: The Government's response*. London: Government Equalities Office. https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/133262/consultation-response_1_.pdf (31 March 2017).

Traditional government engagement methods already make use of civil society networks, but at a distance. For example, in consultations, governments issue a request for comment on a particular issue. Relevant civil society organisations pick it up, and either using their existing knowledge and established positions, or after speaking to their networks, they provide a formal response. In the opposite direction, civil society organisations can use their networks to pick up emerging issues and pressure government.

Wider, more conversational and more consistent use of these networks could recreate the 'missing middle', particularly if done using a combination of online and offline networks to maximise reach and keep the conversation going.

Facilitating wider communication

To make this work, the government and civil society have to start by seeing the creation of a positive and open public debate as their joint responsibility, and taking on that responsibility. This means that governments need to commit to acting in an open way, so that people's participation in public debate is respected and seen to be powerful. It also means that civil society needs to work to communicate better with its own networks, ensuring that they support good public debate, even if this sometimes means putting both sides of an argument where they would prefer just to put one side. It may also need more vehicles for creating and supporting trust in the process of dialogue and debate.

The Open Government Partnership



The Open Government Partnership⁹ is a good example of how government and civil society can work together in a spirit of openness and cooperation. Civil society can participate without being too compromised by its involvement with government. Government can participate without being associated with the different agendas of civil society groups.

The partnership, which was created in 2011 by a partnership of eight governments, has now extended to seventy-five governments. The fundamental partnership element is between a group of civil society actors and the government of each member state. These two are required to meet on a regular

⁹ Open Government Partnership, <http://www.opengovpartnership.org> (24 April 2017).

basis, to draw up a shared national action plan that advances open government along the three axes of transparency, participation and accountability, and (with independent monitoring support) to hold each other accountable. In the years since the Partnership started, more than two thousand five hundred joint commitments have been made.

This is a simple and light-touch process that enables government and civil society to work together in a transparent and trusted way. It also enables government to draw a wider range of perspectives when considering policies or its own behaviours.

The independent monitoring mechanism ensures that government and civil society do not get too close, and that civil society does not interpolate its personal organisational goals for the wider goals of open government.

Creating trusted space

Successful partnerships between government and civil society depend on a web of trust, not just between the partners, but between members of the public and the process itself. Trust in the process can be supported by ensuring that there is transparency about how people's data and ideas are used, and a clear link between people's participation and outcomes. This does not mean that participants must have the power to decide; just that they need to find out what happened as a result of their participation, the extent to which their input changed the decision, and the reasons why ideas were rejected.

Trust also comes from repeated participation. Ongoing commitment from the government side supports positive behaviour in discussions, because participants know that they are in a continuing relationship.

Different sorts of partnership

Partnerships between government and civil society could take several different forms. Short-term ad-hoc partnerships that are focused on communicating messages to the public are already common, but are focused largely on more efficient transmission of messages to the public, for example in public health campaigns.

The deeper, more two-way communication and engagement partnerships considered here are less common. I distinguish three different types of deep partnership: 'issue partnerships', 'network of networks partnerships' and 'participation infrastructure partnerships.'

'Issue partnerships'

These partnerships are created around single issues or sets of issues where Government and civil society partners want to gather views and insights. They are often focused around new initiatives or work programmes. Civil society partners are used both to support communications, to gather contributions and to be part of the assessment process.



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A good example is the British Red Tape Challenge (RTC), which was run by the UK government between 2011 and 2014. It was designed to crowdsource the views of businesses, organisations and the public on which regulations should be improved, kept or scrapped. The initial scope included 21,000 statutory rules and regulations and the enforcement of regulations. The consultations during the RTC finally covered 5,662 regulations in 28 themes and over 100 subthemes, and over 30,000 contributions were received.¹⁰

The Red Tape Challenge process marked a development in crowdsourcing practice by the UK Government. A previous site, 'Your Freedom',¹¹ was described as 'an opportunity for anyone to suggest ideas on restoring liberties that have been lost, repealing unnecessary laws and stripping away excessive regulation on businesses.' This site had a very broad scope, but was therefore unfocused. A large number of issues were raised – more than 9,000 in the first few weeks¹² – but without pre-moderation or any context to help people make productive suggestions, most were of little value.¹³

Red Tape Challenge, on the other hand, did not make such a general appeal. It divided government regulation into 28 themes, six of which were open for contributions throughout the process, and twenty-two of which were only open for limited times, during which they were the subject of particular communications efforts. Notably, whereas 'Your Freedom' took a traditional press-release-and-launch-event approach to communication, the Red

¹⁰ OECD (2016) 'Red Tape Challenge (United Kingdom)'. in Pilot database on stakeholder engagement practices in regulatory policy, <http://www.oecd.org/gov/regulatory-policy/GBR-Red-Tape-Challenge.pdf> (19 April 2017).

¹¹ Department for Education and Deputy Prime Minister's Office (2010) 'Clegg launches Your Freedom website'. 2 July, <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/clegg-launches-your-freedom-website> (31 March 2017).

¹² Home office (2010) 'Your ideas about your freedom'. 14 July, <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/your-ideas-about-your-freedom> (31 March 2017).

¹³ Chris Applegate's review of the website contains good advice on how to design for effective engagement: 'Your Freedom is a failure. How to make it better'. [qwghlm.co.uk](http://www.qwghlm.co.uk), 1 July, <http://www.qwghlm.co.uk/2010/07/01/your-freedom-is-a-failure-how-to-make-it-better> (31 March 2017).

Tape Challenge worked in partnership with industry bodies and other experts as 'Sector Champions'. These organisations and individuals spread the word about the project into their networks, giving context and encouraging their networks to contribute. They also then supported the government in analysing the recommendations that had been submitted regarding their sector.

In this way, partnership with civil society enabled the British Government to reach a wider audience, with a message that was more effective because it came from a trusted external voice, and therefore implicitly validated the quality of the process. The continued involvement of the sector champions also made use of external expertise and gave reassurance to specialist participants that their contribution would be understood in the right context.

The Red Tape Challenge has inspired several similar projects, including Bez Barijera in Montenegro¹⁴ and Adminhack in Serbia¹⁵, which focused on administrative burdens experienced by digital and start-up businesses, and was launched with the support of Belgrade's principal start-up network.

'Network of networks partnerships'

Where there is a wide range of stakeholders, or a broad issue to be considered, governments can use a 'network of networks' approach, that tries to interact with a broad range of networks as a way of bringing in different views. The Scottish Government undertook a broad deliberative exercise during 2016, called Fairer Scotland. As well as a website where ideas were gathered under broad topics, they led two connected series of consultation events, each asking the broad question 'what does a fairer Scotland look like?'

The first set of events used networks of community organisations to bring together two hundred meetings around Scotland, focused on a place and interest, from prisoners to religious and ethnic minorities. These meetings were an open format, discussing what participants wanted to see as the priorities for a fairer Scotland. The second consultation series used the same community networks to recruit broadly representative samples of Scottish residents in eight locations, for a more structured conversation in a 'citizen panel' format.

The result of these two events was a rich set of evidence, recorded by Scottish government civil servants, from more than seven thousand participants.¹⁶ The involvement of the

¹⁴ Bez barijera [Without barriers], <http://www.bezbarijera.me> (24 April 2017).

¹⁵ Adminhack Serbia, <http://www.adminhack.rs> (24 April 2017).

¹⁶ Summarised at Scottish Government (2016) 'Creating a fairer Scotland: what matters to you: a summary of the discussion so far'. March, <http://www.gov.scot/Resource/0049/00497495.pdf> (31 March 2017).

community organisations, as with the Red Tape Challenge, gave external validation and trust to the process. Furthermore, their role in hosting and recruiting conversations showed community organisations as partners with government supporting the democratic and civic quality of the discussions.

Exercises such as participatory budgeting (PB), where money for infrastructure improvements or other public projects, are also examples of using a network of networks. Rather than using existing networks, PB processes (and other participatory innovation process such as GovCamp¹⁷) encourage the creation of networks of support around particular projects. The city of Paris undertakes a large participatory budgeting process for its infrastructure spending each year, allocating 94 million Euro.¹⁸ In 2016, to deepen the deliberation around the proposals, it arranged a series of workshops to which people with ideas could come, find others with similar ideas, and receive advice. Such projects become the seeds of community networks around ideas, which (for successful, and some unsuccessful ideas) then continue through to practical action and beyond. By the end of the process, 90,000 votes had been cast and 219 projects selected for funding.

Both examples demonstrate that there is capacity to broaden routes into participation by using or creating networks. However, both PB and the Fairer Scotland programme are ad-hoc. Participatory budgeting is a regular event, but the issues considered change from year to year depending on what is proposed. The Fairer Scotland programme was a one-off exercise and it remains to be seen how much that public input will be used as the policy ideas derived from the programme are implemented.

Is there scope to make the networks and partnerships built in this way more stable and more long-term? That is the goal of the final type of partnership, one to create and support participation infrastructure.

'Participation infrastructure partnerships'

If trust relies on repeated interaction – I trust you to be fair with me because you have been fair with me in the past – governments are missing an opportunity if they do not keep in touch with participants after consultation exercises, not just to tell them the outcome, but to offer them the chance to participate further. Lobby groups and those who have a direct financial interest will always stay involved, because it is to their direct profit to do so, only the voices of citizens will be lost.

¹⁷ In the UK, <https://www.ukgovcamp.com> (24 April 2017).

¹⁸ These and other statistics from Paris.fr (2017) 'Budget Participatif 2016: tous les résultats' [Participative Budget 2016: all results]. <http://www.paris.fr/actualites/budget-participatif-2016-tous-les-resultats-4116> (31 March 2017).

To do this, though, needs an infrastructure for participation – something that allows a continued light connection with participants, and also the possibility of drawing from that pool for future engagement exercises, either small number exercises such as citizen juries, or broader exercises such as consultations.

There are relatively few organisations dedicated to the creation and maintenance of participation infrastructure. In France and Italy (on a model from Québec)¹⁹, there are state-funded organisations who have a duty to undertake consultations on significant government proposals. There are a number of organisations that have arranged large-scale participation events running over several months, for example Mission Publique’s global conversation on climate change²⁰, and many (too many) stand-alone digital engagement platforms in every part of Europe.

There have been efforts, through European funding programmes, such as D-CENT, to create digital tools that can support such long-term consultation infrastructure, and some D-CENT tools are being used on Madrid’s new Consul platform, which currently has signed up about 200,000 citizens. Other participatory tools that had early success, such as Reykjavík’s ‘Your Priorities’, have extended their reach and maintained audiences over several years. Finally, some governments, such as the city of Paris, and cities such as Ghent (Belgium) and Athens have a political commitment to supporting participation that has been in place for several years.

A successful long term participation infrastructure partnership would need both commitment from government, an organisational and digital infrastructure to support and engage participants, and one or more partners whose commitment was to the quality of the democratic engagement rather than to the pursuit of an organisational or sectoral goal. This does not exist yet, but several existing partnerships discussed here – the Open Government Partnership, the Paris PB project, Fairer Scotland – have hints within them of a potential infrastructure for a partnership. Emerging projects, such as the Council of Europe’s Democracy Incubator²¹, have an explicit goal of bringing local innovation into closer alignment and joining up the disparate and uncoordinated work on developing participation practices and networks. Developing these longer-term ‘middle spaces’ is the next challenge for democratic innovation.

¹⁹ The CNDP in France (<https://www.debatpublic.fr>) and the APP in the region of Toscana (<http://www.consiglio.regione.toscana.it>), both inspired by the Office of Public Engagement on Environment in Québec (<http://www.bape.gouv.qc.ca>) (all websites were last accessed on 24 April 2017).

²⁰ Missions publiques, ‘Le Débat Citoyen Planétaire sur le Climat et l’Énergie’ [The Global Citizen Debate on Climate and Energy], <http://missionspubliques.fr/debat-citoyen-planetaire-climat-energie-world-wide-views> (31 March 2017).

²¹ World Forum for Democracy, Incubator for participatory democracy, <http://www.coe.int/en/web/world-forum-democracy/incubator> (31 March 2017).

Although civil society and government have long-standing relationships and well-understood interactions, this type of ongoing partnership will be new to many. It will require each side to learn from the other, about what works to build trust, how good information can be presented and discussed, and how to reach representative audiences. If successful, though, the reward is significant: better citizen engagement in decision-making, a wider range of evidence available to policy-makers when they are making decisions, and a renewed architecture of democracy to connect citizens, communities and government.



Anthony Zacharzewski set up the Democratic Society with four friends in 2006 and has been Chief Executive since 2010. The Society works to create more participatory government and greater democratic engagement, and is based in Brighton and Edinburgh. The Society is the UK Government's lead civil society partner on open policy-making and participation in the National Action Plan on open government. Its recent projects include NHS Citizen, a participation infrastructure for the health service in England that has been called 'the most exciting participation project in Europe in the last twenty years'; work with the Scottish

Government on the Fairer Scotland programme; and projects on local participation with several local authorities in England. Zacharzewski is regularly involved as an external expert on democracy in European organisations and networks such as the European Council of Regions and the Club of Venice. Before working for Demsoc, Zacharzewski was a civil servant, first with the Department of Health, later with the Cabinet Office, Privy Council Office and HM Treasury. He also spent four years in local government, first as Head of Policy then as Acting Director of Strategy and Governance at Brighton and Hove City Council.



EU COMMUNICATION CHALLENGES



Inspiring and sharing good values: how European public diplomacy can make a difference

Vincenzo Le Voci

In his Mentor Book entitled 'American Diplomacy 1900-1950'¹, George Kennan² embarked on a comprehensive evaluation of US foreign relations, reflecting on what was needed at that time to help preserve peace and stability in a world which had just emerged from two terrible conflicts:

'I cannot refrain from saying that I firmly believe that we could make much more effective use of the principle of professionalism in the conduct of foreign policy; that we could, if we wished, develop a corps of professional officers superior to anything that exists or ever has existed in this field; and that, by treating these men with respect and drawing on their insight and experience, we could help ourselves considerably. However, I am quite prepared to recognize that this runs counter to strong prejudices and preconceptions in sections of our public mind [...] and that for this reasons we are probably condemned to continue relying almost exclusively on what we might call "diplomacy by dilettantism".'

More than half a century later, the issue raised by Kennan remains topical and should sound like a warning bell.

Today's society continues to experience a complex combination of economic, political and social turbulences owing to conflicts and instabilities of different nature, scattered in leopard-like spots. Some of these phenomena erupted suddenly and unexpected, others have very deep roots built up over time.

The socio-political environment is being challenged by growing mutual distrust, extremism, terrorist threats and is being exacerbated and destabilised by outbreaks of xenophobia and nationalistic feelings. Moreover, very often the fragmented political landscape or the prevalence of two antithetical political forces generates painful shifts in both internal governance and international relations.

¹ Edited in 1951 by the University of Chicago.

² George Kennan, US diplomat, in the last century served as Ambassador to the former Soviet Union and Yugoslavia and subsequently taught history and international affairs at Princeton University, was not only a keen observer but also a shrewd 'capacity and diplomacy builder'.

Against this background, does it still make sense to speak about 'Public Diplomacy'? Does this expression still count in today's socio-political landscape? What is the impact of the new geopolitical scenarios on the EU and its Member States' public diplomacy and public communication strategies?

As communicators, what can we learn from historical and current conjunctures? Is it possible to adjust strategies and cope with the evolving scenario? Have any successful models been identified from which Public Diplomacy (PD) strategies could draw inspiration? Is there enough ground to explore synergies between institutional and governmental practitioners in this field or is this just a matter to feed national or institutional vanities ... and jealousies?

Communication challenges and deficits in the EU and its Member States

Traditional PD definitions depict this topic as 'direct or indirect communication of one State with the citizens of another State, engaging with key stakeholders such as political parties, NGOs and special interest groups, engaging through the media (by articles, interviews, "classic" internet presence and a proactive approach with "social media") to communicate policy goals.'

History, though, has shown us that PD's initial connotations³ are old-fashioned, and have been overtaken by events.

While enjoying this luckily peaceful period in Europe for almost seven decades, with dialogue increasingly replacing warlike attitudes, Europeans have learned that Diplomacy is a strategic science that cannot be invented or prefabricated. It must be built step by step and then nourished. Professionalism and sharing of techniques and experience can help strike a balance.

Public diplomacy, 'soft diplomacy', reputation management, traditional-cultural-social diplomacy, external educational dimension and branding are – with different nuances – part of the same business, but are often challenged by three important factors:

- lack of experience, competence and comprehension of geopolitical realities;
- lack of investment in new generations of professionals and in training;
- the newly emerged media landscape: unless adapted, diplomacy always runs the risk of arriving with 'too little too late'.

³ Joseph Nye's definition of PD in his book 'Soft Power: The means to success in world politics', New York: Public Affairs, 2004, is relatively recent but no longer valid since many changes have occurred since then.

Verena Nowotny⁴ has aptly observed that PD's foundations – and consequently effective PD practices – can only be consolidated if endowed with concrete and credible strategies. This is corroborated by other distinguished specialists in this field such as Simon Anholt⁵, who underlined that 'good public diplomacy rests on three ingredients: "strategy, substance and symbolic actions".⁶

Today we should speak about 'Public Diplomacy reviewed', since in modern democracies it is no longer time to assert prestige, authority and strength or influence politics, but rather to disseminate a culture of mutually beneficial social, cultural, educational and ethical values that can be globally shared. Only by using this new approach can the words 'Public' and 'Diplomacy' work together.

I fully share Verena Nowotny's recommendations concerning the homework the EU and its Member States (MS) must do in terms of coordination and cooperation to move ahead in this field:

- knowledge of the real needs of audiences;
- investments (this field has a price tag);
- perseverance;
- measurement and evaluation.

In order to formulate proposals for possible developments of suitable PD and communication models, an assessment of today's approaches is necessary to try to identify realistic prospects.

Approaches to change with European institutions and professional networks

Today's society has lost the former generation of visionary European statesmen and is in the thrall of a resurgence of fragmentations, scepticism, revisionism and nationalistic tendencies. Nevertheless, governments and institutions are trying to counteract these trends by reshaping their international relations and investing in the promotion of globally recognised values.

⁴ Verena worked as Foreign Affairs Spokesperson for the former Austrian PM Wolfgang Schüssel. Today she is communication advisor at Gaisberg Consulting and is an expert on Far Asia nations' branding trends.

⁵ More information on Simon Anholt <https://goodcountry.org/simon-anholt> (16 March 2017), TED (2014) 'Which country does the most good for the world? | Simon Anholt'. Youtube, 2nd July, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1X7fZoDs9KU> (16 March 2017).

⁶ Verena's 'We don't want to be European' was published on the Club of Venice review 'Convergences' n° 2 – <http://www.politicheeuropee.it/attivita/18676/il-club-i-venezia-e-la-rivista-di-comunicazione-pubblica-convergenze> (16 March 2017).

The European Union, awakened by the loss of citizens' confidence and by the progressive decline of turn-out in European Parliament elections, has adopted a proactive approach to better explain its policies and its added value by a strengthened public diplomacy network. This complex task started with the creation of the European External Action Service (EEAS), a new structure composed of EU and MS officials in each Delegation of the Union worldwide. The real push however came under the current mandate of the EU High Representative Federica Mogherini, and in particular with the acceleration determined by the rise of the security threats within and beyond Europe, which require prompt and joint responses.

For the public diplomacy principles to be implemented through a credible and effective approach, it was necessary to elaborate a comprehensive strategy, which could encompass the core tasks of the EU as a global actor:

- full commitment to promote universally recognised values and citizens' interests;
- building and playing a dual role: as direct negotiator and as guide/inspirer in external relations;
- capacity to react to all crisis scenarios promptly and through integrated plans.

The Global Strategy for Foreign and Security Policy presented by the EEAS to the European Council in June 2016⁷ seems to have responded to the new trends and expectations. Its success will clearly depend on the implementation and the engagement of the key players through coherent and coordinated action.



EEAS global strategy logo - June 2016

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Meanwhile, technology has enabled other players – public and private – with different skills, agendas and objectives, to communicate directly with the wider public. Action in this area was previously confined within the traditional monopoly of governments, whilst today everyone (in particular digital natives) can speak

to large audiences, penetrating various blogospheres with little effort.⁸ Other professional profiles, some with doubtful experience and questionable credibility and authenticity, have emerged. This risk cannot be overlooked!

⁷ European Union Global Strategy (2016) 'Shared Vision, Common Action: A Stronger Europe – A Global Strategy for the European Union's Foreign And Security Policy'. June 2016, http://eeas.europa.eu/archives/docs/top_stories/pdf/eugs_review_web.pdf (16 March 2017).

⁸ An interesting analysis in: Hargreaves, Ian (2014) 'Digital natives versus digital adaptors'. Chapter 'Digitals: after the deluge' in *Journalism - A Very Short Introduction*. Oxford Univ. Press, 2nd ed..

The Club of Venice, which is an open panel of national and institutional experts from the EU Member States, has been reflecting on Public Diplomacy strategies for almost ten years, since November 2007 (plenary meeting in Italy, to coincide with the celebrations of the 50th anniversary of the Rome Treaties).

Since then, the Club has developed further analysis and debate in this field through:

- four thematic seminars, respectively in France (2009), Malta (2010), Poland (2011) and Cyprus (2012);
- two plenary meetings in Tallinn (June 2013) and The Hague (2016) which enabled members to deepen discussion and share valuable feedback in the presence of diplomats and external specialists (Clingendael Institute, Anholt consultancy);
- the 5th thematic seminar in Brussels (September 2016) focused on anti-terrorism challenges and discussing 'reputation management' implications.

The scope of discussions increasingly covers the impact of today's big crises, such as the refugee and migration emergencies, economic turbulences and the terrorist threat, on public opinion. The recent tragic events in France, Belgium and Germany have caused a tremendous shift in the resident population's perception as well as in sentiment abroad with regard to the security standards in those countries.

A system-level governance principle appears increasingly difficult to apply on a planet where it is almost impossible to 'find harmony among neighbours'.

Between 9/11 and today, public diplomacy has changed remarkably because the future is more unpredictable. The impact of threats and conflicts, national instability and drastic (though, not always unexpected) shifts in internal politics on public opinion is the main enemy of public diplomacy, which is the first victim of shifts in external relations.

Very complex and complicated issues are poisoning relations:

- TTIP negotiations
- the Russia-Ukraine crisis
- the turmoil in the Middle East
- the heterogeneous response of EU Member States to the EU's call for a sensible attitude to the emergency relocation of migrants
- diverging views on how to handle the African and Asian migratory phenomenon
- the results of the UK referendum on EU membership

Countries that had rebuilt and reinforced century-long relations of mutual trust and cooperation are feeling the effects.

Even more worrying, according to specialists in global governance such as Jim Whitman⁹, 'human societies are manufacturing new global security risks at a faster pace than existing institutions can cope with'...

The world has changed and public diplomacy is acquiring new connotations, expanding its scope and broadening its horizons. Hence, promoting a common, corporate identity made of solidly branded values cannot be a one-off initiative.

A public diplomacy strategy cannot be launched without proper reflection, but requires a long process of self-examination, self-understanding, acquiring necessary skills and a thorough insight into a country's principles and values. This should then be followed up and enhanced with a thorough reflection on the best instruments to communicate that strategy.

Different options for future institutional and governmental communication models

The motto chosen by the EEAS for its Global Strategy is 'Shared Vision, Common Action: A Stronger Europe'. The word 'shared' epitomises the common wish to grow together, promoting peace, security and democracy. It also promotes working together and sharing responsibilities for safeguarding those values and instilling them in the new generations.

As clearly indicated in the Global Strategy, the EU aims to 'foster the resilience of its democracies, and live up to the values that have inspired its creation and development'.

The EEAS' declared intention to 'encourage cross-fertilisation' with 'regional and international organisations, civil society, academia, think tanks and the private sector' is a step in the right direction. And the reference to a blend of traditional ways ('dialogue, cooperation and support') and innovative formats ('exchanges, embedded personnel and joint facilities, harnessing knowledge and creativity') is very promising in terms of capacity and capability building.

At the same time there is a need to:

- equally, and objectively, address any weaknesses and lack of strategy and vision;
- seek cohesion, coherence and ensure continuity, preventing PD players and specialists in branding from merely thinking wishfully and then being satisfied with scattered actions.

In this context, a very important element to take into account is digital technology, which has provided the capacity to penetrate much deeper diplomatically. There is no doubt that policy makers need to be 'educated' to the digital world, since the future lies in the appropriate use of the new technologies.

⁹ Whitman, Jim (2005) *The Limits of Global Governance*. Routledge.

Like in many other fields, professionals are obliged to reflect on how to achieve their goals and reshape their organisation according to the rapid technological developments, having due regard to:

- Driving forces of influence operating through the digital world;
- The different audiences, and in particular younger generations, that gain access to information sooner, especially through the use of social networks.

Inspiration could be drawn from national practice, joint institutional/MS initiatives and transnational cooperation (progress made in bilateral sharing actions which have provided random, but crystal-clear successes):



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'Diplohack' transparency hackathon – Brussels, 29/30 April 2016. Dutch Presidency introduces the Brussels 24h event in the EU Council Press Room.

- UK's campaign 'Bringing Foreign Policy Home' (based on the concept 'Better World, Better Britain') carried out in 2007-2008, focusing on global governance as well as on specific issues such as anti-terrorism, conflict prevention and environmental goals;
- public diplomacy strategies in EU Member States (Denmark, Sweden) and candidate countries (Montenegro);
- new practices which are quite forward-looking in terms of openness, inclusiveness and expertise sharing, such as 'hackathons';
 - a successful first experience in Sweden in 2014;
 - a joint UK/Sweden event of this kind organised in early 2016;
 - a 'Diplohack2' organised in Brussels by the Council of the EU and the Dutch Presidency in April 2016;
- bilateral collaboration in the cultural field such as between a) Denmark and Egypt; b) Bulgaria and Tunisia; c) Germany and Afghanistan;
- the correlation between Cultural Diplomacy and Cultural Exchange: the British Council and the Korean Cultural Centre;
- reputation management models applied in third countries by governments and by independent organisations – or jointly;
- analysis and evaluation carried out by national governmental communication academies.

Another important element to take into account is the tangible and also symbolic value of the work of single charismatic figures:

- the Pope in his struggle for transparency, against inequalities, and for the humblest and weakest;
- Malala Yousafzai, the Pakistani activist fighting the Taliban for the right of children to be educated and for women's role in society;
- Nelson Mandela's heritage as a need for reconciliation, peace and human rights recognition and protection.¹⁰

But a remarkable quality step forward would be the progress in cooperation between public communication and external professional networks and social multipliers, some of which are already fully engaged. This field should be further explored and developed, since it amplifies public diplomacy's scope, outreach and perspectives.

The Global Strategy refers to the fact that the EU is ready to act as a 'responsible global stakeholder', but it also underlines that 'responsibility must be shared and requires investing in our partnerships.'¹¹ Wider exchanges of information on Public Diplomacy practice among the EU's Delegations worldwide as well as between them and national governments, would certainly have a positive impact on cooperation.

Cultural events and educational exchanges are then *de facto* recognised (though not unanimously) as major public diplomacy opportunities. Such major events or large-scale programmes can be catalysers for great branding campaigns of remarkable impact:

- Copenhagen UNCCC Conference (Cop-15) on Climate Change in 2009
- Chopin's Anniversary campaign in Poland in 2011
- Croatia's EU membership referendum campaign in 2012-2013
- Greece cultural 'relief' campaign to promote the country during the attempt to recover from the economic crisis
- Paris UNCCC Conference (Cop-21) on Climate Change in 2015 (and the follow-up ratification)
- Milan Universal Expo 'Feeding the Planet, Energy for Life' in 2015
- the European Year for Development (EYD) 2015
- Scotland's image-promotion campaign during the ongoing reflection following the UK referendum on the EU
- this year's celebration of the 60th Anniversary of the Rome Treaties
- the Erasmus experience.

¹⁰ USC news (2014) 'Top 10 public diplomacy stories of 2013 reveal global trends'. 21st January, <https://news.usc.edu/58392/top-10-public-diplomacy-stories-of-2013-reveal-global-trends%20> (16 March 2017).

¹¹ European Union Global Strategy (2016) 'Shared Vision, Common Action: A Stronger Europe – A Global Strategy for the European Union's Foreign And Security Policy'. June 2016, http://eeas.europa.eu/archives/docs/top_stories/pdf/eugs_review_web.pdf (16 March 2017).

This multi-faceted approach is clearly indicating the way forward. The EU's Global Strategy suggests developing the EU's external action through a comprehensive plan. The inclusive road proposed is multi-disciplinary: covering 'energy, cultural and economic diplomacy'.

The word 'diplomacy' has taken on another connotation that differs significantly from its traditional understanding. Finally, a new concept has been coined: 'climate diplomacy' (since Paris UN Climate Change Conference COP 21), which in HR Mogherini's view defines the new path 'to reach out to our partners, to the general public, to the business community, and to civil society organisations'.

As a matter of fact, it is inevitable for Public Diplomacy to expand its scope given the complexity of global relations (today we also hear the expression 'civil society diplomacy'). However, if on the one hand, the emergence of new players can enrich the scenario and multiply outreach, on the other hand it can open new challenges on ethics, trust and truth.¹²

Conclusion

Immediately after WWII, Albert Camus in his book 'The Plague' warned the reader that celebrating peace was not enough. Citizens had to build enough synergies and be vigilant in order to prevent further evil from returning. Similarly, William H. Auden in 1947 launched the reflection on a cultural state of disease, of insecurity and uncertainty about the future of humanity.

Today, more than ever in our new 'age of anxiety', Public Diplomacy counts! It is mirroring current trends¹³ and is much more capable of adapting to evolving societies than we give it credit for. This is indeed a very challenging field, where central governments of big and small countries, as well as regions, cities, international organisations and institutions, are all striving to shape their own specific dimension. 'Shape it before sharing it' ... and this global engagement requires a 'multitude of actors and networks'.¹⁴

Diplomacy serves a purpose: it is instrumental in achieving success. But today's strength of governments and international institutions such as the EU essentially lies in their use of public diplomacy utilising 'soft power', which relies on culture, values and policies. And this capacity requires investments and continuity!

¹² Siracusa, Joseph M. (2010) 'Diplomacy in the age of globalisation', in *Diplomacy - A Very Short Introduction*, Oxford Univ. Press.

¹³ Lukes, Steven (2005) 'Power and the Battle for Hearts and Minds' in *Millennium: Journal of International Studies* vol. 33; for PD 'as a communicative practice is not only a matter of projecting and controlling self-images abroad'. I would add that 'it is no longer' as such.

¹⁴ USC news (2014) 'Top 10 public diplomacy stories of 2013 reveal global trends', 21st January, <https://news.usc.edu/58392/top-10-public-diplomacy-stories-of-2013-reveal-global-trends> (16 March 2017).

In substance, public diplomacy is a must. Both the EU and its Member States should feel concerned and understand that this is no longer a game to be played before and after conflicts to show who is the most capable of exercising political influence over others. It has become an ongoing key task to inspire and share good values, appeal to full engagement as well as promote common sense and commitment to act through a wide spectrum of practices.

Public diplomacy can have a strong impact on international cooperation and in relations with all ranges of audiences and stakeholders, from the closest to the most remote. It can be the key feature of earning the reputation, as Simon Anholt put it, to become a 'country which does good for the world.'¹⁵

Horizons and deadlines will depend on geopolitical developments. Strategic communication and public diplomacy will be following a parallel path. And, most important, those who are not familiar with the new media landscape and keep hesitating to adapt will be increasingly unable to interact and deliver. Foreign ministries have no choice but to develop digital strategies if they are to survive. Behaviour change and capacity of quick adaptation will make all the difference.¹⁶



Vincenzo Le Voci, Secretary-General of the Club of Venice (network of communications directors from the European Union Member States, institutions and countries candidate to the accession) is an EU Council official since 1992. He has worked on Transparency and Information Policy issues since 2001 and is currently coordinating the work of the Working Party on Information. Within the EU Council Secretariat, he consolidated his experience by working for the Linguistic Division, Research and Development, Education and Culture and Staff Training Departments. Before reaching the EU framework in 1992 he worked in NATO as Housing Manager for the US Air Force (1985-1991). Le Voci writes on communication topics for books and magazines and gives lectures in communication faculties of universities EU-wide.

¹⁵ TED Talks (2014) 'Simon Anholt: Which country does the most good for the world?', June, https://www.ted.com/talks/simon_anholt_which_country_does_the_most_good_for_the_world (16 March 2017).

¹⁶ see also 'The Leaders' Report: the future of government communication', the WPP research into government communications launched on 17 January 2017 at the World Economic Forum in Davos <http://wpp.com/govtpractice/leaders-report> (16 March 2017).

The Balkans and the EU's Global Vision: uniting the public under a European perspective

Angelina Eichhorst

The EU Global Strategy – shared vision, common action

In June 2016, the European Union launched its Global Strategy on Foreign and Security Policy for the European Union. A core precept is that none of the countries in Europe has the strength or resources to seize the opportunities or address the threats of the 21st century on its own. When working together towards a stronger Union that is more responsive and more strongly united, Member States will collectively thrive. Alongside a core emphasis on security and defence, EU integration plays a central role. The Global Strategy recognises that a credible enlargement policy is a strategic investment in Europe's security and prosperity, and has already contributed to peace and stability in the Western Balkans moving far beyond the wars of the 1990s.

Effective communications and robust public diplomacy are essential for achieving the full integration of the Western Balkans into the EU. These efforts seek to ensure that perceptions in the Western Balkans – and also in Member States – reflect the realities of EU integration, particularly the clear and demonstrable economic, political, and social benefits that accrue through the integration process. For its part, the EU is focusing its key messages on how peoples' lives and opportunities are being made better through integration. As detailed here, we are actively working with Member States and host governments, engaging media and opinion leaders, countering disinformation, and utilising a range of communication to get the real story out to the citizens of the region.

Why the EU integration process matters

Through the Global Strategy, the EU Member States have made it clear that a credible EU accession process, grounded in strict and fair conditionality where modernisation and democratisation proceed in line with the accession criteria, is vital to enhance state and societal resilience in the region. EU integration is the best tool we have for bringing the Member States of Europe and the Western Balkans to the same table to forge common solutions so that all Europeans can live in peace, freedom and prosperity. The Global Strategy was announced shortly after the UK referendum on exiting the Union. While some asked how the EU can credibly proceed with the integration of new members on the one hand while a Member State was leaving the Union on the other, the UK's decision did not change the values of the Union, nor the Western Balkans' position in Europe – politically or geographically – and it certainly did not change the Strategy. On the contrary, any European State that respects and promotes the

values enshrined in the EU treaties may apply, and our partners in the Western Balkans have all chosen to move forward along the European path.

We recognise that a vital, real and tangible European perspective has been and remains the key driving force for irreversible political, economic and societal reform in the Western Balkans. The prospect and process of EU accession have powerful transformative effects, embedding positive change, providing increased economic and trade opportunities, and improving standard of living. EU integration helps to address broader shared challenges like migration, energy security, terrorism and organised crime. Within the region, the EU perspective and accession process create conditions that are conducive to good neighbourly relations. EU integration enables neighbours to exchange, communicate, cooperate, and collaborate to resolve disputes before they escalate. These are just some examples of why EU's doors are open to the whole of South East Europe. And why the Union remains fully committed to integrating the region and anchoring it firmly and sustainably in peace and stability.

Public opinion on EU enlargement

Given the long-term strategic interest in integrating the Western Balkans into the Union, the EU is paying increasing attention towards public opinion on the accession process and, in parallel, stepping up its engagement with the public. The interest of the peoples of the Western Balkans in joining the EU is strong and consistent. After a decade of external and domestic political challenges, unfulfilled expectations, and, for the first time, the prospect of a Member State leaving the Union, public opinion in each partner country remains remarkably steady. Surveys on support for EU membership in 2016 show popular support within 10 percent of levels reported in 2006 by similar survey questions.

Public support has wavered little despite timelines for accession having exceeded the expectations of the population of most partner countries. A Gallup Balkan Monitor Survey in 2009 asked 'In which year do you think [country] will be part of the European Union?'. Responses ranged from 2013 in Croatia to 2020 in Bosnia and Herzegovina. In Croatia, which signed its Stabilisation and Association Agreement in 2001 and originally aimed for accession in 2007, in 2009 the average Croatian respondent accurately predicted their country's membership date of 1 July 2013. The timelines for other partners differ from the target dates expected by their respective populations by a wide margin, yet they remain solidly supportive of EU membership.

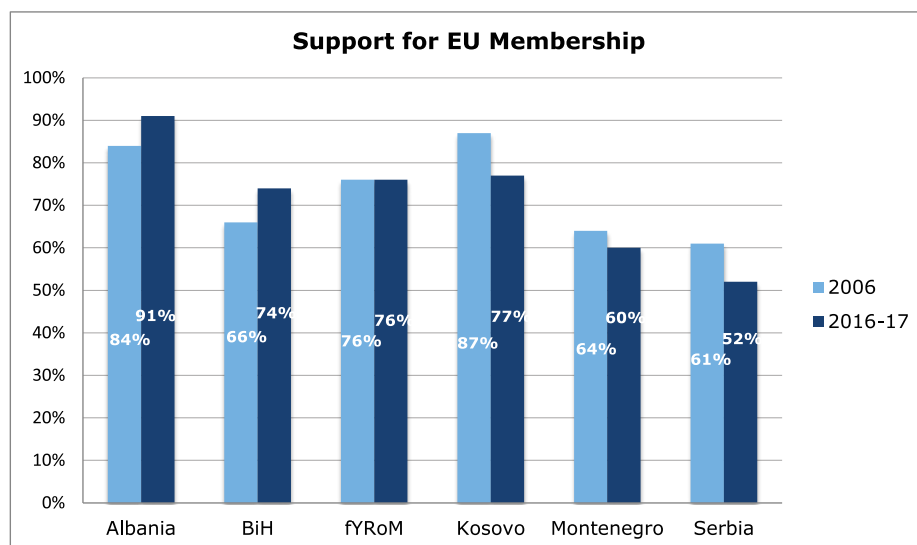


Table 1: Support for EU membership in Western Balkan partners, 2006 and 2016-17¹

In EU Member States, there is a wide range of views on further enlargement as shown by recent Eurobarometer surveys. While the interpretation of results is often focused on so-called 'enlargement fatigue', results also show support for enlargement among most of the newest EU Member States. These Member States, with recent experience with the transformative effects of European integration, have citizens who strongly support the same opportunities for others. This implies that, at least on an abstract level, citizens know that the EU matters and, critically, that it benefits them.

¹ 2006 data is from the Gallup Balkan Monitor Poll. Question: *Generally speaking, do you think [COUNTRY]'s membership of the European Union would be a good thing, a bad thing, or neither good nor bad?* Figure is percentage responding that membership is a good thing. 2016-2017 figures from individual EU Delegation polls in each partner. Questions were either *'Do you support [COUNTRY]'s membership in the EU?'* Or *'If a referendum on EU membership were held today, how would you vote?'* Figure is percentage yes. Gallup (2009) Gallup Balkan Monitor: Focus on Perceptions of the EU in the Western Balkans. <http://www.esiweb.org/enlargement/wp-content/uploads/2009/02/2009-Focus-on-perceptions-of-the-EU-in-the-Western-Balkans.pdf> (10 January 2017).

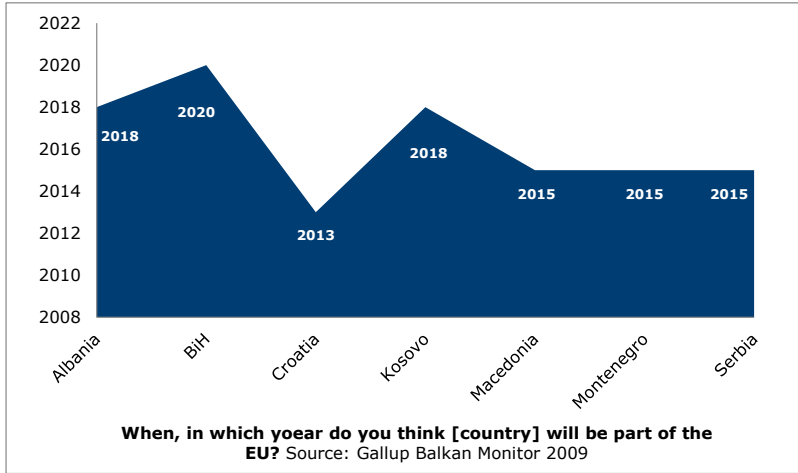


Table 2: Expectations for accession, 2009.²

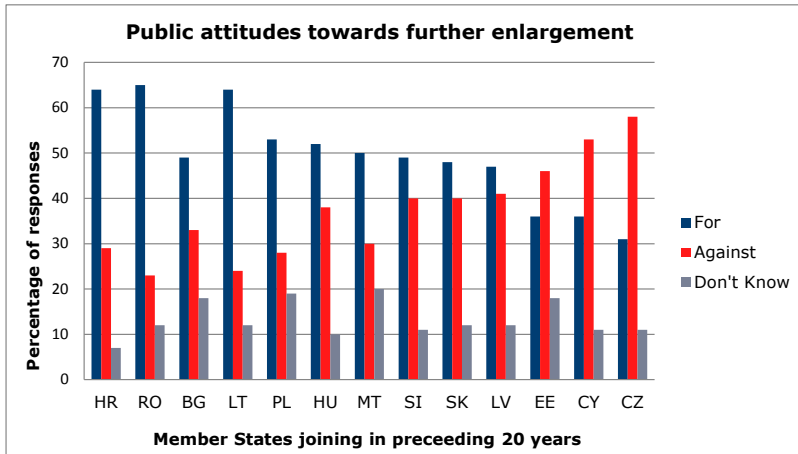


Table 3: Public attitude towards further enlargement³

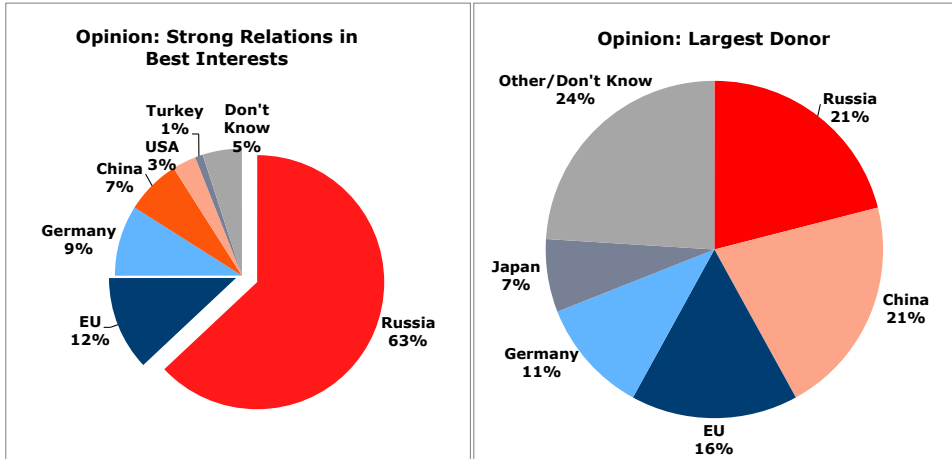
When EU support and citizen perceptions diverge

The EU is not alone in recognising the importance of engaging with partner countries in the Western Balkans. Other international actors also engage in efforts to increase their visibility and influence in the region, which can impact public opinion of the EU. Serbia, which has some of the highest volatility in terms of views on the EU, is a case in point. The country displays a wide discrepancy between opinion and reality on which partners provide

² Ibid. Gallup Balkan Monitor 2009.

³ Eurobarometer (2016) 'Standard 86 – Autumn 2016'. December, <http://ec.europa.eu/COMMFrontOffice/publicopinion/index.cfm/Survey/getSurveyDetail/instruments/STANDARD/surveyKy/2137> (17 August 2017).

support to the country. The EU's positive image has risen over time in parallel to rising EU visibility, such as the aftermath of the devastating floods in 2014 when the EU sent more than 800 relief workers and released 3 million Euro in humanitarian aid to help the most strongly affected communities in Serbia and Bosnia and Herzegovina. Yet public opinion retreated in subsequent years as the immediate emergency and media coverage waned. Concurrently, Russian-oriented media outlets expanded, including the establishment of web portals and radio programming, increasing the number of pro-Russian stories accessible to the public.



Tables 4/5: Serbian public opinion on largest donors and most important international relations⁴

When the Serbian public was asked in May 2017 who the largest donor in Serbia was, more than 21 percent said Russia and another 21 percent said China. The EU came third at 16 percent, followed by Germany and Japan. When asked to choose the one country with which maintaining strong relations serves Serbia's best interest, nearly two-thirds of respondents in 2015 chose Russia. Only 12 percent named the EU.

⁴ Ipsos (2017) 'Attitudes of Serbian citizens towards EU integration – III wave, May 2017' and Centre for Insights in Survey Research (2015) 'Serbia's interests are best served by maintaining strong relations with which one country?'. December.

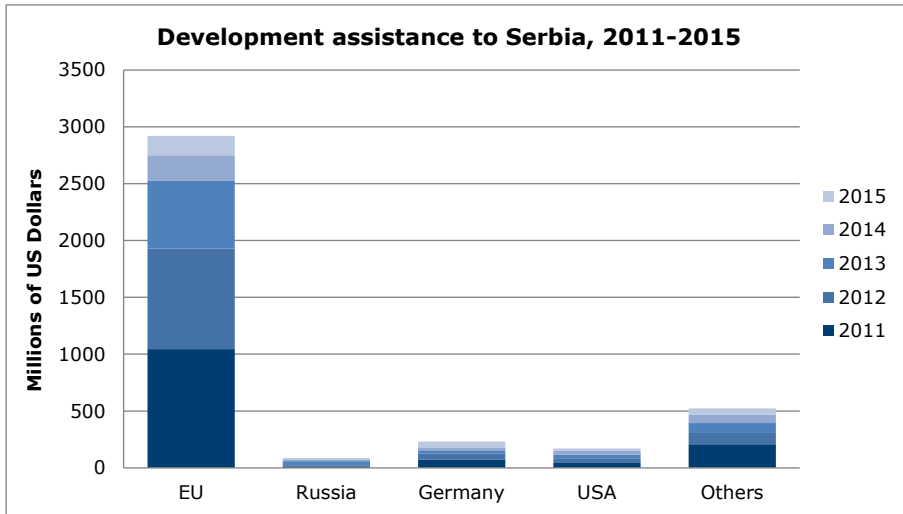


Table 6: Development assistance to Serbia⁵

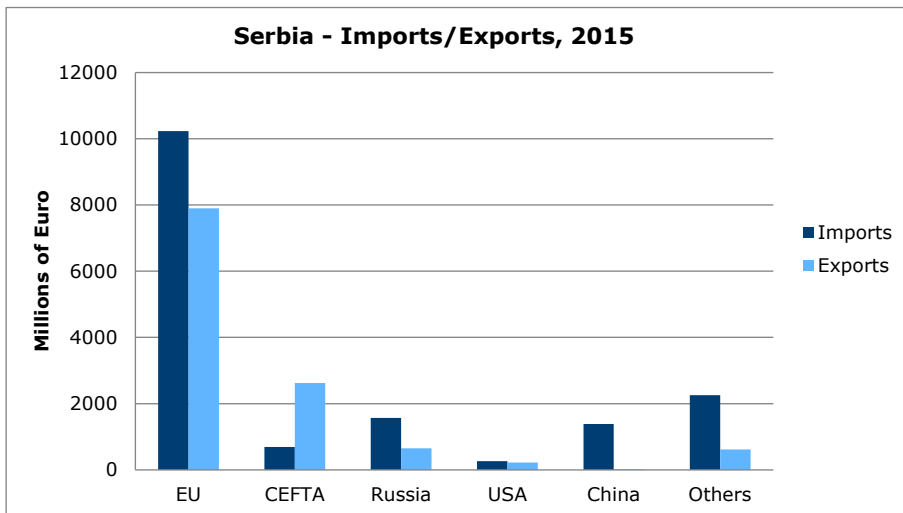


Table 7: Serbian imports and exports⁶

Yet according to OECD figures, the EU is by order of magnitude the largest donor of development aid to Serbia. In the five years ending in 2015, EU assistance of nearly 3

⁵ OECD (2017) 'Dataset: Aid (ODA) disbursements to countries and regions [DAC2a]'. <http://stats.oecd.org/qwids> (13 February 2017).

⁶ Statistical Office of the Republic of Serbia (2017) 'External Trade Database – Exports and Imports by Country of Destination/Origin'. <http://www.stat.gov.rs/WebSite/public/ReportView.aspx> (13 February 2017).

billion Euro was higher 33 times as compared to the 86 million Euro provided by Russia. Export/import figures also show a disproportionate balance of trade with the EU and with Russia or China.

Unlike the question posed in the survey, Serbia does not have to choose only one relationship. Russia and the EU are not an either/or choice. The EU, on the strength of figures, is the largest partner for trade and development in Serbia, and generates opportunities for jobs, growth, and investment far beyond any other partner. This is the real story to be told.

Enhancing public diplomacy on EU enlargement

More work is required to ensure citizens, both inside and outside of the EU, fully understand and recognise what the EU does and how it improves citizens' well-being. The Western Balkans Six are part of Europe, and their peoples share the values of the European Union. We need to work harder on making clear the benefits of EU accession and of shared security, along with those of strengthened rule of law, human rights and free expression, in order to build modern democratic societies in the heart of Europe.

Public diplomacy and effective communication is much more than highlighting project results or proclaiming EU values – it is listening to the interests and concerns and answering any questions EU Member States and enlargement countries, their citizens, business communities and civil society organisations may have. It also means engaging in dialogue to build common understanding. And explaining in a straightforward manner how the enlargement process works and its positive implications for people's lives. When citizens understand why the EU matters, we expect public and democratic support to motivate political decision-makers to proceed deeper and faster with significant, irreversible reforms with the power to transform countries. We have seen the strength of this drive already in the region, for example in the public's clear demand for fair and transparent justice in Albania.

Focused public diplomacy is particularly important at a time of not only scepticism in some EU Member States towards further enlargement, but also of external challenges such as migration or increasing Russian influence in the region. This is why EU institutions, the Member States, as well as governments and civil society in countries on the path to full EU membership, all need to focus on key messages and speak with one voice. There is now a common and compelling EU narrative with a clear vision of what the EU is aiming to achieve in South East Europe with each partner, and why.

Providing clarity to citizens and decision-makers

Focusing media attention and raising public awareness require sustained efforts. More involvement and better coordination among the main players, notably EU institutions and Member States, but also the countries aspiring to EU membership and our implementing

partners, both in Brussels and on the ground. EU Delegations are now working more closely with EU Member State embassies on planning, joint messaging, and outreach. The EU is working toward better streamlining its messages and pulling together efforts and resources. Public understanding of the benefits of the EU, not only membership but also of the path towards it, encourages political leaders to pursue reforms with greater vigour.

Greater and better visibility of EU funding in the region is an essential step. The EU will provide the Western Balkans Six and Turkey with financial and technical assistance totalling 11.7 billion Euro between 2014 and 2020 through the Instrument for Pre-Accession. The EU will also spend up to 1 billion Euro to help investment in infrastructure and provide technical assistance for the 2014-2020 period in the Western Balkans, providing a strong boost for much-needed investment that can benefit all. In total, the EU is providing 13 billion Euro – this means almost 2 billion Euro per year. Such substantial assistance should improve living standards and create new opportunities for businesses and people alike. The funding is targeted in particular to areas such as economic growth and competitiveness, governance and public administration reform, and rule of law and fundamental rights. Highlighting the launch of EU-financed technical assistance for institution building or a budget support programme is not sufficient – there is a need to explain the reasons why and provide concrete examples that have an impact on everyday life. Bringing together communications experts and policy-makers at headquarter level and in the field, with Member States, partner governments, and implementing partners to develop a public diplomacy toolbox, including social media strategies and other outreach campaigns, will help to deliver these critical messages, but more importantly make them understood.

A broader EU effort is needed when it comes to countering disinformation about EU policies and objectives toward the region. Russian disinformation and misinformation in South East Europe is becoming an increasingly serious issue. The EEAS StratCom East Team provides a useful lesson here in addressing this challenge⁷. This team delivers a robust EU response to the challenge of identifying and countering pro-Kremlin disinformation and has achieved significant results. In 2016, more than 2,000 examples of disinformation were identified, coming from state media, extremist websites, government-organised NGOs, think tanks and trolls and targeting the West, Europe, the EU, its policies and politicians. The Disinformation Review and Digest newsletters, in Russian and English, highlight the disinformation and provide the facts to counter it. The products are read up to 20,000 times a week, including by Member State governments and security services, and its twitter account, EU Mythbusters, brings these facts to the general public in an easily accessible format. The Strategic Communications department in the EEAS is recruiting staff in 2017 specifically to cover the Western Balkans more effectively, based in part on the best practices of the East team.

⁷ See also Chapter 'StratCom: standing up to disinformation and reaching out to the EU's neighbours'.

Getting the message out

The EU is undertaking information campaigns and outreach at every level. At Commission level, the High Representative/Vice President Federica Mogherini's daily and extensive outreach, using a wide range of communication tools including her blog, explains top-tier EU foreign policy decisions and activities in straight-forward, understandable language for the general public. In addition, EU leaders maintain very active social media profiles, including on Twitter. In the 2017 Twiplomacy study⁸, an annual analytical review of performance, trends and connections on social media among world leaders and accounts, the EEAS Twitter account was the best-connected account among foreign ministries for the second consecutive year. The EU has also created easy-to-follow animated videos explaining complex topics such as stabilisation and association agreements, which have been posted on Vimeo and YouTube, and Delegations have also made them available in local languages. And we work robustly in order to counter disinformation, engaging the public via Twitter and opinion leaders through weekly newsletters.

In the region, our delegations working both independently and together with Member States, host governments and other partners, are actively promoting EU messages. The EU Delegation to the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia is undertaking a nation-wide information and educational campaign to run throughout 2017 under the slogan 'EU for YOU!'. The campaign features three segments on environment, human resources development, and economic development and includes both social media and advertising to multiply the impact of the messages, plus publications and numerous theme-based events for various target groups. Following an analysis of the available tools, the Delegation decided to invest more in social media outreach by opening a Facebook page and YouTube Channel.

Recent campaigns have featured television programmes on the EU, billboard campaigns, photo exhibitions, and film festivals. In Bosnia and Herzegovina, the Office of the EU Special Representative produced seven inspirational stories under the title 'Life in the Union' for a TV programme with an audience of 820,000 viewers. The ten-minute episodes focus on EU policies and practices seen through the experience of people from Bosnia and Herzegovina and the Western Balkans region living in EU Member States. Topics included: What is it like to live in the European Union? How easy is it for people living in the EU to start their own businesses? How different is it to study in the EU compared to studying in Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH)? How do consumer protection rights differ in the EU compared to those in BiH? Following the broadcasts, the videos were also made available online and shared through social media.

In Montenegro, a billboard campaign produced 20 billboards on EU assistance in different sectors, such as the rule of law, public administration reform and agriculture. The displays

⁸ Lüfkens, Matthias (2017) *Twiplomacy Study 2017*. <http://twiplomacy.com/blog/twiplomacy-study-2017> (11 July 2017).

not only informed the public of the significant levels of EU funding in the country, but gave clear examples of why particular projects are important for the people in the country. For example, the construction of modern radar stations along the coast will monitor vessel traffic and help avoid environmental disasters, upgrades to food safety laboratories make the food supply safer than ever, and safe houses for women serve victims of domestic violence. These beneficial projects were made possible through EU assistance. Displayed on the busiest streets in several Montenegrin cities, almost half of the population of Montenegro has seen these messages.

A 2016 EU Delegation campaign in Serbia highlighted the role of the EU as the largest donor (over 3 billion Euro in grants from EU pre-accession funds) and main trading partner to counter the misperceptions identified previously. Fourteen major events reached 142,000 people. A photo exhibition attracted more than 40,000 viewers in Belgrade and 1,000 in Niš. And the campaign reached more than 400,000 individuals on social media. In addition, 'Europe Days', film festivals and other cultural events in coordination with Member States have reached hundreds of thousands more, enhancing positive attitudes towards the EU throughout the region.

Public support for key messages

Accession to the EU offers the citizens of South East European countries opportunities, the right to travel and live throughout the continent, and greater freedom to shape their lives. The EU supports the development of a fair and transparent judiciary for all and the development of an efficient civil service. Membership of the Union improves the business climate and makes the Western Balkans more attractive to investors. The EU is already the main trading partner for Western Balkan countries and by far the biggest source of foreign direct investment. Better economic policies bring numerous benefits to the people and businesses across the region. They create new jobs and contribute to growth; improve predictability and confidence in the domestic market, stimulating local business and attracting foreign investment, and give local companies full access to the largest market in the world, with hundreds of millions of consumers.

With such a large impact on the lives of those living in prospective EU Member States, it is important for citizens to have sufficient influence on and ownership of the government actions leading to EU integration. The Civil Society Facility supports the development of a civil society which is participating actively in the public debate on democracy, human rights, social inclusion and the rule of law, and has the capacity to influence policy- and decision-making.

Open public debate should be the rule, not the exception. More needs to be done to engage local populations and build the understanding of what EU membership brings and, equally, what the accession process itself brings to people of the region and Europe as a whole. Such an effort will allow voters to realise that benefits do not materialise only

upon the date of accession, but accumulate throughout the accession process. This in turn motivates political leaders to advance reforms and their full implementation to meet democratic demands. The EU must also endeavour to explain to EU citizens the benefits of incorporating the Western Balkans firmly into the European Union.

EU support for and cooperation with partners in the accession process 'must deliver concrete benefits today, and must be communicated well.'⁹ The enlargement policy continues to deliver results and the process is moving forward in most countries, albeit at varying speeds. The people of the Western Balkans want to join. They are already experiencing some of the benefits integration brings. Making sure that messages about this positive future are heard and understood is a central part of the joint work we are doing together with our partners in the region to make its integration into the European Union a reality.



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⁹ European Union Global Strategy (2016) 'Shared Vision, Common Action: A Stronger Europe – A Global Strategy for the European Union's Foreign And Security Policy'. June 2016, http://eeas.europa.eu/archives/docs/top_stories/pdf/eugs_review_web.pdf (16 March 2017).

More Europe for South East Europe: changing perceptions towards enlargement

Ivana Đurić

Currently 48 percent of citizens support membership of the European Union (EU) in Serbia. The strongest support – 67 percent – was registered in May 2008, the month during which the Eurovision Song Contest was held in Belgrade. Since 2002, when the Serbian European Integration Office (SEIO)¹ began conducting biannual public opinion surveys on the European orientation of citizens, this figure has been as high only once – in December 2009, after visas for travelling to the Schengen area were abolished for Serbians.

Although these two events seemingly have nothing in common, both figures tell us the same thing: When there is more Europe around us, we are more European. Whether it is a Europe embodied in something that seemingly does not have a wider social significance, such as a music contest, or the result of the then first-class policy of the Government of the Republic of Serbia, which was ready to fulfil all required conditions. This ultimately prompted Brussels to open the doors for visa-free travel of its citizens to most countries of the European Union. The citizens have, insofar as this is borne out by our observations, recognised this and respond with a sense of belonging, which always implies acceptance of the values of the surrounding environment.

The example of Serbia also largely illustrates the attitude of citizens towards the EU in other countries in South East Europe (SEE) from the onset of the process of European integration, although most support levels were even higher (76 percent in Montenegro², 77 percent in Macedonia³, 85 percent in Albania in 2013⁴, in Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH) 76 percent⁵, while in Moldova it was somewhat lower – 41 percent⁶).

¹ Since June 2017 Ministry of European Integration of the Republic of Serbia.

² Delegation of the European Union to Montenegro (2017) 'Opinion poll: continuous rise in support for Montenegro's EU accession'. 17 January, <http://www.delme.ec.europa.eu/code/navigate.php?Id=3782> (16 June 2017).

³ Damjanovski, Ivan (2017) 'Analysis of public opinion on Macedonia's accession process to the European Union (2014-2016)'. IDSCS, 20 February, <http://idscs.org.mk/en/2017/02/20/nalysis-of-public-opinion-on-macedonias-accession-process-to-the-european-union-2014-2016> (16 June 2017).

⁴ Çela, Alba (2013) The European Perspective of Albania – Perceptions and Realities 2013. Albanian Institute of International Studies, Tirana, <http://www.aiis-albania.org/sites/default/files/The%20European%20Perspective%20of%20Albania%202013.pdf> (16 June 2017).

⁵ Direkcija za evropske integracije [Direction for European Integration] (2016) 'Ispitivanje javnog mnijenja u BiH' [Survey on public opinion in BiH]. Research Plus, April 2016.

⁶ NDI (2015) 'Public Perceptions of Politics and Government – Findings from Recent Survey Research in Moldova'. November 2015, <https://www.ndi.org/moldova-November-2015-survey-results> (16 June 2017).

EU accession as an instrument of democratisation

Since the early 2000s, and particularly since the Thessaloniki Summit held 14 years ago, a green light has been flashing for a European future based on the individual progress of each country in the region. The more rapidly a certain SEE country implements internal changes and improves its economy and society, simultaneously harmonising its legal system with EU acquis, the closer it comes to EU membership. Accession has from the very beginning been an instrument of state democratisation and modernisation, while the progress achieved in this area is measured on the basis of parameters that should be clear and transparent to governments – and even more significantly – to citizens.

The enlargement policy, embodied in European integration, has been the impetus for reform in each country in the region and has brought concrete results. Slovenia was the first South East European country to join the EU, with the exception of Greece, followed by Bulgaria and Romania in 2007, while Croatia became a member in 2013. Other South East European countries like Albania, Montenegro, Serbia and Macedonia have the status of candidates for membership, while Bosnia and Herzegovina and Kosovo* are potential candidates.

However, since the onset of the global economic crisis, especially since 2010 when the focus of concern switched from the private to the public sector and the solvency of the governments became an issue of great importance, accession day was postponed to a more distant future. The refugee crisis with its challenges and implications for the EU and several countries in SEE took centre stage.

In parallel, Daesh terrorist attacks in Europe and the EU response to the issue have echoed in the region, taking into account the implications that the fight against terrorism may have on, for example, free travel of citizens to the Schengen area, both for those who already enjoy that freedom and those who aspire to attain it.

In addition, the UK's decision to leave the Union has relegated enlargement, one of the EU's most successful policies, firmly to the back burner. Although for the time being it seems that Brexit had a powerful effect on bringing EU Member States together around the idea of preserving the Union and its achievements, it had an overall dampening effect on the region's aspirations for membership. The local public followed the Brexit debate during the campaign and the assertions of Brexit supporters that five countries – Albania, Macedonia, Montenegro, Serbia and Turkey – would join the EU until 2020. The counterargument of then British Prime Minister David Cameron sounded as a verdict, even if it was not far from reality – that those five are not going to join the EU any time soon and that their admission to the Union, once they have fulfilled all criteria,

* This designation is without prejudice on status, and is in line with the UNSCR 1244/1999 and the ICJ Opinion on the Kosovo declaration of independence. This footnote applies to the whole text.

will be subject to a UK veto and a veto by each of the other 27 EU Member States. From that perspective an earlier statement of European Commission President Jean-Claude Juncker from 2014, which shocked the public in the region because he said that 'under my presidency of the commission, ongoing negotiations will continue ... but no further enlargement will take place over the next five years'⁷, seemed encouraging, although it looked and sounded different at the time.



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Street art in Brussels 'The future is Europe' implying that there is no alternative to the EU.

Is there an alternative?

Therefore, from the perspective of the general public in this region of Europe, it seems justified to say that the enlargement process has almost come to a complete stop. Recently, Slovak Foreign Minister and former High Representative in BiH Miroslav Lajčák, openly said that 'we are not doing what we promised to the Western Balkans. That region has not been on the agenda of the EU Council of Ministers for as long as two years...'⁸

Moreover, theories have been published in the media with increasing frequency, alleging that the European Union has an alternative in the Western Balkans in the form of closer cooperation with Russia, which is for example Serbia's key partner in achieving energy stability⁹, or with Turkey, which as a regional power has

⁷ Juncker, Jean Claude (2014) 'A New Start for Europe: My Agenda for Jobs, Growth, Fairness and Democratic Change – Political Guidelines for the next European Commission'. Opening Statement in the European Parliament Plenary Session, 15 January, Strasbourg, https://ec.europa.eu/commission/sites/beta-political/files/juncker-political-guidelines-speech_en_0.pdf (16 June 2017)

⁸ Numanović, Sead (2017) 'Ekskluziv – Miroslav Lajčák: Politika utječe na pravosuđe u BiH [Exclusive – Miroslav Lajčák: Politics influences the judiciary in BiH]'. Interview with Miroslav Lajčák, Dnevni Avaz, 24 March, <http://www.avaz.ba/clanak/283444/ekskluziv-miroslav-lajcak-politika-utjece-na-pravosuđe-u-bih?url=clanak/283444/ekskluziv-miroslav-lajcak-politika-utjece-na-pravosuđe-u-bih> (16 June 2017).

⁹ Pavlović, Vladimir (2016) 'Mitovi o Evropskoj Uniji [Myths about the European Union]'. Republic of Serbia, Serbian European Integration Office. http://www.seio.gov.rs/upload/documents/publikacije/mitovi_o_eu.pdf (03 May 2017).

been expanding its political, cultural and economic influence since 2000. The TIKA report (Turkish Cooperation and Coordination Agency) on Turkish development assistance for 2014 states that of a total of approximately 3.6 billion US Dollars (ca. 3.3 billion Euro) in that year, a sum of 133.8 million US Dollars (approximately 122.6 million Euro) was given to the countries of the Western Balkans and Eastern Europe. Bosnia and Herzegovina is the single largest beneficiary and in the top ten recipients of Turkish aid with 43.5 million US Dollars (ca. 40 million Euro), while similar projects in the field of education and strengthening cultural ties were implemented in Macedonia, Serbia, Moldova, Montenegro and Kosovo*. Furthermore, Turkey is also a significant investor in this part of Europe – 50 Turkish companies invested about 113 million US Dollars (ca. 104 million Euro) in Serbia, about 81 million US Dollars (approximately 74 million Euro) in BiH, around 340 million US Dollars (ca. 312 million Euro) in Kosovo*. At the same time, much more was invested in three EU countries – two billion US Dollars (ca. 1.8 billion Euro) in Bulgaria, more than six billion US Dollars (ca. 5.5 billion Euro) in Romania, in which 7,000 Turkish companies operate, while they invested about 430 million (approximately 395 million Euro) in Croatia.¹⁰

This is also reflected in the attitude of Serbians who have a distorted image of reality. Although significant European aid is transparent and the public is being constantly informed about it through various media channels, almost continuously since 2010 Russia has been regarded as a major donor in public opinion polls whereas in reality the biggest donor is the European Union. In the period 2000-2015 it assisted Serbia with nearly three billion Euro.¹¹

It should also be noted that public perceptions within the EU and the countries of South East Europe have changed and that the previous keys to success, i.e. conditionality, are no longer seen as convincing. Indeed, EU citizens are not convinced that candidate countries have sufficiently embraced European standards and values, while the EU itself does not attempt to influence public opinion in the Member States that are almost always consistently opposed to enlargement – most of all in Austria, Germany, the Netherlands and France.¹²

According to a Eurobarometer survey conducted in September 2016, 52 percent of respondents at EU level did not agree with the statement that a new enlargement would happen at some point in the future. In Austria, this question was answered in the same way by 71 percent of the population, 68 percent in Germany, 65 in France, while a more positive attitude towards the issue of expansion was recorded in countries that joined the EU in

¹⁰ Turkish Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 'Balkans'. <http://www.mfa.gov.tr/sub.en.mfa?91541430-f1dd-41d0-b6eb-e1a6cc3e556b> (16 June 2017).

¹¹ SEIO (2016) 'European orientation of Serbian citizens'. Public Opinion Poll, December, http://www.seio.gov.rs/upload/documents/nacionalna_dokumenta/istrazivanje_javnog_mnjenja/opinion_poll_december_16.pdf (03 May 2017).

¹² Eurobarometer (2016) 'Standard 85 – Spring 2016'. July, <http://ec.europa.eu/commfrontoffice/publicopinion/index.cfm/Survey/getSurveyDetail/instruments/STANDARD/yearFrom/1974/yearTo/2016/surveyKy/2130> (31 August 2017).

the latest wave of enlargement. In Bulgaria, less than one-third of respondents opposed enlargement, namely 29 percent, in Romania 28 percent, while in Croatia 33 percent.

Bearing in mind such a geopolitical context, the results of public opinion surveys in South East Europe show clear trends. Even though support for EU integration continues to exist at levels varying from high to balanced, citizens' fears about the future of the EU are also present in this part of Europe, along with lacking confidence in the political elite and in the media. For example, according to a public opinion survey carried out by the Serbian European Integration Office (SEIO) over the course of December 2016, only 19 percent of Serbian citizens said that the EU would overcome the current challenges, that it would continue to expand and that it had a bright future. In comparison, EU citizens were much more optimistic – in December 2016 the Eurobarometer survey showed that around half of Europeans in 21 Member States said they were optimistic about the future of the EU.

The reason is that EU citizens have 'more Europe'.

How to obtain 'more Europe'?



More Europe for everybody

In order to maintain and further strengthen full membership perspective in SEE countries, the Berlin process, initiated in 2014, outlines a roadmap towards greater regional integration, especially in the areas of economy, connectivity, civil society and youth. As stated in an article written by Alida Vračić: 'The EU must reinforce its role on a very practical level, show more flexibility in foreign policy mechanisms and

improve economic governance beyond the Berlin Process agenda [...] Equally important is to highlight the necessity for the EU to look for correspondingly sophisticated policy tools to be introduced in the region that will deepen the European contexts and reaffirm a European future for the citizens in the region. In a time when people in the [Western Balkans] feel profoundly disconnected from their political leaders, this might be the key push factor.'¹³

¹³ Vračić, Alida (2016) 'Turkey's Role in the Western Balkans'. SWP Research Papers, December, https://www.swp-berlin.org/fileadmin/contents/products/research_papers/2016RP11_vcc.pdf (03 May 2017).

The signature of the Transport Community Treaty at the 2017 Western Balkan Summit in Trieste has significantly expanded the area in which South East Europe has truly become part of united Europe – the Energy Community Treaty for South East Europe, the Open Sky Agreement, the Agreement on Free Trade in the Western Balkans and an agreement on visa facilitation and readmission already in place and applied for years have already contributed to a better quality of life for citizens.

The promotion of the European Union can only be successful if the positive results of European policies are highlighted, not forgetting domestic ones in the context of EU accession being conducted by the political elite in the region. Communication strategies, such as key documents and a framework for communication activities, exist in almost all countries in the region, and most are carried out on the basis of action plans defined by governments with significant support from the EU Delegations and EU information centres operating in the region.

But without the clear commitment of governments in the region, reflected in changes that better the life of citizens, and without clear EU support for these changes, there can be no strengthening of the EU's role. This role should provide crucial assistance in two highly important areas for the citizens in SEE countries: the fight against corruption and the rule of law. Rule of law is also a fundamental value on which the EU is founded. According to the criteria to be fulfilled in the accession process, countries aspiring to join the EU need to establish and promote from an early stage the proper functioning of the core institutions that ensure the rule of law.

The main narrative of communication

Therefore, the rule of law should be the main narrative of communication in countries across the region, not forgetting that the citizens themselves have identified it as being of the greatest importance for them personally and for society as a whole. We find a good example of this thinking in Serbia, where the fight against corruption with 16 percent and judicial reform with 14 percent top the list of reforms that citizens consider essential on account of these areas having the biggest impact on their daily lives.

Not only is the rule of law an essential prior condition for peace, security and prosperity, but it also reinforces the social and economic strength and capacities of a country, and has a powerful transformative effect on society. A well-functioning judiciary that is independent, effective, transparent, accountable and accessible helps improve the quality of people's lives. The prevention and fight against corruption improves economic conditions and prosperity. Rule of law is crucial for a stable business environment, for ensuring that economic operators benefit from legal certainty, for supporting consumers and boosting investment, jobs and growth.

The main message should be that accession to the EU is the way to ensure that these and other civil rights can be exercised more efficiently.

On the other hand, it is not sufficient to provide only facts about the activities of all institutions taking part in the process of European integration or to answer questions about 'what EU money is spent on'. Today, the depiction of reality in most regional media is not sufficiently grounded in fact. Hence a campaign of truthful presentation of the results achieved does not suffice in the face of a tsunami of shallow reporting and fabricated myths offering half-truths and deceptions regarding both achievements and aspirations, especially when it comes to the reason why something has been done.

The impact and role of the media

In order to create the possibility for citizens to understand what we are talking about when referring to EU values, especially for the young to whom the future of Europe and the European Union belongs, we must, as an essential precondition, strengthen media freedom, freedom of expression and the overall advancement of media literacy. What information is to be presented depends on what the media and the general public consider news or newsworthy. For example, over the years about 60 percent of the Serbian population has claimed that the reason for the low awareness of issues relating to European integration is mostly due to 'not having an interest' in the topic. A much lower percentage of respondents is 'blaming' the media and the government. According to an analysis of media reporting on EU topics, conducted by the SEIO in 2016, there were 19,809 media reports dealing with a range of topics relating to daily politics, accession negotiations, reform processes, stands on Kosovo* in the EU context, relations with Russia, EU funds, including relevant analysis and commentary. The attitude towards the topics was predominantly neutral, namely 62 percent; 26 percent of the reports were positive, and nine percent took a critical approach, with only three percent being negative.

In another interesting example from BiH, an analysis of the prevailing narrative in the press and online media in that country on topics relating to European integration was conducted and published under the title 'Invisible Europe: Media Representation of European Integration in Bosnia and Herzegovina' by Lejla Turčilo and Belma Buljubašić¹⁴. The analysis has shown that 'the topics about the European Union are not the major focus of the print and online media in Bosnia and Herzegovina [...] Predominantly, the very process is being discussed, not its consequences. Journalists reporting on EU related topics take a neutral stance which is often the result of a shallow approach rather than the editor's decision or attitude.'

Another conclusion drawn from that analysis is the public perception that EU accession is mostly dependent on EU actors and their agreements with the Bosnian political elite, and not really on concrete reforms and improving living conditions.

¹⁴ Turčilo, Lejla and Buljubašić, Belma (2016) *Nevidljiva Evropa: Medijska slika evropskih integracija u Bosni i Hercegovini – Analiza dominantnih narativa u izvještavanju printanih i online medija u BiH o evropskim integracijama [Invisible Europe: Media picture of the European Integration in Bosnia and Herzegovina – Analysis on dominant narratives in the research of print and online media in BiH on European integration]*. Heinrich-Böll-Stiftung, Sarajevo, https://ba.boell.org/sites/default/files/mediji_i_evropska_unija.pdf (03 May 2017).

A similar analysis was conducted earlier in Montenegro and its results were presented in the publication 'Europe here and there'.¹⁵ In October 2012, during the election campaign, Nataša Ružić and Andrijana Rabrenović found out that the media coverage of EU topics was extensive but that the quality of reporting was poor. The most valuable aspect was that information was up-to-date; it mainly concerned statements by political actors and provided short news on formal and technical events in the integration process. The authors pointed out that 'more profound reporting which could explain the citizens of Montenegro what the accession to the EU will bring and what the process of the European integration is all about are missing.'¹⁶

These examples show that media are very important in shaping the public opinion on EU integration, but more so as a communication channel for relaying messages of the main political and social actors than as a channel for contributing to the provision of high quality information to citizens. The role of journalists is to initiate debates between government authorities, the non-governmental sector, the academic community and citizens, and to create topics and discuss them based on arguments in an understandable and clear language, not following political agendas, regardless of whether they come from Brussels or governments in the region.

An open debate about the benefits and costs of EU integration would help citizens to better understand the process of accession, as much as the coverage of success stories from the daily life of ordinary people who have seen some of the benefits. It is also important that media owners grasp their responsibility for the professional development of journalists and enabling them to conduct proper research and explore topics of interest for the general public.

It is essential to understand that the issue of media reporting on EU integration should not be analysed in isolation from the way journalists write or talk about other important social and political topics. For this reason, one of the EU political priorities is to support media freedom and the right to access to information. As stated in the background paper¹⁷ 'Media freedom in the Western Balkans' by the authors Florian Bieber and Marko Kmezić, 'the performance of the media in the Balkans disappoints, and the fear is that democracy in the region will disappoint as well [...] Without the ability to access and exchange information, without fearless fact-finding and the exposure of potentially uncomfortable truths, and without debates that allow

¹⁵ Valić Nedeljković, Dubravka and Kleut, Jelena (2013) *Evropa, tamo i ovde – Analiza diskursa o evropeizaciji u medijima Zapadnog Balkana [Europe, there and here – Analysis of Europeanisation in the media of the Western Balkans]*. Philosophical Faculty, Novi Sad, <http://odsek.medijiskestudije.org/wp-content/uploads/2011/03/Europe-Here-and-There.pdf> (05 May 2017).

¹⁶ wbc-rti.info, 'Europe, Here and There: Analysis of Europeanisation Discourse in the Western Balkans Media'. <https://wbc-rti.info/object/project/11956> (16 June 2017).

¹⁷ This background paper was written for the Civil Society component of the Vienna Western Balkans Summit 2015.

for critical and diverse points of view, the democratic standing of a country is forfeited¹⁸ for all important social issues equally, including communicating Europe.

Who communicates the European Union in South East Europe?

Finally, we have to answer the question of which institutions communicate the European Union in South East Europe.

Firstly, the European Union is communicated through the Member States. The public in the region often sees the EU exclusively through the prism of those states – no matter what the issue is, should it be migration, terrorism or economic situation – in the same way as these issues are seen and communicated by Germany, Austria, UK, Greece, France, Hungary, Italy, etc.

Secondly, there are the institutions of the European Union, e.g. the European Commission and European Parliament. The European External Action Service (EEAS), together with the EU diplomatic service, assists the High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy. The Strategic Communications Division ('StratCom') as part of the EEAS coordinates the efforts to enhance the public diplomacy aspects of EU diplomacy and communicate the external and security policy of the Union.¹⁹ Together with different EU institutions, the Division works on projects and promotes key EU policies and values such as human dignity, freedom, democracy, and equality, even beyond EU borders. The StratCom makes recommendations and supports the EU network consisting of 140 delegations and offices around the world, and missions and operations in which the EU participates.

A new communication approach, driven by the changes that have occurred in recent years, has contributed to the consolidation of EU communication policy within the Union to improve its functioning in South East Europe – providing information and disseminating facts, along with strengthening public diplomacy elements as well as better coordination of all communication activities linked to two main messages: the first is that EU doors remain open to all countries in the region and the second one relating to development assistance (the EU remains the biggest donor in the region). The EU Delegations in the region are implementing an entire range of communication projects to this end – from campaigns for green economy to the protection of consumers' rights, grants to media and non-governmental organisations, professional training of journalists and media trips, along with support for libraries, the academic community and other multipliers.

¹⁸ Bieber, Florian and Kmezić, Marko (2015) 'Media Freedom in the Western Balkans'. Background Paper, Vienna Western Balkans Summit, <http://www.biepag.eu/wp-content/uploads/2016/10/BIEPAG-Media-Freedom-in-the-Western-Balkans.pdf> (03 May 2017).

¹⁹ See also chapter 'StratCom: standing up to disinformation and reaching out to the EU's neighbours'.

Finally, and equally responsibly, the European Union is communicated by the governments of candidate countries and potential candidate countries. One of the biggest national challenges in each of these countries is assuming this important responsibility. Clearly, the sense that the accession process does not specifically lie in the opening and closing of negotiating chapters or in anticipating the annual progress report of the European Commission, but above all in achieving the only real goal of European integration that is transforming a country into a modern and prosperous society in which citizens have high standards of living while observing the rule of law.

The biggest responsibility of governments in communicating the EU integration, above and beyond providing information about the accession process and promoting of European values, is creating conditions that are conducive to open public debate on the activities related to the achievement of a greater degree of alignment with the EU. In addition to the government – at central and local level alike – and political parties, the media and civil sector also play an important role in this communication effort.

With regard to the way in which the system of communication is regulated at all levels of government, in Montenegro, for example, the government has adopted the 'Strategy for informing the public on the European Union' and preparation for EU membership for the period 2010-2018, aiming at fostering better understanding of citizens of commitments as well as the responsibilities and benefits that Montenegro has and will receive on account of the integration process. The strategy is implemented by a Consultative Body, consisting of members of the working group who were involved in drawing up the strategy and the representative of the Delegation of the European Union. The body has been given a mandate to monitor the implementation of the Action Plan and to provide recommendations to the Operational structure. The Operational structure is composed of representatives of all parties engaged in Strategy implementation – relevant government agencies, representatives of the national parliament, associations of local governments and civil society. Each local government must designate at least one person responsible for the coordination of communication on EU matters. They aim to communicate the key message that Montenegro's EU accession will improve the quality of life of all citizens in different ways – from institutional reform and establishment of the rule of law, to a stronger economy, standards harmonisation and convergence in terms of quality of life.

In Bosnia and Herzegovina, aiming to achieve high quality and effective communication with the public on activities relating to EU integration, the Council of Ministers adopted a communication strategy in February 2009. It defines the communication principles, strategic goals and approach, target groups and key partners, addressees and messages, and communication tools. It represents the basis for planning and implementation of communication activities in the field of EU integration on an annual basis. Following the dynamics of the EU integration process in Bosnia and Herzegovina, especially the fact that in February 2016 it applied for full membership of the EU, an action plan for the

implementation of the communication strategy was adopted in 2017. It is interesting to note that out of 60 competent institutions invited to participate in drawing up this instrument for planning, monitoring and evaluation of communication on EU integration, 30 submitted valid proposals which were subsequently integrated into the action plan. Having in mind the pioneering effort to coordinate communication activities in this way in a country with a markedly fragmented institutional structure, it is important to underline that the planned activities are grouped in the fields of publishing, digital communication, public opinion research, competitions and contests, organisation of events and developing promotional material and that significant financing has been provided of more than 400,000 Euro.

The case of Serbia shows how the civil sector can be involved in membership negotiations as an interested party, but even more importantly as a promoter of European values. The public institution responsible for communicating the accession to the European Union is Ministry of European Integration. That ministry is also responsible for coordinating the implementation of Serbia's communication strategy in the process of accession to the European Union. A special segment of the document addresses the involvement of the civil society both in the integration process and negotiations, and in communicating these issues to citizens.

The concept of Serbia's National Convention on the European Union is particularly interesting²⁰ as it represents a permanent body for thematically structured debate on EU accession – with representatives of the state administration, political parties, non-governmental organisations, experts, trade unions and professional associations. The idea is to allow, in addition to regular consultations of all stakeholders and putting forth recommendations on negotiating positions of Serbia, a transparent and open dialogue and better informing of the public. The way in which the National Convention operates largely coincides with the initial idea of Živorad Kovačević, a former president of the European movement, who used to say that 'this approach would bring three main benefits: firstly, many structures of the society would be much better informed about EU integration and would raise to a higher level their own ability to master European issues and challenges. Secondly, state authorities would get broader basis for the accession process and thirdly, the negotiations with the EU would be significantly legitimized and democratized.'²¹

Finally, I would like to quote Milica Delević, a member of 'The Balkans in Europe Policy Advisory Group', who said in a presentation on the State and Prospects of EU integration of the Western Balkans region in October 2015: 'The most important thing though – do not rejoice at the crisis and the weakness of the EU and do not yearn for its failure and

²⁰ National Convent on the European Union, <http://eukonvent.org> (16 June 2017).

²¹ Ibid.

disintegration. It would not bring anything better. At the level of Europe, the EU is a peace and economic project, and at the level of region it represents an anchor, predictability and stability' [...] Instead, think how you would like Europe to be with our country in it.'²²

In May 2017, these words are even more meaningful than at the time they were uttered, and they apply equally to all countries in South East Europe. The above considerations conclusively demonstrate that EU communication in South East Europe should be a common concern and activity for both countries in the region and the European Union. The key and overriding condition at the moment remains the commitment of the EU to further enlargement, i.e. a clear European perspective being given to the region. When the issue becomes unquestionable for all actors in the process, professional communicators responsible for the challenges of EU communication will step forth and do their share.



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²² Delević, Milica (2015) 'Stanje i perspektive EU integracija regiona Zapadnog Balkana [Status and perspective of the EU integration in the region of the Western Balkans]'. eu info centar, 29 October, <http://euinfo.rs/stanje-i-perspektive-eu-integracija-regiona-zapadnog-balkana> (03 May 2017).

Brand Europe: in search of a joint communication approach

Stefan Vukotić

Communicating Europe together for a common good

Europe as a political, cultural, and social notion¹ has been challenged repeatedly throughout history², yet it has endured in perceptions both on and beyond the Continent to our day. And this is because despite all differences there is a common narrative to Europe – a cohesion of European characteristics – that make the notion of Europe an identifiable set of values. Trying to articulate this perception in a single sentence, we could say that 'Europe is a kaleidoscope of some of the world's finest dwellings, landscapes, arts, crafts, and social norms.'³ And Europe has given the world its only union of nations that willingly gave up part of their sovereignty to pursue shared interests – a unique form of political collaboration toward the achievement of shared objectives.

Europe as a brand faces various challenges posed by the splintering of European associations, external challenges and contenders, internal political changes, the influx of new settlers, economic power shifts, and general disenchantment and perceived irrelevance of what, since the end of WWII, has come to be known as 'European values'.

We therefore need to make a case for a joint European communications approach⁴ that would include states, international organisations, NGOs, businesses, and citizens in whose interest it is to promote European values in their various forms.

¹ The term 'Europe' has many definitions and facets which include considerations of geography, history, culture, and political values which will be used to explain the brand of Europe.

² One being German Chancellor Bismarck's remark on a letter from Russian Foreign Minister where he scribbled that Europe is nothing but a 'geographic notion.' Cf. Gowan, Peter, Anderson, Perry (1997) *The Question of Europe*. Verso, p. 118.

³ Vukotić, Stefan (2016) 'Public diplomacy and branding: re-telling Europe,' in Club of Venice *30 Years of Communication Challenges*. pp. 138-140. This article has been the main inspiration for this chapter, as has been a meeting of the South East Europe Public Sector Communication Association (SEECOM) in Brussels in October 2016. After this meeting I discussed the potential of developing the idea of a single European communication strategy as a project with my colleagues from SEECOM, the Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung, and the Club of Venice.

⁴ Cf. the idea of 'transnational advocacy networks': Keck, Margaret E., Sikkink, Kathryn (1999) 'Transnational advocacy networks in international and regional politics'. *International Social Science Journal*, 51, pp. 89-101.

First, we need to find out what Europe's brand is and why it brings good to the world. Then, we have to consider the challenges the brand and its impact face. Finally, the challenge is to outline a collaborative communications approach that would reinforce the brand and rally support behind it.

It is to show that the true brand of Europe is unity and collaboration for the common good and that this is also how we should pursue our communication on Europe.

Explaining 'brand Europe'

How we define the word brand has changed over time,⁵ but in the 21st century it is safe to understand that brand is a set of thoughts people associate with and the values they attach to what the brand stands for, i.e. its image or perception. Moving closer into the area of the nation brand, the perception of a country, institution or international organisation rests on what these political entities do⁶ and their brand is closely linked with the impact they make both at home and globally. Especially in the fast-paced world of today, a brand must spell out an immediate association for the person perceiving it, needing to reflect substance at the same time.

In view of this understanding of a brand, Europe is likely home to the largest selection of brands viewed favourably across the world.⁷ From food, fashion, art, and history Europe offers a colourful selection of world heritage traits that makes it one of the most recognised brands in its own right. And 'brand Europe' also comprises important social and political achievements that are broadly considered as either originating from Europe or being inextricably European: international law, human rights protection, social welfare, tolerance for diversity to name a few.

In recent decades, the most important brand of Europe has been *In Varietate Concordia* (United in diversity). This motto of the European Union,⁸ the world's first political union

⁵ An interesting short overview of this topic is found in: McLaughlin, Jerry (2011) 'What is a Brand, Anyway?'. *Forbes*, 21 December, <http://www.forbes.com/sites/jerrymclaughlin/2011/12/21/what-is-a-brand-anyway/#1b48c1ee2aa4> (23 February 2017).

⁶ This topic has been covered very extensively by Simon Anholt. Particularly interesting is his more recent paper for the UK Foreign Office Public Diplomacy Board: Anholt, Simon (2013) 'Beyond the Nation Brand: The Role of Image and Identity in International Relations'. *Exchange: The Journal of Public Diplomacy*: Vol. 2: Iss. 1, Article 1, <http://surface.syr.edu/exchange/vol2/iss1/1> (23 February 2017).

⁷ The same author noted at a Club of Venice conference in Estonia in 2013, presenting his 'The Good Country Index,' that taken collectively the brands of EU countries would easily top the list by a very high margin. 'The Good Country Index,' <https://goodcountry.org/index/about-the-index> (05 March 2017).

⁸ European Union (2000) 'The EU Motto'. *Europa*, https://europa.eu/european-union/about-eu/symbols/motto_en (23 February 2017).

where the sovereign actors willingly share powers for the common good, has become synonymous with Europe. Indeed, many outside Europe are not even aware of the distinction between Europe and the EU, and even some on the continent would actually have the EU in mind when they say 'Europe'⁹. There are also many of those living within its borders who are not aware or do not care about the distinction between the EU institutions and other similarly named European organisations. They are not ignorant, they have simply been lucky enough to live in a united part of the continent for so long. Many others from the countries who wish to join the club know the differences all too well and explain to their compatriots what benefits united Europe brings, along the way also reminding those inside of the good fortune they already have. And this is also part of brand Europe.

This brand has been under threat recently for two main reasons: various difficulties posed to European unity and the Europeans forgetting what brand Europe used to be.

Challenges to 'brand Europe'

The difficulties facing Europe as a brand come both from within and without. Over the past five years or so, xenophobia and intolerance have been on the rise throughout Europe,¹⁰ along with support for far-right politicians, which has brought into question whether Europe stands for the values it is globally recognised for and whether its political model can survive. We are witnessing constantly growing criticism levied at the EU and internal challenges to the promotion and attainment of ideas that have brought unity to a large part of the continent.¹¹ Brexit and speculations of further exits from the Union, growing support for Euro-sceptic politicians, perception of declining solidarity and sense of values, overly bureaucratized institutions with little vision and leadership, a sense of detachment and disillusionment with institutions, the rise of the 'post-truth' and 'fake news', external challenges and attempts to undermine European unity and curtail its global role, doubts among EU Member States and countries aspiring to join the Union about the future of the EU: these recent developments have arguably all contributed to a growing distrust in 'brand Europe'.

Remembering Europe

In addition to the difficulties Europe is facing, there is another factor at play that is posing a challenge to 'brand Europe': people in Europe and beyond have forgotten the story of a united Europe and, therefore, value it less.

⁹ For instance, in the Balkan Peninsula many countries work to join the EU it is not uncommon to hear that we 'are working to join Europe.'

¹⁰ UNRIC (2016) 'Intolerance and xenophobia on the rise in Europe'. 15 November, <http://www.unric.org/en/latest-un-buzz/30377-intolerance-and-xenophobia-on-the-rise-in-europe> (05 March 2017).

¹¹ Holzer, Jan and Mareš, Miroslav (2016) *Challenges to Democracies in East Central Europe*. Routledge.

The idea of a united Europe came in the aftermath of great destruction brought about by ideas whose spectre is haunting Europe again today. A united Europe was envisaged to ensure that issues were solved through joint effort, making a conflict akin to WWII impossible to happen again. And this idea materialised in the EU, which has for so long kept Europe at peace and united as never before. Moreover, it has produced so much good: visa-free travel between countries, allowing for previously unimagined freedoms and opportunities; possibility to study and work wherever one wishes to within the EU, allowing for unprecedented variety of choice and cultural exchange; trade under the same conditions in every Member State, allowing for competition that has led to world-class products and services. Europe has set international standards in many areas, such as human rights protection, education, environmental protection, workers' rights, food safety, intercultural cooperation. The EU has created preconditions for a common foreign and security policy for 28 countries that have waged war among each other for centuries.

All of these achievements are part of brand Europe, and they are worth recalling each time we hear the point of having a united continent called into question – a point all too



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easy to forget when the memories of worse times have mostly faded. But now that they are creeping back into Europe's reality it is the time to act and remind all that a united Europe has kept them at bay, and that they are best kept away for good.

In the neighbour countries of the EU the brand Europe is seen desirable like here at the Maidan in Kyiv during a meeting of the Youth of the European People's Party.

Therefore, without attempting to argue that Europe as a continent, the EU, and European countries

are facing numerous challenges, the negative perceptions of 'brand Europe' do not hold up to scrutiny and Europe does much more good than it does bad. For this reason, Europe needs to reassert itself as the defender of values that are most admirable and a desirable place to live in. This narrative needs to be told in a united voice of all Europeans.

Europe is unity: achieving a collaborative communication approach for the continent

A major challenge for all European institutions and for civil society is joining forces to communicate the values of our continent in order to ensure that it remains one of the

most favourably viewed brands in the world.¹² This is ultimately about recognising that our similarities are more important than our differences and that they should unite us towards pursuing common goals.

Attempts to reinforce 'brand Europe' through a collaborative communications approach may appear somewhat idealistic, but they can be very much based on the real needs of those involved in such a common project. The nation-states of Europe, international organisations such as the OSCE, the Council of Europe (CoE), and of course the EU as the world's first and only organisation of this kind, Europe-based businesses, NGOs, and European citizens – they all benefit from Europe having a reputation of a continent united by shared values.

Indeed, given the rise of Euro-scepticism in recent years, such a communication approach can provide a much-needed response to the criticism of European cooperation. As many have lost sight of the reasons behind the creation of a united Europe – and, most importantly, forgotten the overriding need to prevent future wars through fostering functional interdependence among European nations – these reasons need to be restated and communicated again. European institutions and European nations alike seem to have stopped repeating this message and insisting on it, whereas critics and opponents have turned and focused their attention on other issues – such as for instance the 'loss' of sovereignty – while avoiding the purely practical and real needs that have led to the project of united Europe.

A common communication approach would need to be co-owned by all participants, all of whom would communicate their own messages, their own products/values and their own activities, infusing them with a common European dimension. It should weave a single overarching narrative serving as an anchor for all stakeholders. This narrative would include a broad definition of 'brand Europe', helping everyone involved to define their communications efforts as 'European'.

The initiative in launching and steering this joint communication endeavour should come from the EU. With all its issues and shortcomings, the EU is the best case of integration of European values we have and it has a long tradition of joining individual efforts and needs of many stakeholders towards shared goals. The focus of this communication could explain the most basic tenets of the project of united Europe.

It is generally accepted among communications professionals that it would be most beneficial for the EU to focus its communication efforts on explaining the benefits of the EU as a political and economic project. There is a real need to emphasise the values

¹² Over a dozen EU and European countries are ranked among the top 20 most reputable countries in the world: World Atlas, 'Most Loved Countries in the World', <http://www.worldatlas.com/articles/best-countries-in-the-world.html> (04 August 2017).

of living together and cherishing diversity, as many people living in Europe are so used to the current state-of-play that they forget that it came from a conscious effort and a political vision that evolved over many decades. The EU could also benefit by including in its communication efforts the candidate countries, especially when communicating with their citizens on the ground, and elsewhere in Europe, to help underline the message that all parts of the continent belong together. As EU's High Representative Federica Mogherini said, 'this geographic, historic, and cultural reality'¹³ needs to be emphasised in order to sustain and reinforce the powerful idea of a united Europe.

Other stakeholders – European countries outside of the EU, other European organisations, and Europe-based businesses – all have their place in a common narrative and may have an interest in working together with the EU to communicate their role in the European project.

In this process, it is important to maintain the approach that has ensured the sustainability of united Europe – only loose coordination with ground rules accepted by all and allowing for freedom of expression. This means that a collaborative communications approach should involve setting the overarching narrative, branding and visibility, and then letting the stakeholders communicate to the audiences as they know best. A successful example of communicating a great variety of things united by a shared identity and purpose is 'Sweden.se'¹⁴, a national portal of Sweden that communicates all things Swedish, from stories of Norse gods, to traditional meals, culture festivals and political values.

Following the example of such a successful communications project with similar goals, the European communications approach could focus on concrete things: policies that benefit citizens, peace efforts, support to less developed regions and countries, environmental protection, ensuring high-quality standards for products and services, consumer protection, safeguarding human rights and diversity, world-class education, a great urban and richly endowed natural environment, heritage and culture, food, football, everything that makes Europe stand out in the world. And these should be communicated in a manner that is tailored to the needs and interests of target audiences: instead of complex EU-jargon the focus should be on story-telling through photography and video, social media campaigns, face-to-face presentations, etc. Most importantly, communication must follow up on action, because political communication can only be effective if the underlying policies are. And an important part of this communications project would be to re-invigorate the passion for Europe.

¹³ 'The Balkans are part of Europe and have always been: no political boundary can change this geographic, historic and cultural reality. The people of the Balkans are European: they deserve the same opportunities, the same safeguards and rights as all other citizens of this continent'. Mogherini, Federica (2017) 'Leading the Western Balkans inside the European Union'. *European External Action Service*, 1 March, https://eeas.europa.eu/headquarters/headquarters-homepage_en/21705/%22Leading%20the%20Western%20Balkans%20inside%20the%20European%20Union%22%20Federica%20Mogherini (05 March 2017).

¹⁴ 'Sweden,' sweden.se (05 March 2017).



Good examples on how to brand can be taken from individual countries like Sweden, e.g. National Day Celebrations in Stockholm

The reason these issues are not already central to the EU communications approach, although they are common ground among communications professionals, is – it would seem – that in the EU communication is being developed as an afterthought to policies already put in place rather than as an integral part of policy-making. So, the EU could benefit from developing a communication narrative that would focus on the main policies and achievements, framed in a palpable and understandable way that sends a clear message to citizens about what the EU is helping us achieve and how it is contributing to the well-being of Europe and the world. This will help communicate Europe better, but it will also help run the EU better, ensuring greater understanding among citizens and weaving citizens' insights into the policy-making process.

Conclusions

There are several conclusions for a joint European communication approach:

- Europe is one of the most recognised brands in the world and a joint approach to communicating it will benefit various stakeholders. Brand Europe comprises all values that Europe has given to the world, and most importantly a unity of values and collaboration for the common good. Therefore, the communication on Europe should also be a collaborative effort pursued by institutions and citizens together.

- The challenges to 'brand Europe' are mainly due to two reasons: the contemporary issues facing Europe, ranging from deteriorating European solidarity to reduced appeal of the concept of a united continent, coupled with the forgotten story of why unity is the best solution to the common problems in Europe. However, the positive stories to be told from Europe far outweigh the negative ones and this is precisely what should be done through a concerted effort within a joint European communications approach.
- Broadly outlined, a joint European communications approach should be centred on a single narrative telling the story of 'brand Europe.' Its central idea must be that Europe's highest and most cherished value is unity. Given that various stakeholders – such as businesses who benefit from international trade, nations and international organisations which benefit from prolonged periods of peace based on European cooperation – have an interest in communicating their messages under brand Europe, they stand to profit from a joint communications approach loosely coordinated by the EU. The overarching objective of this communications approach should be to inspire support and passion for the idea of a Europe united in values as a unique brand.

The strongest argument for adopting a joint European communications approach is that it will help sustain policies aimed at closer European cooperation and greater well-being. It will also send an additional message of added-value between the lines: Europe is unity, both in action and in communication.



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StratCom: standing up to disinformation and reaching out to the EU's neighbours

Michael Mann

In the blueprint for the European Union's future Foreign Policy, the 'Global Strategy', EU High Representative for Foreign and Security Policy Federica Mogherini identified strategic communications as one of her main priorities.

This call to action could not come at a more opportune moment. The shock waves from Brexit and the rise of populist, Euro-sceptic political forces in many EU countries have highlighted the need to do a better job of promoting the numerous achievements of European integration.

Meanwhile, the liberal democratic model championed by the EU's member countries is under attack: both from the East by well-orchestrated and well-financed disinformation campaigns, and from the South by radical Islamist narratives generated by extremist groups with access to hi-tech communication technologies.

The US Presidential campaign has brought to the public consciousness the notion of 'fake news' and seen concerted attacks on media organisations long admired for the impartiality and quality of their journalism.

Against this difficult backdrop, the Strategy calls for a major boost to EU's strategic communications: 'The EU will enhance its strategic communications, investing in and joining-up public diplomacy across different fields, in order to connect EU foreign policy with citizens and better communicate it to our partners. We will improve the consistency and speed of messaging on our principles and actions. We will also offer rapid, factual rebuttals of disinformation. We will continue fostering an open and enquiring media environment within and beyond the EU, also working with local players and through social media.'¹

Surrounded by regions facing unprecedented political instability and confronting the challenges brought by huge migratory flows, the EU's communicators face an immense challenge. Yet, it is one they need to step up to like never before.

¹ European Union Global Strategy (2016) 'Shared Vision, Common Action: A Stronger Europe – A Global Strategy for the European Union's Foreign And Security Policy'. June 2016, p. 23. http://eeas.europa.eu/archives/docs/top_stories/pdf/eugs_review_web.pdf (16 March 2017).



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Federica Morgherini giving a press point in the hall of 'Europa' Council building.

In that, the EU is fortunate to have a High Representative with a clear understanding of the importance of 'StratCom' as an integral part of the diplomatic and political process, and who is committed to taking every opportunity to reach out personally to highlight the importance of the work and political principles of the European Union.

Creative ways to project core EU values

In a world of increasing uncertainty, the EU can and must, as never before, act as a beacon of stability and values.

To succeed in this endeavour, it must find new, creative and persuasive ways to project these values and the concrete ways in which it puts them into practice.

At the heart of the EU project are peace and security, prosperity, democracy and a rules-based global order.

In an ever-more complex and contested world, internal and external security are ever more intertwined: to guarantee security at home, the EU needs to take an interest in peace in its neighbourhood, and a broader effort to prevent conflict.

Advancing the prosperity of its people also requires the EU to help the developing world adopt the Sustainable Development Goals, and to lead the way on ensuring an open international economic system.

The EU leads the way in fostering democracy and is determined to live up to and propagate the values that have inspired its creation and development. These include respect and promotion of human rights, fundamental freedoms and the rule of law. They encompass justice, solidarity, equality, non-discrimination, pluralism and respect for diversity.

The EU also stands for a rules-based global order, with multilateralism as its key principle and with the United Nations at its core. As a Union of medium-to-small sized countries, the EU has an interest in facing the world together. As the Iranian nuclear deal – brokered by the EU – proved, the EU can make a major contribution to a peaceful, fair and prosperous world.

Yet, as recent developments have shown, successfully communicating this vision to the world has proved difficult.

Sometimes, EU communications have suffered from the Union's complex structures and an inability to develop simple messages that resonate with ordinary people.

The EU has also been the victim of the temptation of some national politicians to take credit for EU successes and to use the EU as a convenient scapegoat for problems. Brexit is the clearest example of the danger – for all – of this approach.

The EU has also been accused of being timid and averse to taking risks.

While such shortcomings always presented a problem for the Union in the past, they are thrown into even sharper relief in what is today an infinitely more competitive global communication environment.

In the world of 2017, the EU finds itself confronted with far more alternative narratives which challenge its core values.

Russian 'disinformation' is not limited to the Russian-language-speaking space, but affects EU candidate countries in the Western Balkans and indeed the political discourse within the EU itself.

The narratives of jihad peddled by the likes of Daesh reach far beyond the battle grounds of Iraq and Syria, but present a clear and present danger in many EU countries, which have already been hit by terror attacks.

In the Asia-Pacific region, the EU seeks to win recognition for the close working relations it has with a number of countries, not least through the ASEM (Asia-Europe Meeting) process.

But the growing influence of China presents huge competition to the EU's values-based approach to cooperation and communication.

Even in the US, traditionally the EU's greatest ally, there has been a major shift in the communications environment. The new President's criticism of some of the most globally-admired media organisations and the battle around 'fake news' have the potential to re-set the communications agenda on the other side of the Atlantic.

In response to all these challenges, the EU has reappraised its approach to communications, and begun to adopt the techniques of Strategic Communications. Outreach and Public Diplomacy have now, finally, been recognised as a core part of the EU's political and diplomatic process.

In this, the basis of the EU's work is and must remain an insistence on communicating accurately and factually, and never allowing itself to be drawn into a propaganda war.

The EU responds to disinformation, propaganda, spin and 'fake news' with facts, but is also identifying new and interesting ways of doing so, getting away from its previously over-bureaucratic approach and finding stories and projects and themes that touch people's lives and resonate with key audiences in key markets; for example producing human interest stories about EU project support in Moldova which were classified as free social advertising and carried on prime time TV for three weeks, thus reaching 70 percent of the TV-viewing population.

Taking on Russian disinformation with a positive agenda

It has now been two years since work began in earnest within the European External Action Service to take on the twin challenges of Russian disinformation and the radical narratives being propagated by organisations such as Daesh.

The East StratCom Task Force was set up at the request of the March 2015 European Council, which tasked Mrs Mogherini to submit, in cooperation with EU institutions and Member States, an action plan on strategic communication in order to address Russia's ongoing disinformation campaigns.

The Task Force's work is the best example of how the EU combines proactive, positive communication with the need to identify and respond to false narratives being fed into the media by those who aim to destabilise the EU, lessen its influence for good in a given country, or further their own political aims.

It has three priorities: to help communicate EU policies towards the Eastern Neighbourhood more effectively; to help support a stronger media environment in the region, especially in the Russian language; and to improve the EU's capacity to forecast, address and respond to disinformation.

It began as a team of nine, drawing expertise in strategic communications, the Eastern Partnership region and the Russian language from the EU institutions and seconded experts from Member States. It's now expanded to eleven.

Most of the Task Force's resource has been focused on positive communication. It has deliberately not branded this work as its own, instead working increasingly closely with the European Commission and providing its support and expertise to EU Delegations, and on occasion Member States, to deliver as close to the target audience as possible.

The result has been significant increases in audience and impact. In particular, the Task Force has worked with EU Delegations to introduce new communications concepts, designing products which engage as well as inform.

It has helped update their communication strategies, better to identify key policy issues, events, messages and audiences. And it has then supported these through a limited

number of priority, tested messages, promoted via more effective social media strategies and better products.

Much of the output has been quick-time, short-term and tactical, giving visibility and support to one-off events, visits or announcements. Increasingly, the focus is now moving to fully fledged communications campaigns, which will be helped by pooling the visibility components of EU projects into single communications contracts.

The Task Force is also managing a pilot project in Georgia aimed at developing new online tools and practical methods for improving project communication.

Looking ahead, the Task Force's positive communications focus will stay on Ukraine, Georgia and Moldova; on developing output on Armenia, Azerbaijan and Belarus; and on Russian language outreach.

Under its second objective of media plurality, the Task Force has played a discreet, supportive role in promoting a more pluralistic and independent media environment in the region.

Eighteen months on and things are happening: a new Baltic Centre for Media Excellence in Riga, a Russian Language News Exchange in Prague, plans for a new 'content fund' to improve access to quality non-news content, increasing Member State support and the launch of the Commission's new 8 million Euro OPEN Media Hub programme.



The Task Force has given its expertise to these initiatives through its participation in various steering committees. And it has mapped Member State and Commission activity to share information, encourage best practice and partnership, and avoid duplication.

The Task Force has also made a difference of its own through launching the EEAS's new Russian language web pages, supported by a new Russian journalists' network and newsletter. This has filled a gap: for the first time, the EU is communicating from headquarters in

Russian, providing real time, accurate information on EU foreign policy backed up by off-the-record briefings. There is a clear appetite for this, across the Russian language

media spectrum. The EU's engagement in the Russian language is one of the best ways to belie the claim of a natural rift between the West and the Russian speaking world.

Objective three – addressing disinformation – is the Task Force activity that has received the most public attention. Over the year the Task Force has created: a network (the EU 'mythbusters'); a brand ('EUvsDisinfo'); a recognised and regular product (a weekly Disinformation Review, in Russian and English); new social media profiles (Twitter reaching 1.4 million impressions per month, Facebook growing fast); an audience (the newsletters and web blogs alone are read over 20,000 times a week); increasing coverage in the global media; and major endorsements from political, NGO and academic experts in this field.

Fundamental to this success has been giving the Task Force the freedom to operate outside the confines of a formal EU product, to create something that is not typically 'EU' and bureaucratic.

But pro-Kremlin disinformation continues: it comes from state media, extremist websites, government-organised NGOs, think tanks and trolls. It is targeting the West, Europe, the EU, its policies and politicians (if anything, increasingly).

It exploits the challenges Europe faces, finding a ready (and probably growing) audience among the disillusioned and anti-establishment. It sows doubt, divides societies and turns the principles of free speech and balance against those who champion it.

It is important to recognise that this is not just a foreign policy problem but a domestic EU challenge which needs a cross-institutional/government approach.

Reaching out positively to the Arab world

Alongside this work in the East, the separate Task Force South was established by the EEAS in spring 2015, after EU foreign ministers called for 'improving its strategic communication, developing an outreach strategy to the Arab world, including developing counter-narratives to terrorist propaganda, promoting fundamental rights, and taking into account the increasingly frequent use of the internet in radicalisation, engaging through social media and enhancing communication in Arabic.'

The Task Force seeks to develop and promote positive, alternative narratives to those propagated by Daesh and other extremist groups, foster dialogue and cultivate mutual respect between Arab and European communities, especially among young people, and promote EU policies and projects in the region.

In this, it coordinates closely with the EU Delegations to strengthen existing ties and highlight shared values. The Task Force South does much of its work through the EU's network of delegations because these have Arabic-speaking staff with detailed knowledge

of the local communications environment and of which messages will resonate with each identified audience.

It builds on the excellent Public Diplomacy the Delegations have carried out for many years, but attempts to adopt a more strategic approach, linking established communication practices with the EU's political priorities both regionally and in each individual country.

In June 2015, the Task Force South produced an advisory report which fed into High Representative Mogherini's contribution to the European Council with an initial set of 30 recommendations.

Since then, the Task Force South has mapped existing outreach and communications tools, developed a business plan, started putting into effect the June recommendations, and assisted the Delegations to put together detailed communication strategies which are now being rolled out.

The EEAS has considerably increased the press and information budget for Delegations in the Arab world. Among other things, efforts have focused on strengthening their social media presence in the region, producing more content in Arabic, and focusing on young people to establish their concerns and to explore which narratives would work best where.

Owing in no small measure to the success of the East StratCom Task Force, the EEAS Strategic Communications Division has now been allotted additional staff for the whole division, and the first priority has been to bring in Arabic-speaking specialists to drive forward the work in the Arab world.

Its work complements a number of other, similar activities, including the project 'Strengthening community resilience to radicalisation and recruitment – MENA', funded by the European Commission, launched in late 2015 in Tunisia and working hand-in-hand with local NGOs on different approaches to tackling radicalisation.

Similar projects are being rolled out in other countries in the region. The Task Force South also cooperates with the Communications Cell of the Global Coalition against Daesh, which works principally on developing direct counter-narratives and debunking some of the myths put about by the Daesh propaganda machine.

The Task Force South thus plays a key role in coordinating the many different strands of work going on in the EU against the threat posed by the increasingly sophisticated communications of radical groups in the Arab world.

The EU has often been guilty in the past of seeing communications as an after-thought to the political and diplomatic process. However, the work now going on, and best illustrated by the two Task Forces for the East and South, is clear evidence of a step-change in its

attitude to strategic communications as a necessary response to the huge challenges it faces.

What is the goal of these Task Forces? Ultimately, that they are not necessary any more. Moreover, that the EU has got better at explaining its own policies, and no longer faces a constant disinformation attack and that negative and destructive narratives in both the new and traditional media are a thing of the past.

Clearly, this is a distant dream and much remains to be done. Yet, while the task remains daunting, the EU has learnt much and become vastly more sophisticated in how it communicates.

The new approach has already made a real difference, and has garnered the level of political support which will ensure that this work can only go from strength to strength.



Michael Mann has been Head of Division for Strategic Communications at the European External Action Service from March 2011 until September 2017. In this capacity, he was responsible for communications activities both at EEAS headquarters and across the network of 140 EU Delegations around the world. From March 2011 to November 2014, he was also Chief Spokesman to Catherine Ashton, the EU's first High Representative for foreign affairs and security policy/ Vice President of the European Commission. Between 2002 and 2011, Mann worked as a spokesman for the European Commission, covering a number of different portfolios. Since September 2017, he is EU Ambassador to Iceland. Prior to joining the EU, he had a career as a journalist, focusing on EU affairs, working for media including The Financial Times, Reuters, Bloomberg and European Voice. He was also a regular contributor to TV and radio, notably for the BBC.

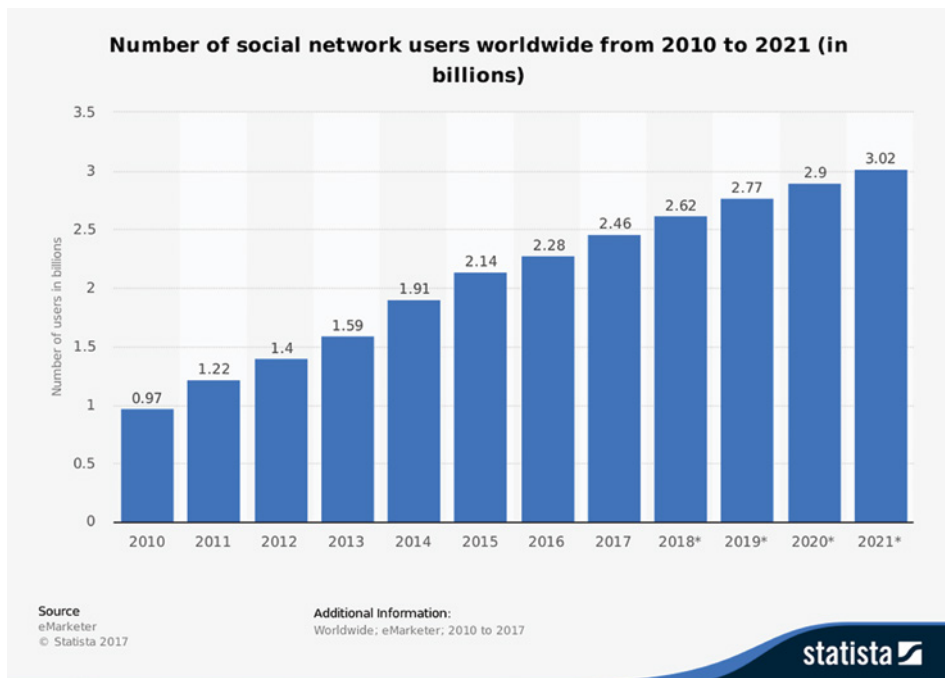
Politics goes viral: European institutions and global leaders on the web

Aleksandra Atanasova

In less than a decade social media has revolutionised communication, creating a whole new industry around itself. Nowadays, a social media presence is a must for any public figure: be it celebrities posting selfies on the photo-sharing app Instagram, politicians tweeting about their agenda, or simply ordinary people harnessing the power of social to develop their own brands. Social networking sites (SNS) are making the online environment increasingly interconnected, which alters the ways we use information and interact with each other. This article will outline some of the most recent global trends and developments in social media use and focus on political communication globally and in Europe to explain how EU's political actors use social media to inform citizens, gain momentum, and promote values.

The growth of social

Social media penetration worldwide is constantly on the rise. In 2016, 68.3 percent of all internet users, or 2.34 billion people, were also social media users.¹ It is estimated that by 2020 around one third of the world's population will use social media.

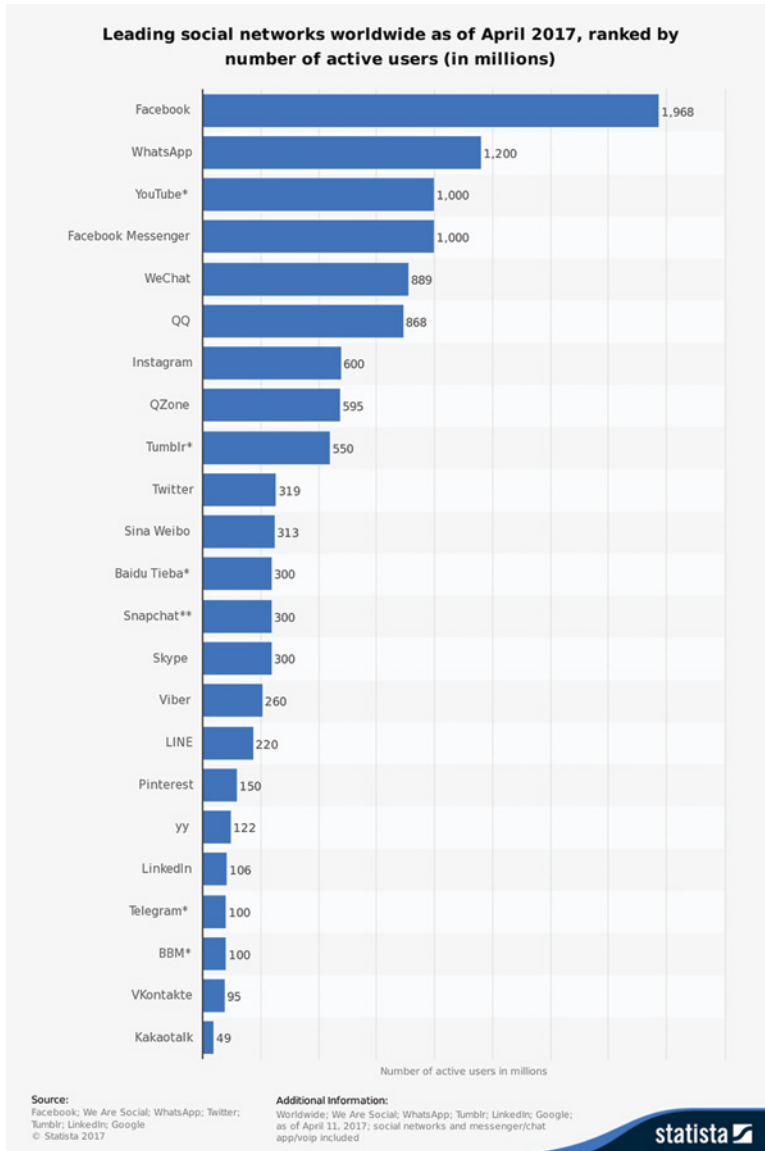


¹ Statista (2017) 'Number of social media users worldwide from 2010 to 2020 (in billions)'. <https://www.statista.com/statistics/278414/number-of-worldwide-social-network-users> (07 June 2017).

An ever growing number of people use social media on various mobile devices, changing many aspects of content production, consumption, and subsequent promotion. Data from 'We Are Social' shows that the share of mobile social media use grew by 30 percent in 2016 as compared to 2015.²

The most popular SNS

The chart below shows an overview of the most popular social media networks ranked by the number of monthly active users (MAU), as of April 2017.



² Ibid.

With its 1.97 billion MAUs, Facebook is doubtlessly the behemoth of all social media platforms. The video platform YouTube comes in third with 1 billion MAUs, Instagram is seventh, and microblogging platform Twitter is in the tenth place.

Most social networks with more than 100 million users originate in the US, but the Russian VK, or Chinese platforms such as Qzone also boast large fan bases on account of strong local appeal.

The user base of instant messaging apps such as WhatsApp, Facebook Messenger, WeChat, Viber, etc. has been growing rapidly, which is one of the leading trends in social media in 2017. As the chart shows almost one-third of the most popular social media platforms worldwide are private messaging apps.

The video boom

Social media favours visual over textual content, and this trend is only getting stronger over time, with visual social media channels gaining new and bigger audiences than ever before.

Pictures remain the most popular content type on social media.³ Thus, it comes as no surprise to see that some of the top platforms nowadays are entirely for visual communication, for example Instagram.

User-generated video has been steadily gaining popularity on social media: it is a major functionality of platforms for younger audiences such as Snapchat. Data from June 2016, for instance, shows that almost 7 million videos are viewed on Snapchat in one minute.⁴

The popularity of videos can also partly be explained by the fact that Facebook encourages natively uploaded videos over other types of content, which, in turn, prompts pages to produce more videos to keep their posts up in the newsfeed. As a result, video is becoming Facebook's top content.

To illustrate how video sharing has transformed the platform: Facebook's total video views (including Facebook 'Live' videos) are estimated to reach 64 billion video views per day by August 2017, compared to the 'modest' 4 billion video views per day just two years before, in April 2015.⁵

³ Statista (2017) 'User-generated content – Statistics & Facts'. <https://www.statista.com/topics/1716/user-generated-content> (02 August 2017).

⁴ Statista (2016) 'Media usage in an internet minute as of June 2016'. <https://www.statista.com/statistics/195140/new-user-generated-content-uploaded-by-users-per-minute> (07 June 2017).

⁵ Mediakix.com (2017) 'The top 13 Facebook Live Statistics you should know'. 09 March, <http://mediakix.com/2017/03/facebook-live-statistics-video-streaming-to-know> (02 August 2017).

Other forms of video-similar content such as GIFs are also popular on social media. In one minute, a whopping number of 569,217 GIFs is being served by Giphy, a distribution platform for GIF content.⁶

Visual storytelling: Live streaming

Mobile live streaming is one of the biggest social media trends in 2017. Raw, unedited videos, streamed off-the-cuff, are the new way to tell stories as they evolve. Live streaming is a format that blends television and social media, and invites user participation and direct interactions.

With the launch of the Periscope app in 2015, Twitter was the pioneer platform for mobile live streaming. Just two years later, however, mobile live streaming has become something that all global platforms offer. Data from Statista shows that currently Facebook is the most preferred platform for live streaming in the US⁷, followed by YouTube and Snapchat.

Snapchatification: transience of posts, fun

Social media networks have always copied each other's functionalities in an attempt to win new audiences, and Facebook has usually served as a model. However, the mass tendency to emulate the leader, which has prompted many platforms to develop a Facebook touch, has recently been reversed. In 2016, it was Facebook that started implementing new features inspired from the Snapchat app, and others quickly followed suit.

This has led to the current 'snapchatification' of many huge social media platforms: Instagram, Messenger, WhatsApp all have implemented some Snapchat logic: ephemeral content that disappears within 24 hours (the 'Stories' function), and creative editing features for photos or videos such as filters, masks, stickers, and texts.

Although Snapchat is primarily popular with teenage audiences, and its functionalities are created with a view to stimulating informal, funny communication, many brands experiment with the Snapchat aesthetic to attract younger users.

Pay to play

SNS platforms have monetised their existence and created an advertising industry that generates billions annually – data from Statista shows that the social advertising

⁶ Statista (2016) 'Media usage in an internet minute as of June 2016'. <https://www.statista.com/statistics/195140/new-user-generated-content-uploaded-by-users-per-minute> (07 June 2017).

⁷ Richter, Felix (2017) 'The State of Live Video Streaming'. Statista, 13 February, <https://www.statista.com/chart/8057/live-video-streaming> (07 June 2017).

worldwide accrued to almost 31 billion US Dollars (approximately 27 billion Euro) in 2016.⁸

Only in the US, Facebook generated 11.9 billion Dollars (ca. 10.3 billion Euro) of ad revenue in 2016.⁹ The platform reaps the biggest ad revenue of all social media platforms, and is expected to double its profits between 2015 and 2018.

Visual platforms are typically more attractive for social media advertising – for instance, Instagram is making better profits than text-based Twitter. Mobile ads are becoming more popular, too.

Political communication via social media

Given the enormous importance of social media nowadays, it is hardly surprising that politicians and parties from all corners of the world turn to social media to communicate with citizens on their agenda. American writer Nicholas Carr argues that we are at the start of a 'third big technological makeover of modern electioneering'¹⁰ – after radio and television, social media is now modifying the tone and messages that politicians use to communicate with potential voters.

Moreover, social media shifts the focus towards the individual, affecting the way political parties and candidates present themselves online. Political communication through social media has become increasingly personified in both candidate-centred political systems such as the US, but also in traditional party-centred systems.¹¹ What people want to see on social media are the faces behind the party or individuals who are inspirational and authentic. Hence, many political actors strive to add a personal touch to their social media presence.

Social media not only changes public communication, but is also believed to increase political participation. For example, researchers from the University of Twente, Netherlands,

⁸ Statista (2017) 'Social advertising spending worldwide from 2014 to 2016 (in billion US Dollars)'. <https://www.statista.com/statistics/495115/social-ad-spend-worldwide> (07 June 2017).

⁹ Statista (2017) 'Advertising revenues of selected social networks in the United States from 2015 to 2018'. <https://www.statista.com/statistics/426520/us-social-networks-ad-revenues> (07 June 2017).

¹⁰ Carr, Nicholas (2015) 'How Social Media Is Ruining Politics'. Politico.com, 2 September, <http://www.politico.com/magazine/story/2015/09/2016-election-social-media-ruining-politics-213104> (02 August 2017).

¹¹ Enli, Gunn Sara and Skoderbo, Eli (2013) 'Personalized campaigns in party-centered politics'. *Journal Information, Communication & Society*, Volume 16 (5).

showed a link between user engagement on politicians' social media profiles and the number of votes these politicians received at the following elections.¹²

Data also shows that more and more people rely on social media to connect to politicians, and it is not just the youngest voters who do so¹³. According to a survey done by Pew Research Centre in 2015, the main reason why US voters would follow a political figure on social media is to learn news quicker than others. The second reason is to feel personally connected with the politician. As a third reason, American voters stress that they trust social media updates more than traditional journalism.

The shift from traditional media towards social media in public communication is also provable in numbers. In 2016, in the USA only, political ad spending reached a record high of 11.4 billion US Dollars, or 20 percent more than what was spent in 2012.¹⁴

Facebook and Twitter remain the leading platforms for political communication, but the two serve different purposes: Facebook is the preferred platform for marketing purposes, whilst Twitter is used for continuous dialogues with citizens and real-time updates. Instagram and YouTube are also popular with politicians around the globe, and even platforms for younger audience such as Snapchat are gaining momentum.

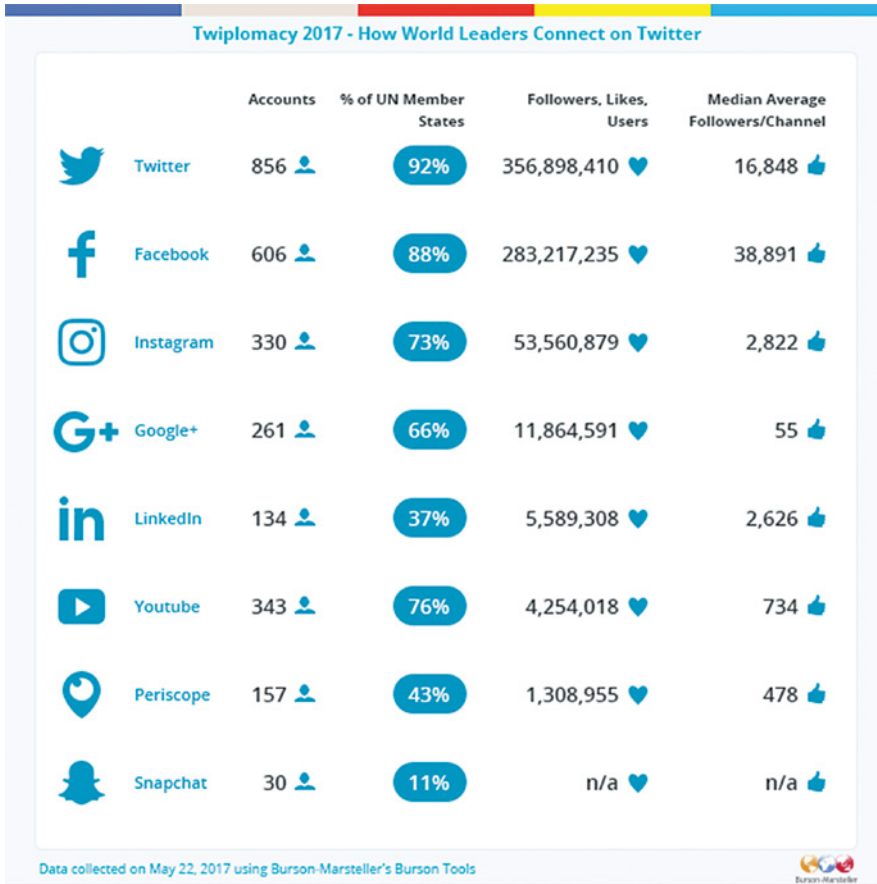
Below is the list of the most used social media platforms worldwide by world leaders and governments, ranked by the total number of followers. The number of accounts indicates the importance of the specific platform for political communication. The data is taken from the latest Burson-Marsteller's Twiplomacy Study, published in May 2017.¹⁵

¹² Effing, Robin, van Hillegersberg, Jos and Huibers, Theo W. C. (2011) 'Social Media and Political Participation: Are Facebook, Twitter and YouTube Democratizing Our Political Systems?'. *Electronic Participation. Third IFIP WG 8.5 International Conference*, ePart 2011, Lecture Notes in Computer Science; Vol. 6847). London: Springer, pp. 25-35.

¹³ Anderson, Monica (2015) 'More Americans are using social media to connect with politicians'. PewResearchCenter.org, 19 May, <http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2015/05/19/more-americans-are-using-social-media-to-connect-with-politicians> (02 August 2017).

¹⁴ Lapowsky, Issie (2015) 'Political Ad Spending Online Is About To Explode'. *Wired*, 18 August, <https://www.wired.com/2015/08/digital-political-ads-2016> (02 August 2017).

¹⁵ Lüfkens, Matthias (2017) *Twiplomacy Study 2017*. <http://twiplomacy.com/blog/twiplomacy-study-2017> (11 July 2017).



Twitter

According to the Twiplomacy study for 2017¹⁶, Twitter is the social media channel of choice for governments and foreign ministries. It boasts the highest number of political accounts: there are currently 856 Twitter accounts belonging to heads of state and government, and foreign ministers in 178 countries, which represent 92 percent of all 193 UN member states. The combined audience is 356 million followers.

However, the study revealed that some 13 percent of the analysed accounts are currently inactive. An interesting finding is that a significant number of accounts tweet actively only around election campaigns, and remain dormant in the periods when the politician is out of the spotlight. The most followed Twitter accounts of world leaders in 2017 are those of Pope Francis (first place with 33.72 million followers), US President Donald Trump (second place with 30.13 million followers) and Prime Minister of India Narendra Modi (third place with 30.06 million followers).

¹⁶ Lüfkens, Matthias (2017) *Twiplomacy Study 2017*. <http://twiplomacy.com/blog/twiplomacy-study-2017> (11 July 2017).

Twitter is primarily used as a powerful one-way broadcasting tool by the most popular political accounts. Interactions with citizens (in the form of replies) are rare.

The data also shows that Twitter is mostly used as a text-based platform by political accounts (¾ of all analysed tweets are text and link tweets), while tweets with photos constitute less than a quarter of all tweets, and tweets with videos make for only 1.3 percent of all tweets. However, live streaming video is popular with governments: Twitter’s Periscope app is used by 207 accounts for live broadcasting.

Facebook

The biggest SNS with the best developed options for granular advertising understandably plays an important role in political communication. According to the Twiplomacy study¹⁷ published in February 2017, Facebook is the second most popular network for political communication: the governments and leaders of 87 percent of the UN member countries have a Facebook presence. The combined audience of all analysed pages is 311 million fans.

Below is the list with the biggest Facebook pages of world leaders in 2017.



¹⁷ Twiplomacy (2017) 'World Leaders on Facebook 2017'. 21 February, <http://twiplomacy.com/blog/world-leaders-facebook-2017> (21 June 2017).

The analysis shows that political communication on Facebook remains predominantly visual. Posts with pictures are the most popular type of content and represent 55 percent of all analysed Facebook publications. 22 percent are posts with links to other websites and 12 percent are natively uploaded videos. Only 8 percent are simple status updates without any visuals.

Photo posts that show political leaders in their personal capacity (with pets, at family gatherings, during religious holidays) are the best performing type of content. Politicians often use selfies to appear more human and to offer behind-the-curtain glimpses of their busy schedules. Facebook Q&A sessions are a typical format as well, used to create more interactions. Facebook Live streaming is another popular feature, used by a number of world leaders.

YouTube

343 heads of state and government and foreign ministries of 148 countries, representing 77 percent of all UN member states, have YouTube channels¹⁸. That makes YouTube the third most used platform for political communication. The platform is mainly used as video repository for speeches, coverage from events and campaigns, election clips. Live streamed Q&A sessions and Google Handouts are a popular method to reach out to citizens and interact directly.

US politicians are leading on YouTube: The White House is the most popular channel of a government organisation. Barack Obama was the first world leader to upload a video to YouTube on September 14, 2006. The White House was also the first government account to broadcast a Google+ hangout on the platform.

Instagram

Instagram is the fourth most popular platform for political communication. The heads of state and government and foreign ministers of 140 countries currently have accounts on Instagram. In total that represents 72.5 percent of all UN member states. These accounts have a combined following of 48.7 million and have published 61,281 posts between April 2016 and April 2017.

Below is the chart of the most followed world leaders on Instagram.

¹⁸ Twiplomacy (2016) 'World Leaders on YouTube 2016'. 22 March, <http://twiplomacy.com/blog/world-leaders-on-youtube-2016> (22 June 2017).



The content analysis shows that many accounts post visual quotes – photos of the political leader together with an excerpt of text taken from some of his or her speeches. Many accounts publish personal photos showing spare-time activities.

Snapchat

According to the Twiplomacy study¹⁹ from 2016 government leaders are starting to show interest in Snapchat in an attempt to reach younger audiences. The live broadcasting is the most popular feature with political accounts. The 'Stories' function allows users to collect different photos and video content in one slideshow, and many political accounts use it to illustrate their daily programmes such as state visits, conferences, etc.

The UK Foreign Office is the first foreign office to open a Snapchat account in September 2015. According to the analysis, UNICEF and the European Parliament make particularly good use of the platform.

¹⁹ Twiplomacy (2016) 'How World Leaders use Snapchat'. 14 April, <http://twiplomacy.com/blog/how-world-leaders-use-snapchat> (14 June 2017).

The EU institutions on social media²⁰

The EU institutions on social media constitute a large network of inter-related accounts with somehow overlapping audience, because many people interested in EU affairs follow more than one profile to stay updated on the EU agenda. European Parliament, European Council, European Commission, and all the other EU bodies and agencies have their own presence on social media and are active on all big platforms. Each institution communicates in line with its political priorities; however, there is a level of general intra-institutional coordination on social media actions and campaigns: social media teams working in different departments keep each other informed on important communication campaigns.

The **European Parliament** is the EU institution with the highest following on social media. It is present on all big channels (Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, LinkedIn, etc.), but also on niche platforms like Flickr, Spotify and Reddit. So far, it is also the only EU institution with a well-developed Snapchat presence²¹. The Parliament's cumulative social media fan base is slightly more than 3 million followers.

Apart from the central EP accounts, Directorates-General, parliamentary committees, elected MEPs, European parties and party leaders all have their own social media presence. All EP Information Offices in the Member States also have separate social media accounts. The European Parliament is dedicated to the principle of multilingualism in the EU, so the Parliament's @Europarl_EN Twitter account in English has 23 counterparts that publish the same content in the other 23 official EU languages. The 24 EP multilingual Twitter accounts have a combined audience of over 1 million followers.

The same complex scheme applies to the **European Commission** on social media, where, except the central accounts driven by the social media team working at the Directorate-General for Communication, all Directorates-General, 28 Commissioners, and 28 local EC Representation offices keep their own social media presence. The total audience of the central social media accounts of the European Commission is 2.3 million followers.

Focusing on the bigger profiles will allow insight into the network's overall functioning, as the central accounts are the ones that receive best practices from all other departments, and use this overview to improve their own strategy.

²⁰ Tool used to analyse the accounts: Engagor, minter.io. Analysed period: 1 Jan 2016 – 1 Jun 2017.

²¹ EU affairs (2015) 'Snapchat: European Politics in pictures'. News, europarl.europa.eu, <http://www.europarl.europa.eu/news/en/headlines/eu-affairs/20151210STO06961/snapchat-european-politics-in-pictures> (02 August 2017).

Case study: European Commission and Parliament

Analysed period: 1 January 2016 – 1 June 2017

Facebook and Twitter have received the highest number of engagements (user interactions) for both the European Commission and Parliament within the analysed period. However, **Instagram** is the fastest growing platform for both institutions – over the period, for example, the European Commission has increased its following by a staggering 300 percent.

Parliament has the biggest audience on Facebook: slightly less than 2 million fans. The Commission's biggest channel is Google+ with 1.7 million followers. However, the engagement on Google+ is very low compared to Facebook and Twitter.

Both Commission and Parliament post daily on all big platforms. Twitter is the platform with the highest posting activity: 6-8 tweets per day; the average posting activity on Facebook is 2 posts daily.

The engagement rate for Twitter, Instagram, and Facebook for both the European Parliament and European Commission has increased in 2017, compared to 2016. For Instagram, the increase has even been two-fold. Photos bring the highest number of interactions on social media, and remain the preferred publishing format.

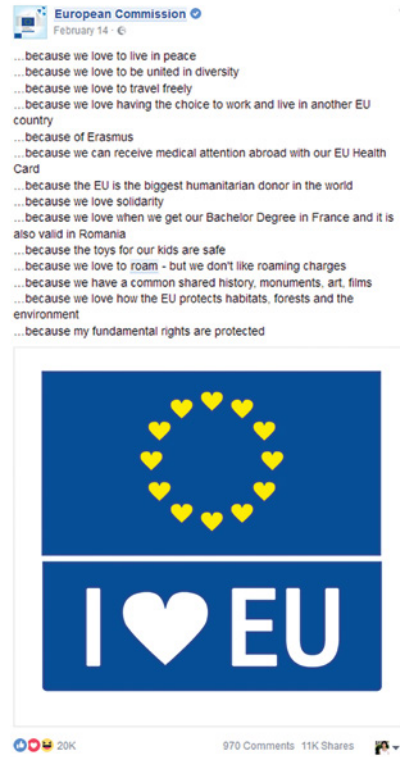
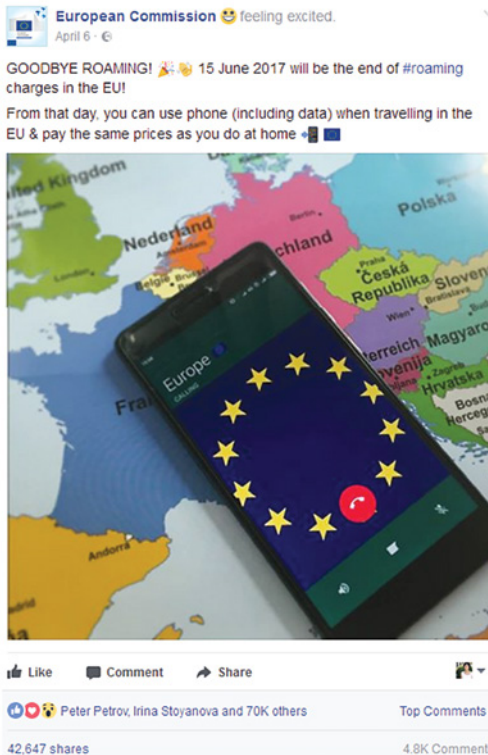
Both the Parliament and the Commission use Facebook to communicate with the general public and explain the EU priorities, so their posts on the platform often tend to be lengthy, which is not optimal for social media.

Both accounts strive to be conversational and to reach out to citizens. The profile response activity of both Commission and Parliament is very high on Facebook, and both accounts tend to engage with citizens either by directly replying to their comments, or by liking them.

Live streaming has become a commonly used feature by both mostly in the form of Facebook chats with Commissioners or MEPs on different topics.



Lighter posts with more general character perform better than posts directly related to the EU political agenda. For example, the two top posts on the European Commission's Facebook page are a photo dedicated to the end of roaming charges and a Valentine-style post about the reasons people love the EU.



Both Commission and Parliament use excessively the tagging option on Twitter to connect with stakeholders or ensure better outreach of the tweets. For example, the European Commission Twitter account often tags accounts of Directorate-Generals, EC Representations or commissioners on specific tweets related with their sphere of work.

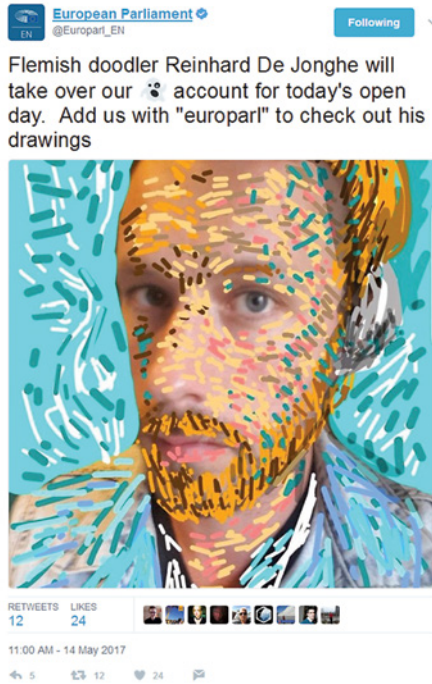
The Commission uses more emojis on social media to lighten the content, elicit emotions from the audience, and ensure higher engagement.

Both accounts post more videos in 2017 than in 2016, following the general social media trend to prioritise video content.

Visual quotes with excerpts from EU politicians’ speeches are a popular type of content for both institutions.



Social media takeovers are a method commonly used by the European Parliament to appear more approachable whilst giving citizens the power to manage its social media accounts. Both common citizens and popular figures are regularly invited to take over one of the social media channels for a day.



Having in mind the logic of the platform, both Commission and Parliament strive to post lighter content on Instagram that would appeal to more people.

A list of the most popular photos published on the Commission's account within the analysed period shows that EU branding used in funny and creative ways wins the audience: for example, Jean-Claude Juncker carrying a cake with a topping like the EU flag to celebrate the 60th anniversary of the Treaties of Rome, or a photo with a statement about the European values of non-discrimination written in the flag itself.



The most successful Instagram photos of the Parliament show the same trend towards lighter content: Photos from blooming magnolias around the Parliament’s building or a child carrying a balloon with the EU flag resonate better with users than snapshots of MEPs during the plenary session.

The European Parliament posts daily on **Snapchat**: mainly with highlights from the plenary sessions, the most important discussions and the weekly agenda, and interviews with MEPs.

Conclusion

Social media has changed public communication, allowing governments and political leaders to get closer to citizens and present themselves in a more approachable way. Many political organisations use social media to reach out to voters, to inform and educate people, and to create discussions around political topics. The Twiplomacy studies show that politicians worldwide strive to keep in line with the latest trends in social media and use all available platforms to reach citizens. The overview of EU’s social media presence reveals that the EU institutions try to get closer to citizens by using lighter and more personal content and by actively engaging with users online.



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COMMUNICATION OF POLITICAL PARTIES

Earning trust in restless times – party PR between polarised media and demanding citizens

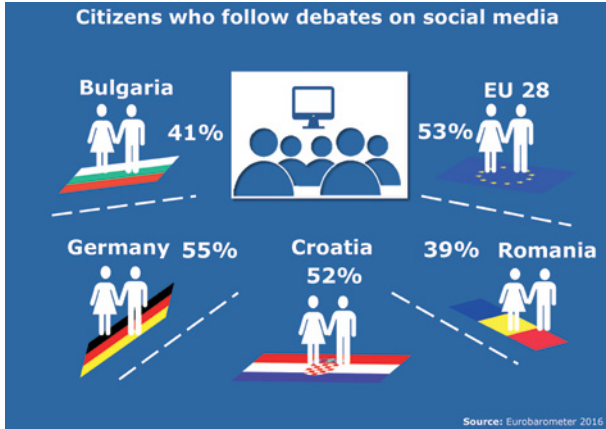
Christian Spahr

In young democracies, political parties have even bigger tasks in communication than their equivalents in Western industrialised countries. Slightly more than 25 years ago, the Western Balkans as well as Bulgaria, Romania and Moldova broke free from the communist system. Most of the former state parties renamed themselves, many new parties emerged and from these new parties only a few enjoyed long-term popularity. This quarter of a century has been a period of ongoing changes in the political systems, with progress towards open and stable political landscapes, but also drawbacks. The Yugoslav Wars and old boy networks have delayed the implementation of European standards in individual countries. At the same time, the global political situation has become increasingly complex: the replacement of the Cold War order by a multipolar one, and especially the effects of digitalisation and globalisation, have changed the world fundamentally. Major technological revolutions like the GSM mobile phone, email, the Web 2.0 and social networks took place in this short lapse of time.

More information for citizens about fundamental decisions

In many South East European countries citizens still need to agree on fundamental political decisions: More or less EU integration? Pro-Western or pro-Kremlin? Liberal democracy or a strong state? The EU crises and the migration challenge have stirred up this debate again. Yet, a consensus on how to see the communist past has not been achieved, and societies are still deeply divided on this question. In other words, citizens in the Balkans rather need more than less information from political stakeholders as opposed to their peers in Western Europe. Politicians need to provide orientation in three fields: a narrative for the past, guidance in terms of EU integration, and a perspective for collective and individual development in an ever-changing global environment. Many in South East Europe still need to be convinced of the advantages of democracy and open societies.

Just as in Western Europe, political parties are the main pillars of the democratic system. Their role is being contested, due to reasons rooted both in the past and in recent developments. Traumatic experiences with the communist state parties, political adventurers in the immediate aftermath of dictatorship and a highly polarised political discourse in general have impaired the reputation of political parties. Corruption cases have impaired the images of politicians and parties, too. But as much as inherently political reasons, the digital lifestyle is a challenge for the public relations of parties. NGOs and informal movements claim more and more attention of citizens via the internet, presenting themselves as fresh and innocent players in



Survey question: 'Do you follow debates on social media, for example by reading articles on the internet or through online social networks or blogs?'

the political field. Mass protests have been organised with the help of Facebook and Twitter for example in Bulgaria (2013), Bosnia and Herzegovina (2014), and Macedonia (2015). The Web is increasingly used to consume political information, many users create their own content and the digital gap towards Western countries is rapidly shrinking. For example, 52 percent of Croatians, 41 percent of Bulgarians and 39 percent of Romanians follow political debates on social media, according to Eurobarometer.¹

These parameters alone help to imagine how sophisticated the communications of political parties need to be in the new EU Member States and candidate countries. However, the challenges become even bigger when we look at the media situation. Formally, the press is independent in all countries of the region, and freedom of speech is guaranteed by the constitution. However, the reality is often different, at least concerning traditional media. Many of them, especially TV and newspapers, are in the hands of media moguls who own them as an instrument of power. These media owners are not publishers in the traditional sense; they are not interested in earning money with good journalism. Essentially, they are PR entrepreneurs and invest consciously in loss-making media on basis of a hidden agenda. Their interests lie in political and economic influence to be used for their own purposes. Tacit agreements with politicians are part of this concept. On top, many media outlets depend heavily on state advertising – both national and regional. It is still a common practice for government authorities to use public funds or parts of EU subsidies to support friendly media coverage.

The climate of interdependence between media and politics makes it difficult to enforce legal provisions or self-regulation in the media, for example when it comes to transparency of ownership and paid content, limiting monopolies in news production and distribution, and fostering ethical standards of reporting. Most South East European countries are only ranked as 'partly free' in the press freedom rankings of the NGOs Freedom House and 'Reporters Without Borders'. Freedom House ranks the South East European countries

¹ Eurobarometer (2016) 'Standard 86 – Autumn 2016'. December, <http://ec.europa.eu/COMMFrontOffice/publicopinion/index.cfm/Survey/getSurveyDetail/instruments/STANDARD/surveyKy/2137> (17 August 2017).

² Ibid.

between 38 (Romania) and 64 (Macedonia) on their list of 199 states and territories in the world. Only Cyprus receives a better score (23) and is considered to have actual media freedom.³ 'Reporters Without Borders' see the countries of the region between 46 (Romania) and 111 (Macedonia) of 180 analysed countries. Again, Cyprus is a positive exception (rank 30).⁴ Not only news corporations are potentially receptive to political orders but so are internet service providers (ISPs). In individual countries, the ISP market is either controlled by state companies or shows a high percentage of hidden ownership.⁵

Unequal opportunities in a dysfunctional media landscape

For parties in government, such a media landscape can be beneficial in the short or medium term – at least on the surface. When TV and newspaper oligarchs guarantee friendly coverage for the price of political influence, political leaders suffer less from journalistic investigations. This is why parties in government often lack motivation to enforce more transparency in the media sector, for instance by unveiling hidden cash flows and allocating government advertising according to reliable standards and in transparent ways. Much more difficult can be the situation for opposition parties: By far, they don't have the same opportunities for influencing media, and are being isolated from coverage by mainstream media in some cases. Turning towards online platforms and social media cannot fully compensate for this handicap, as TV is still reaching out much further than news portals, and not many citizens in rural areas read political information on Facebook. According to a survey by the Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung (KAS), 91 percent of Bulgarians receive political information from TV. 23 percent inform themselves about politics via social media – a trend on the increase.⁶ Regional print and audio-visual media can be alternative options for parties in opposition to communicate messages. In any case, developing trustful and respectful relationships with professional journalists will stay a key requirement for PR experts.

One strong trend affects the entire media sector: growing budgetary constraints. Due to the internet revolution, citizens use more sources of information, and most of them for free – an economic disaster for traditional media who, for a long time, ignored or underestimated the challenges that lied ahead. With dramatic consequences: staff had to be reduced in media outlets and the pulse of news making and news consumption has

³ Freedom House (2017) 'Freedom of the Press – Press Freedom's Dark Horizon'. <https://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-press/freedom-press-2017> (17 August 2017).

⁴ Reporters Without Borders (2017) 'World press freedom index 2017' . <https://rsf.org/en/ranking> (16 September 2017).

⁵ OCCRP, RISE Project and EurActiv.ro (2016) 'Internet Ownership Project'. <https://www.reportingproject.net/internetownership> (17 August 2017).

⁶ KAS and Alpha Research (2017) 'Media and Foreign Policy – Opinions of Bulgarians'. http://www.kas.de/wf/doc/kas_22991-1442-1-30.pdf (17 August 2017).

accelerated. Today, much less journalists produce much more news. Weak newsrooms are more dependent on PR content. As a global trend, communication professionals have better working conditions than journalists, and the balance between media and PR has been lost. The global weakening of journalism goes in line with a strengthening of political communications or PR in general. According to the analysis of one of the German media associations, 48,000 full-time journalists were facing up to 50,000 PR employees in the country already in 2014.⁷ The US Department of Labour even counted 4.6 PR experts per journalist in the same year.⁸ It has become easier to influence media and to benefit from their weaknesses.

But is this truly positive news for PR managers? The economic crisis of the media comes together with a crisis of confidence – in journalism and political communication alike. In South East Europe, the lack of professional and ethical standards in the relationship between politics and media fires back. According to studies conducted by the Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung (KAS), the trust in both media and in political PR is extremely low. In a representative survey published in early 2016, only 12 percent of Bulgarians considered the media to be independent. At the same time, not more than 8 percent of the citizens felt well informed by politicians about the decisions they make. A similar KAS survey in Romania conducted one year earlier did not produce much better results: 28 percent believed in independent reporting, whereas only 7 percent felt well informed by politicians.⁹

If trust in traditional media is this low, are they still appropriate channels for communicating PR messages? Will citizens believe in messages conveyed through compromised news channels? On top of the questionable quality of mainstream media in South East Europe, social networks are challenging the credibility of professional journalism. Based on algorithms, Facebook and others display only news that fit the presumed interests of their users. Despite the open nature of the internet, more and more users roam in a filter bubble of unanimous messages, depending on their own political preferences and personal environment. If all 'my' sources on Facebook tell the same, can they be wrong? According to Eurobarometer, 46 percent of Romanians, 37 percent of Bulgarians and 30 percent of Croats consider the content of social media (social networks, blogs, and video hosting

⁷ Paefgen-Laß, Michaela (2014) 'Der PR gehen die Journalisten aus [PR runs out of journalists]'. Springer Professional, April, <https://www.springerprofessional.de/en/media-relations//der-pr-gehen-die-journalisten-aus/6602740> (18 August 2017).

⁸ Dillman, Thomas and Honneff, Bad (2014) 'Übermächtige PR in den USA: 4,6 PR-Leute kommen auf einen Journalisten [Superiour PR in the USA: there are 4.6 PR people for every journalist]'. PR Journal, April, <http://pr-journal.de/nachrichten/branche/14510-uebermaechtige-pr-in-den-usa-4-6-pr-leute-kommen-auf-einen-journalisten.html> (18 August 2017).

⁹ KAS (2014) 'Trust in Romanian Media and Political Communication'. http://www.kas.de/wf/doc/kas_15224-1442-1-30.pdf (18 August 2017).

websites) to be reliable.¹⁰ Despite differences in wording and methodology in the above mentioned polls, the figures underline that an increasing number of citizens rather believe what their friends post on Facebook than what is offered by mainstream media.

Rebuilding trust by pragmatism and openness

This should encourage spokespersons to check the credibility of media platforms as well as alternate or combine them, if necessary. Media relations with full-time reporters and direct communication with citizens are complementary. Next to online platforms and physical events, political parties still need traditional media to participate in the political discourse, but they should focus on quality outlets. Secondly, it has become more important for PR managers to adhere to ethical standards for obvious reasons. A growing number of national and international PR associations have defined professional guidelines that can serve as reference. In the digital era, information manipulations are likely to be unveiled sooner or later – if not by newspapers, then by freelancers or non-profit media organisations.

Thus, rebuilding trust is essential for political parties in order to gain new voters, supporters and members and keep the commitment of existing ones on a high level. Increasingly, the young and middle-aged generations in the Balkans are asking for a new political style that can be described as open and pragmatic, without battles for prestige, solution- and dialogue-oriented, participatory, upright, and directed towards public interest instead of serving the interests of a few. The rule of law and civic rights are key topics to this growing group of voters. The massive civic anti-corruption demonstrations in Romania in the last two years are a foretaste of what politicians in other countries of the region might have to expect in the future, including the emergence of new political parties arising from such protests.

Instead of propaganda-like communication, more citizens are asking for dialogue with politicians – especially the internet-savvy, well-travelled young and urban segments of the population. Less and less, politicians can score with ideology; increasingly, they need to address citizens' concerns in their daily life, offering pragmatic, efficient political solutions. Hopes, anxieties and the trust of citizens are more important than party programmes. For instance, the economic situation, good education and transparency of the civil service are relevant topics for election campaigns.

In this light, accepting modern standards in policy-making and public dialogue is a huge opportunity for political parties in the Balkans. In order to be successful, both decision-making and communication need to meet high expectations and go hand-in-hand. A professional communications management is the key to ensuring that all major

¹⁰ Eurobarometer (2016) 'Special 452 – Media Pluralism and Democracy'. November, <https://ec.europa.eu/digital-single-market/en/news/media-pluralism-and-democracy-special-eurobarometer-452> (17 August 2017).

stakeholders within a party express themselves in line with official positions in order to be trustworthy for the audience.

As relevant expert conferences of Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung have shown, political parties in South East Europe already make extensive use of modern technologies in their public outreach. For instance, all parties affiliated to the European People's Party (EPP) and their leaders have Facebook pages, and with the exception of few, the party headquarters and presidents are active on Twitter. In terms of PR instruments, social media postings have outpaced press releases. While TV stations are still the most frequently used channels to convey messages, online portals come second in importance, leaving print media behind. All EPP sister parties in the region have dedicated communications departments that are accepted by journalists as a point of contact, for instance when requesting an interview.

Behind these observations lies a bigger challenge – shaping a professional role model for PR managers of political parties in the region. In many cases, the work of spokespersons and communication advisers is rather seen as an extension of policy-making than a part of it. From this perspective, a 'press' or 'media' department has the main task of 'broadcasting' the messages of the leadership – in other words, making sure the president enjoys enough airtime in the dominating TV channels and has an attractive Facebook fan page. Despite the fact that social media are already an integral part of the PR mix, communication still happens largely 'on demand' of the party chiefs – as a publication of positions, often in a unidirectional way.

A true steering function for PR managers

The relevant PR specialists don't always have access to meetings of the executive board, and are not systematically used as advisers in the process of decision-making. KAS workshops with PR managers have shown that at least some of them wish for a more reliable, direct access to their bosses, and aim for a genuine steering function in the party's communication – as this is the case in many party headquarters in Western countries and in large companies. Such a steering function includes dissuasion to adopt certain problematic political positions, choosing key messages to focus on in accordance with public debates (agenda-setting), and making sure all party branches and members of parliament accept briefings with the official party-line. The latter can be particularly challenging: unlike officials of the party headquarters, it is more difficult to align MP's statements with policy positions as they are elected by the people and feel freer to express their own opinions. However, for the credibility of parties, it is important that prominent representatives speak with one voice – especially in an environment where confidence in political stakeholders is low.

Other important elements of a modern communications management include precise communication objectives, audience insight (opinion polls) as well as a professional evaluation of channels and allocated resources. The implementation depends very much



Spokespersons and PR managers of political parties in South East Europe exchange best practices and discuss with German colleagues in Berlin at the invitation of the Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung.

on the openness of the leadership for an anticipatory and methodical communications approach, in contrast to mainly relying on the intuition of the chairperson and the inner party circle. A strategic communications approach beyond election campaigns is not yet an integral part of the overall strategy of parties in many SEE countries. However, a rethinking is under way. Approximately every second party affiliated to the EPP in the region has compiled a communication strategy as internal guideline. Individual media departments have drafted Q&As for internal use, to facilitate the preparation of media interviews with party officials, which is particularly helpful in crisis communication or addressing sensitive issues.

Especially in critical situations, political stakeholders need to invest in communication. Crises do require more communication. This also means a broad scope of responsibilities for PR experts in party organisations. In a multi-channel and cross-media environment, even the most popular politicians need strong and competent communication teams. They cannot do PR relying on gut instinct alone. Therefore, strengthening the professional profiles of media spokespersons and using their strategic advice in policy-making are important elements of the internal communication management.

Proactive measures are also essential with regard to the polarised media landscape and political environment in the region. As a balanced, thorough reporting is widely absent in mainstream media, political debates lack depth and tend to have a sensationalist, highly confrontational character. Negative campaigning is more widespread than in Western

Europe. 'My most important function is to reply to attacks', said one of the PR managers participating in a KAS workshop. 'Communicating our own central arguments is only a secondary concern.' In this situation, internal briefings and systematic agenda-setting help to stay focused and to shape a party's public profile.

Come election time, politicians in South East Europe are open to implementing new tools like smartphone apps for campaigns, and augmenting video content on social media to reach the young and urban voters. However, they need to take into account that only every second inhabitant is using the internet actively in some of the countries of the region. Especially elderly citizens in villages and small cities barely use the web to inform themselves about politics. Their internet usage might be limited to emails, entertainment content or video calls with family members. Therefore, both door-to-door campaigning and a good alignment of 'online' and 'offline' messages are indispensable.¹¹ More often than not, use of big data and investment in relevant technologies and services can be a game-changer in campaigns.

Dialogue and participation need further development

A modern understanding of political communication, in which citizens and journalists are not only target groups but also dialogue partners, still needs to further develop. This is true for political organisations around the globe, but perhaps especially in young democracies and in the decades after a political system change. Progressively, political leaders are expected to act transparently, be open to advice and agree to be subject to public scrutiny.

Although authoritarian political styles have lately yet again registered more support in both Western and Eastern societies, in most European countries there is no way back to the role model of an omniscient strong leader whose power is without limits. The internet, social networks, open borders, cheap flights and – last but not least – exchange programmes like Erasmus have allowed many people to compare political and societal concepts. The generation of future leaders in the EU's neighbourhood is already used to questioning established procedures and asking for participation. Both governments and political parties are well advised to consider this in their communication styles when reaching out to the citizens.

Reflecting recent democratic changes in the political systems, parties in South East Europe are about to fulfil a change of culture – from a top-down approach to a more collaborative environment, from the exclusiveness of power to open doors, from one-man-shows to the all-round competence of teams. The development of political systems and trends in political communication are two sides of the same coin. The factual implementation of a

¹¹ see Chapter 'Is there a blueprint for victory? Campaign strategy and tactics in elections'.

democratic culture in a society effectuates changes in the ways of political interaction. The further development of political communication in this dynamic, aspiring part of Europe depends more on this change of culture within parties and public agencies than on budget lines or organisational charts.

In its work with spokespersons and PR managers from political parties in the Balkans, the KAS Media Program South East Europe has brought together more than 130 motivated specialists of whom a large majority adhere to a modern, citizen-oriented understanding of communications. They need and deserve support both inside their parties and by international partners. Forums for exchange amongst PR specialists and continuous training are crucial to keep pace with the numerous political and societal changes in the region, with new information habits and the rapid technological progress. With enhanced working conditions and as trusted advisers in an ever more interconnected world of communication, they can effectively contribute in order to make political parties more attractive again, thus strengthening the most important intermediaries between society and state in a representative democracy.



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Public Sector Communication Association (SEECOM), first European professional association for government spokespersons with 55 members from 15 countries and co-host of the South East Europe Media Forum, largest media conference in the region. He has participated as a speaker at media and communications conferences in Germany, France, the Netherlands and South East Europe, amongst others at the Council of Europe, European Federation of Journalists and Club of Venice as well as CeBIT expo (Hanover) and Kommunikationskongress (Berlin).

Increasing mediatisation and dramatisation: parties under pressure

Roland Heintze

Party democracy vs. media democracy

As regards the last decades, it becomes immediately obvious that the media as the fourth estate in the system of checks and balances assumes more and more functions, originally associated with political parties. During the golden age of parties (from 1870s to 1920s) and until the era of growing importance of the media, political parties were the main instance that assumed the function of creating publicity by imparting knowledge about economic, social and political coherences as well as social values and norms. Moreover, the information brokerage led to the formation of political will and participation of society. Nowadays, these functions are assumed by mass media and, increasingly, social media platforms. Thus, the decreasing importance of parties becomes manifest as:

- Retrograde identification with political parties
- Decreasing percentage of core voters
- Stringent willingness to swing vote
- A decrement of memberships in parties
- A low voter turnout
- Declining confidence in politicians and
- The alienation of adolescents from politics.

Referred to Chen, this development is caused by distrust resulting in negative valuation of the political system and its protagonists, the feeling of insignificance and disinterest.¹ Maurer reveals in that context a long-term tendency to negative judgments of political authorities since the early 1980s, evolving into a negative judgment of the political system as a whole.² While the general public attaches little importance to politics, protagonists try to gain and keep up attention by means of professional issues management. In other words: Political parties are in need of publicity to reach potential voters with their topics and candidates. Generally, it is essential to observe that the dependency on a positive news coverage increases in times of declining identification with political parties and a decreasing percentage of core voters. Rhomberg calls this phenomenon 'Kampf um die

¹ Chen, Kevin (1992) *Political Alienation and Voting Turnout in the United States 1960-1988*. San Francisco: Mellen Research University Press.

² Maurer, Marcus (2003) *Politikverdrossenheit durch Medienberichte. Eine Paneluntersuchung [Political disenchantment because of media reporting. A panel research]*. Konstanz: UVK.

mediale Interpretationshoheit' (fight for medial interpretative authority) and provides the example that if news coverage looks upon the present state of the economy favourably, this valuation is of assistance to governments while Noelle-Neumann (Allensbach Institute) traced the defeat of Kohl's government in Germany in 1998 back to a negative news coverage of economic development.³

Mass media communication and social media platforms



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With the advent of internet the politically interested public became more than mere passive recipient.

In modern society, mass media communication as well as social media platforms act as mediator between the political sphere and members of the public. At this point, the question arises whether mass media communication takes place unidirectionally or interactively. Looking retrospectively at history, it becomes immediately obvious that a political public sphere emerged for the first time when mechanical letterpress printing was developed. At that time and during the golden age of parties (from 1870s to 1920s), party newspapers produced fragmented public spheres, until the rise of television reunited them to a general political public. This does neither mean

that, henceforth, political parties became less and less important nor that the rise of television brought an end to the functions political parties perform in the system of checks and balances.

Until then, mass media communication took place unidirectionally, even though the parliament represented a forum that was connected with the public sphere via mass media communication. Only with the advent of internet, the politically interested public ceased to be a mere passive recipient. Henceforth, everybody had the possibility to be a sender of the last resort in the enduring era of social media.

Nowadays, topics and opinions articulated during private interactions, public events, demonstrations or panel discussions do not become generally important before they are taken up by the mass media or discussed on social media platforms. Thus, the media became an indispensable multiplier of political messages and a fundamental support of new social movements fulfilling the following functions:

³ Rhomberg, Markus (2009) *Politische Kommunikation. Eine Einführung für Politikwissenschaftler [Political communication. An introduction]*. München: Fink.

- Implementation of a public sphere
- Information brokerage
- Opinion-making
- Mobilisation of voters
- Legitimisation of a representative democracy
- Promotion of social cohesion

The recipient – a well-informed citizen?

The classical but also the normative and modern democratic theories put forth the ideal of a well-informed, competent, debating and active citizen interacting with the political sphere through the media, which seems to be in sharp contrast to the real situation.⁴ Only 10 percent of the German population is very interested in politics while at least one third shows little interest in following political developments. The other half of the population has no interest in politics. Furthermore, it is essential to recognise the following information paradox: At no other time in history was information as accessible as it is now. Yet, despite information being so readily available, there is no time for the recipient to assimilate it in an orderly manner causing the recipient to feel overstrained and unable to analyse the cost-benefit equation of potential information reception or use a cognitive scheme to help categorise and classify such information. All in all, the political communication via the media is faced with selective percipience, interpretation and valuation by the recipients.⁵

Agenda-setting and priming

Empiricism shows the following impacts of media coverage on voters:

- Mobilisation of core voters: the use of public media reinforces existing predispositions
- Persuasion
- Perception of reality
- Agenda-setting and priming

Essential for a basic understanding of the concept 'agenda-setting' is the observation that frequency and positioning of media coverage determine the importance of topics and political protagonists for the population. Priming, on the other hand, means that the media even fix the value voters attach to political issues so that electors assess the competences of parties regarding meta topics instead of extending their vision to all policies. Besides, there are similar effects relating to the valuation of potential candidates. Since scarcely

⁴ Rhomberg, Markus (2009) *Politische Kommunikation. Eine Einführung für Politikwissenschaftler [Political communication. An introduction]*. München: Fink.

⁵ Ibid.

anybody has ever met the leading candidates of political parties in person, the perception of politicians depends considerably on media coverage.

Consequently, it is non-controversial that the media as the fourth estate in the system of checks and balances incorporates immense power due to agenda-setting, priming and framing. But do opinions about politics rooted in society belong to the utilisation of different types of media (print versus television) or do contents determine the position of recipients? Hans-Bernd Brosius establishes a border between print and television consumption:

‘Fernsehen ist ein Medium, das vor allem durch seine Bilder bei jenen Rezipienten, die nur beiläufig zuschauen, ganz nebenbei Bewertungen und Urteile vermittelt. Gerade weil Rezipienten häufig nicht konzentriert fernsehen, werden sie durch drastische Bilder und übertriebene Sprache beeinflusst, und nicht durch faktische Information.’⁶
(Television is a medium which conveys evaluations and judgments by the way, in particular, through those images which are merely incidental to the audience. Precisely because the audience often does not focus on television, they are influenced by drastic pictures and exaggerated language, not by factual information.)

While politicians attach great importance to the impact of media on public opinion-making, journalists appeal to long-held, firm, core beliefs. The truth, as always, lies somewhere in between: mass media as well as discussions on social media platforms are in no way the sole factor for voting decisions. Rather explanation involves a combination of identifying with political parties and the topics and candidates discussed.

Challenge of increasing mediatization

As outlined above, media researchers discuss whether mass media communication takes place unidirectionally or interactively. Behind that controversy lie different understandings of the recipient. On the one hand, people espousing the view of the omnipotence of media depict mass media as manipulative mechanisms patronising the population. On the other hand, there is the model of ‘minimal effects’: ineffective media are faced with sovereign and participating citizens. Lance W. Bennett criticises that journalists should not be the mouthpiece of public interests acting as a mediator between the political sphere and members of the public.⁷ His opinion refers to the discussion about the media exceeding their authority: while political parties justify their actions by elections, there is a lack of legitimacy regarding the media.

⁶ Brosius, Hans-Bernd (1998) ‘Politikvermittlung durch Fernsehen. Inhalte und Rezeption von Fernsehnachrichten’ [Policy education through TV. Contents and reception of TV news]. in Klingler, Walter; Roter, Gunnar and Zöllner, Oliver (eds) *Fernsehforschung in Deutschland. Themen – Akteure – Methoden [TV research in Germany. Topics – actors – methods]*. Part I, Baden-Baden: Nomos.

⁷ Bennett, Lance W. (2000) ‘Introduction: Communication and Civic Engagement in Comparative Perspective’. in *Political Communication*, 17.

Moreover, political protagonists are confronted with new challenges because politics are dramatized by personalisation and reporting about conflicts: 'Picking news for its entertainment value rather than for its political importance may prevent more-complex issues from reaching the public.'⁸

Conclusion

Mass media and social media platforms alike create a public sphere informing members of the public about political issues; they mobilise voters thereby giving legitimacy to the political system as the fourth estate in the system of checks and balances. Thus, they assume an increasing number of functions, originally associated with the political parties. These are in need of publicity in order to reach potential voters with their topics and candidates. Acting as a mediator between the political sphere and members of the public, media command immense power due to agenda-setting, priming and framing. Nevertheless, both mass media and discussions on social media platforms are not the sole factor for voting decisions. Rather the explanation lies in the combination of identifying with political parties and the topics and candidates discussed.



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⁸ McLeod, Douglas; Kosicki, Gerald and McLeod, Jack (2002) 'Resurveying the Boundaries of Political Communication Effects'. in Bryant, Jennings and Zillmann, Dolf (eds) *Media Effects. Advances in Theory and Research*. Mahwah: Lawrence Erlbaum.

Seven campaigning trends you need to watch

Ralf Gülden-zopf



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Election campaign start of the CDU in North Rhine Westphalia

Election campaigns are exciting. This has a lot to do with the stakes attached to the outcome of the election, but also with continuing innovation. Every election cycle and every technological innovation brings new methods and tools to the table of strategists and consultants – not to mention the shifts in an electorate’s attitudes and preferences. And last but not least, political communication becomes more and more internationalised. It does not take years for innovation to spread from one country or continent to another. The internet and tight personal and professional networks give us almost immediate access to hundreds of campaigns worldwide. That is why we need to watch trends more closely. Here are seven of them.

1. Data is the lubricant of modern campaigns

Technology has always been a driver of campaign innovation. Just think about the influence that radio and TV had on modern elections. Same goes for the invention of the computer

and, of course, the internet. Sure, election campaigns have not been on the forefront of change, but especially in the United States they have been an early adopter. The amount of money and talent involved in elections there has transformed the US into the light-house of modern campaigns.

Since the re-election of Barack Obama in 2012 'data' has been one of the buzzwords. The use of data to identify voters and predict their likelihood of voting and voter choice has been nearly perfected in recent years. The only thing US campaigns seem not to know with certainty is the actual individual voter choice. The two main reasons for this are the availability of data on individual voters and computing power to process the information almost in real-time.

Where to spend your money, who to talk to with your volunteers, what message to use – these are questions campaigns permanently have to answer. They want to know where they get the 'best bang for the buck'. Data not only allows campaigns to allocate their resources more efficiently, but is nowadays crucial for doing so.

The Republicans started in early 2000 with micro-targeting their potential voters. Instead of relying on geographical and socio-demographical data, they started matching different data sets – from public to commercial sources. To this day, the core remains voter registration files that are publicly available. These files contain the name, age and address of the voter. In most states, there will also be a party registration (to be eligible to vote in the Democratic or Republican primary) and a voting history telling in what election the individual actually voted.

The voting file is then matched by name with consumer data and third-party group lists (e.g. National Rifle Association, Sierra Club). Combining this with survey data, one obtains a couple hundred data points that show a statistical prediction of the individuals' vote choice. A voter becomes thereby a micro-target for the campaign.

With the advent of social media and its constant flow of data the campaign databases grew in depth, but also became more up-to-date. Additionally, the campaigns get constant feedback from their supporters that go door-to-door and ask potential voters about issues and party preferences. Shifts in the mood of the electorate can now be followed more closely. On that basis, campaigns and their data vendors are not only able to identify likely voters, but also attune the message to its individual preference almost in real-time. And instead of talking to an anonymous crowd, campaigns can now talk to many small segments of the electorate.

In the 2012 US presidential election the Republican candidate, Governor Mitt Romney, worked with two voter segments. Barack Obama's campaign had nine. Ted Cruz in the 2016 primary communicated according to his campaign manager Jeff Roe with a total of 1,809 segments. Each of these segments could be reached by its preferred communication

channel (direct mail, email, Facebook, TV etc.) and adjusted messages (issue, tone, argument).

Of course, the use of data in US elections cannot and will not be the blueprint for campaigns in other countries. Stricter data protection laws, fewer sources and cultural differences make it hard to just copy that approach. The US campaigns success in data use relies first and foremost on the public availability of voter registration files, as Eitan Hersh points out in his book 'Hacking the Electorate'¹. Very few other countries have this. Nonetheless, we will see a rise of data in campaigns worldwide. There will be more investment in databases and the collecting of data by political parties. An improved and broader email database will be a start in many countries. So instead of trying to get what the Americans have, we need to think in our countries about ways to generate and build our own data. That is the basis for a more efficient communication with citizens and voters.

2. Internet is more than just friends

Minus the slightly felt hype around data, the debate about 'digital' has pretty much sobered up. Instead of sitting at the kid's table 'digital' now sits with the adults at the campaign table. During the last couple of years campaigns and consultants pretty much figured out how and where 'digital' can be useful. And that is an important observation: the internet is a tool to be used at a set target. Having a strong digital operation is not an end in itself, but a means to an end.

Accordingly, in the past the internet was more or less used to signal that a campaign is innovative and modern. The number of friends on Facebook or followers on Twitter was a standard benchmark. Now campaigns are looking much closer at what can be achieved by using the online channel. Hence, campaigns know that to reach a large audience you do not need a single friend on Facebook. Reach comes through online advertisement. This is not to say that the organic reach through friends is not important, but scale is achieved by putting money on the table.

It is quite positive to observe how the almost hysteria over the possibilities of the internet has died down. Campaigns know how to use Facebook & Co. It is not the expertise that restrains campaigns in many countries, but often the lack of resources, especially money. While in US campaigns 'online' gets 15-25 percent of the media budget, in many other countries campaign managers still put their money in traditional media. The main reasons for the growth of online campaigning are the chance for high precision audience targeting and the ability to measure the effects (post interaction, click rates etc.). 'Online' is undoubtedly getting more weight in media planning.

¹ Hersh, Eitan (2015) *Hacking the Electorate: How Campaigns Perceive Voters*. Cambridge University Press.

3. A new understanding of a need for opinion research



Opinion polls and data-driven approaches are important corner stones of a campaign strategy.

The latest US campaign and the close election of Donald Trump as president has sparked a debate about the quality of public opinion polls since many – including the author – did not see a Trump victory coming. Two things became apparent during the discussion: a) the lack of understanding of quantitative research (especially among media); and b) actual problems the industry is having with reaching the proper sample and getting honest answers.

Undoubtedly, opinion polls and quantitative research are an important corner stone of a campaign strategy. Though, they are only one instrument that helps us understand the mood of an electorate and form a strategy and message accordingly. Unfortunately, too many candidates and media outlets focus on the 'horse race'. Questions of who is up and who is down are at the centre of attention. And, in the end, people blame the polls when there is a 'surprising' (or an unwanted) result. At the same time, there is an unfortunate lack of empirical knowledge.

First of all, it is important to realise that a poll is not a forecast. What a poll provides is the current mood at the time when people were asked – no less, but no more. That means that reliance on very infrequent media polls is not a sound predictor of an election result. Moods and issues change quickly nowadays. Way too often, people do not realise that polls come with a grain of salt called the margin of error. In the case of the US election the polls

pretty much indicated a close race, which it was. But within that margin of error it was Donald Trump who won by a couple thousand votes in the key battleground states.

A campaign should poll more often with 'tracking polls' and/or should bring other factors into the mix. That could be e.g. responses of voters during a neighbourhood canvass or probabilities about the likelihood to vote from our own database. Further, what we need from polling are hints towards a better strategy and messaging: Issues that people care about or character traits of a candidate that need to be focused on. The benchmark poll at the outset of the campaign planning process is therefore more important than the poll done few days before the election when there is too little time to react.

Secondly, there are real challenges to our polling methods. The most important is the volatility of voters. Swings in the electoral mood happen with greater frequency and are becoming more pronounced. Those effects can not only be witnessed in polls but also in election results. The spread of mobile phones and the reluctance to participate have additionally troubled pollsters for many years now. Online polling is no real alternative yet, since it is oftentimes not very representative of the overall voting population. Face-to-face is too expensive for most campaigns.

Bottom line: Modern campaigns need to be cautious when it comes to polling. It is unadvisable to rely on the media when it comes to the state of the race. It is neither reliable (nor representative) in any case, nor is it a clear predictor of future outcomes. Campaigns should look for other sources of feedback to evaluate progress. And more importantly: campaigns must be more careful when interpreting polling data.

4. Message over mechanics

In the public narrative, but also in the workings of campaigns, there has been a revival of 'the message'. The plain and simple answer to one question becomes central again: Why should I vote for you? With all the talk about the internet and data, media and campaigns have forgotten that even a nice packaging should have a meaningful content. That is not necessarily a policy issue. The character of a candidate or the 'brand' of a party is also important and can be at the core of a message.

The content of our campaigns as much as the language we are using are especially important when we think about dealing with the rise of populism. There is no doubt about what Donald Trump stood for in the 2016 election. Neither his opponents nor his supporters would say that they did not know what he represented or stood for. The same is not true for Hillary Clinton. Another example, in the 2015 general British elections the Tories' focus was on the economy – the pillar of their eventually successful campaign.

After finding a convincing message that potentially connects with the voter, in a party based political system the main challenge is communicating that message with 'one voice'.

Often you have a national campaign with the main candidate and many district campaigns with the local candidates running. Too often that ends in diluting the message. Too often local candidates think they can set their own agenda. Too often they simply do not know what to say when it comes to national issues – especially when there is some sort of national crisis or sudden event.

With the speed of the modern media cycle it is important to treat local candidates as surrogates instead of autonomous entities. A daily (phone) briefing with the message of the day and talking points on current national agenda should be a routine in the main phase of the election. Furthermore, local candidates should early be advised and supported when it comes to breaking down the party's platform to the local level. The issues might be the same, but the stories and examples should be local.

Internal communication and the focus on the message are crucial elements of winning campaigns. Even though it might be logistically and culturally challenging to most parties, it must be understood that the lack of a coherent message not only endangers the overall success of a campaign, but also the success of the local candidate.

5. Knowing what works – experiments and split-tests

Campaigns know that their resources are limited and should be used efficiently. Usually, there is never enough time, money or people. Hence, campaigns need to know what works. Since the great research of Donald Green and Alan Gerber², we have seen a lot of experiments in the field of political campaigns. Many insights have surfaced and advanced modern campaigns. But this is by far not enough. Way too often the answer to the question 'Why are we doing this?' is 'Because this is how we have done it for many years'.

Fortunately, modern technology combined with accessible research has made experimenting easier to incorporate into campaigns. We can often find support in academia. Many universities and scholars like to work with campaigns for the sake of science. It is the party's responsibility to create an environment in which academia and politics can work together in a win-win-situation: Academia gets to publish the results. Politics gets more insights into what works and what does not.

The easiest way of testing our communications are so-called A/B or split tests. Just like in medicine a campaign can randomly assign people to a control and a treatment group. While the control group would get no communication (or a placebo) the treatment group would receive the treatment of an email, a direct mail piece, or a knock on the door. We then can compare whether one group behaved differently compared to the other.

² Green, Donald and Gerber, Alan (2015) *Get out the vote: How to increase voter turnout*. 3rd edition, Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution Press.

Split testing is the easiest to implement in online communication. Most email programmes let us use A/B testing to see which subject line gets a better opening rate. Alternatively, on Facebook we can track which ad gets more clicks. The results are almost instantaneous and provide permanent feedback on whether we are reaching the right audience with the right message.

6. High tech and high touch

Personal communication has been the almost logical reaction to an increasingly challenging media and attention market. As campaigners realised that their message often gets stuck in the clutter of commercial advertisement, news outrage and cat content they revived the old-school personal conversation. It is no surprise that we have seen this re-emerge across different countries and political systems.

Experiments proved that in-person contact between a campaign volunteer and a voter is the most effective tool for voter mobilisation. Therefore, we see the rise of door-to-door canvassing in many modern campaigns. The main challenge is to scale the relatively old model and link it to modern technology.

In recent campaigns, we have seen the rise of apps to help guide campaigns and coordinate volunteers. Most of the apps not only provide specific targets (who to talk to) on the basis of campaign data, but also feedback to the campaigner about electoral moods – an important addition to polling. The mantra of modern campaigns therefore is 'high tech and high touch'.

7. Don't yield to trends

As in politics, a campaign is permanently waged. Campaigns are also continually changing. It is mostly that, which is outside innovation and technology that not only opens up great opportunities, but also presents us with many challenges. Campaigns know that these trends need to be taken into consideration when planning for the next election. The seven trends mentioned here do not need to be adopted. Copy-and-paste will not work. It is the strategist's and consultant's job to make sure that trends find their way into the campaign plan. But one should never forget that trends are made by trend-setters – not trend-followers.

Very often, innovation comes in pair with disruption, which is a concept that does not necessarily mix well with politics. Still, campaigns need to find ways to be more innovative and try new things. This is why parties should be talking to start-ups about new technology and possibilities. Easier said than done, but parties need to grow their own ecosystem of innovation. This is all the more important when resources are scarce. The investment in building tight and reliable networks with people and institutions can help parties to become campaign trend-setters and to be more successful.



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Is there a blueprint for victory? Campaign strategy and tactics in elections

Mario Voigt

Mike Tyson said it best: They all have a strategy until they got hit. In today's political environment with all its uncertainty and indifference political campaigns sometimes struggle to find the right recipe for success dealing with populism, fake news and a defragmented electorate.

Life is about choices. So are campaigns. Is the country on the right track, or do people thirst for change? Is the economy doing well off with new jobs being created, or is old labour being shipped overseas? Should Capitol insiders decide the country's future, or should main street wits decide peoples' prospects? At its best, campaigns offer voters something to choose, or at least try to frame it that way. Hence, unfortunately not necessarily the person we believe has the best ideas wins. It is not necessarily the person with the best experience. But certainly, the person with the best campaign and a clear and well executed plan wins. While obviously, every campaign is unique, there are some basic principles that can be applied to any election campaign. This article is about what must be taken into consideration to formulate a campaign strategy, plan tactics and communicate a message successfully.

1. In the age of permanent campaigns

The development of campaign management has been changing continuously. In general, experts see an evolutionary development of electoral campaigns¹, which is part of a modernisation process embedded in the technological and political changes in most post-industrial societies.² This development is generally acknowledged by three phases: the pre-modern, the modern and the post-modern campaign.

¹ Norris, Pippa (2004) 'The Evolution of Election Campaigns. Eroding Political Engagement?'. Paper for the Conference on 'Political Communication in the 21st Century, University of Otago. New Zealand, January, also: Plasser, Fritz (2002) *Globalisierung der Wahlkämpfe: Praktiken der Campaign Professionals im weltweiten Vergleich [Globalisation of election campaign: Practices of campaign professionals in a worldwide comparison]*. Wien; Kavanagh, Dennis (1995) *Election campaigning: the new marketing of politics*. Oxford.

² Norris, Pippa (2004) 'The Evolution of Election Campaigns. Eroding Political Engagement?'. Paper for the Conference on 'Political Communication in the 21st Century, University of Otago. New Zealand, January, p. 2; furthermore Norris, Pippa (1999): *A Virtuous Circle*. Cambridge; Holbrook, Thomas (1996) *Do Campaigns Matter?* Beverley Hills, CA. see also: Thurber, James (2013) *Campaigns and Elections American Style (Transforming American Politics)*. Washington.

Communication and the role of media were characterised by a partisan press, local posters and information brochures in the pre-modern era. The candidates spread their message through local meetings and 'whistle-stop' candidate trips. With the changing technical possibilities through radio and television, the demand for modern campaign communication grew, which characterised the phase from the early 1960s to the late 1980s. Especially television with its main evening news proved to be an important catalyst for a controlled news management within political campaigns with daily press conferences and controlled photo-ops. Image-related communication increased the profile of candidates and campaigns. In addition, target group-specific direct mail campaigns were added, which narrowed broad-based communication to specific target groups and niche communication. Since the 1990s campaign communications has experienced a diversification with cable emerging in strongly fragmented TV markets and the new internet outreach. The internet promoted direct communication and accelerated information cycles, and the campaigns responded with expanded message management.

Political campaigns are constantly growing, financially intensive, communicative high-performance machines whose characteristic communication style has changed from 'mass propaganda' to 'media campaigning' to 'political marketing', which in turn are characterised by different elements.³ The post-modern election campaigns are characterised by four essential aspects: (1) the 'personalisation' of campaign communication and the emphasis on the candidate role; (2) the scientification of campaign planning by experts (e.g. pollsters, political consultants) at the expense of traditional party officials; (3) the 'detachment' of political parties from citizens by relying heavily on polling instead of civic interaction; and (4) the development of 'autonomous communication structures', which not only follow the interests of political campaigns, but also the logic of the media.⁴

This has led to an overall objective in modern governance. The need to constantly communicate publicly and, conveying policies to the electorate, set the stage for the next election campaign.⁵ Successful governments use the findings of opinion research and carry out strategically planned communication campaigns. Government actions and

³ Wring, Dominic (2001) 'Political Communication and Party Development', in Bartle, John und Griffiths, Dylan (eds) *Political Communications Transformed*. Houndmills, p. 37. see also: Maarek, Phillippe (2011) *Campaign Communication and Political Marketing*. New York.

⁴ Swanson, David L. and Mancini, Paolo (1996) *Politics, Media, and Modern Democracy*. An International Study of Innovations in Electoral Campaigning and Their Consequences, Westport; especially: Swanson and Mancini 'Patterns of Modern Electoral Campaigning and Their Consequences', pp. 247-277.

⁵ Kotler, Philip and Kotler, Neil (1999) 'Political Marketing. Generating Effective Candidates, Campaigns, and Causes', in Newman, Bruce (ed) *Handbook of Political Marketing*. Thousand Oaks, pp. 3-19; furthermore: Ornstein, Norman and Mann, Thomas (2000) *The Permanent Campaign and Its Future*. Washington.

policy-making are morphing into a recurring marketing offer⁶ – a permanent campaign, where actions and its marketing go hand-in-hand.⁷ Governing is perceived as a permanent campaign to mobilise support and public acceptance, blurring the boundaries between policy-making and news-making.⁸ Hence, political campaigning becomes an integral part of today's politics.

2. The basic question 'change vs. more of the same'

There is a 'golden rule' of campaign politics: A campaign must repeatedly communicate a persuasive message to voters. However, to know what the right message is, who my voters are and how to approach them is the magic sauce of strategy and tactics. But before diving into it one must understand the basic question every election poses. The simple but tricky question is: Change or more of the same?

Does this country need a change because the current situation, its leader or their concepts have failed? Or have the last years been successful, leaders have turned the country around, or deserve another term because there is no other alternative on the horizon? Different political parties or candidates offer different analysis or solutions to the problems a society faces. These are constant choices, which they bring before the voters.⁹ Campaigns offer voters choices, and 'change vs. more of the same' is the simple yet most effective one.

Usually, the opposition formulates a change argument. Obama has been the most obvious candidate doing so when he cleverly filled a void with his simple 'Change and Hope' slogan in 2008 which combined his youthful charm, his media freshness and the promise for better times. Ronald Reagan's 1980 campaign masterfully championed President Carter by framing the choice with the question 'Are you better off than you were four years ago?'

In general, the party or candidate in government argues the opposite. They claim successful years in government or stress how risky it would be to not stay on course. In the middle of the global financial crisis Angela Merkel's 2009 campaign urged voters to believe in the turnaround story of her government. In the words of the chancellor: 'Germany will come out of the crisis more successful than we went into.' Therefore, the campaign message was

⁶ Nimmo, Dan (1999) 'The Permanent Campaign. Marketing as a Governing Tool', in Newman, Bruce (ed) *Handbook of Political Marketing*. Thousand Oaks, pp. 73-88; Jamieson, Kathleen H. (1992) *Dirty Politics. Deception, Distraction, and Democracy*. New York; Luntz, Frank (1988) *Candidates, Consultants, and Campaigns*. The Style and Substance of American Electioneering, Oxford.

⁷ Menefee-Libey, David (2000) *The Triumph of Campaign-Centered Politics*. New York.

⁸ Plasser, Fritz (2002) *Globalisierung der Wahlkämpfe: Praktiken der Campaign Professionals im weltweiten Vergleich [Globalisation of election campaign: Practices of campaign professionals in a worldwide comparison]*. Wien, p. 99; Sides, John and Vavreck, Lynn (2013) *The Gamble: Choice and Chance in the 2012 Presidential Election*. Princeton.

⁹ Rove, Karl (2010) *Courage and Consequence: My Life as a Conservative in the Fight*. New York.

straightforward and asked for continuity: 'We have the power' ... to overcome the crisis and to bring the country back.¹⁰

Understanding the two concepts of 'change vs. more of the same', which clash in its variations during political campaigns, helps to assess the political environment and build a strategy accordingly. But how can someone determine who will convincingly make its case and will win? Usually, it is the campaign which successfully frames the terrain of engagement by building an emotional connection with the voters.

3. Finding the emotional connection

Voters are smarter than some think, but more uninformed than politicians believe. Or as George Bernard Shaw bluntly put it: Democracy is a device that insures we shall be governed no better than we deserve.

There is a trend of more individualisation going around the globe. People customise products they buy, tailor their religion and individualise the political issues they are voting on. However, in all the individualisation there is a greater sense of purpose. Every society shares collective memories, threats or aspirations.¹¹ Maybe not every citizen can agree on them but most citizens do. In the 2004 election, most Americans shared their grief and anger about 9/11 attacks. In the 1990, Germans voted for Helmut Kohl based on his resoluteness to push for German unity. Elections are communicative reminders about collective frames, fears and hopes in society.

Successful campaigns are able to tie voters' problems to the ability of a leader or party to solve them. The perceived unique quality of a leader or party to solve the shared concern, address the needs and dreams of most voters forge an emotional connection that will ultimately win the election. This is as much communication as a strategic question, because it is about defining your own campaign, your opponent's campaign and the stakes in the election.

Ultimately an election is a big philosophical debate about the frames (narratives) of the direction of a country and the necessary arguments and facts enabling the understanding of these frames. A narrative delivers the strategy and links a big theme and the big ideas (issues)

¹⁰ Campaigns are also fought over narratives. A welcome side effect of the claim 'We have the power' was the power of words. As 'Power' is a female noun in German language the campaign claim also could be interpreted as not just the capability to solve the economic crisis but also having the female leader to do so.

¹¹ Interesting read on the impact of social change in the US: Sosnik, Douglas, Dowd, Matthew and Fournier, Ron (2006) *Applebee's America: How Successful Political, Business, and Religious Leaders Connect with the New American Community*. New York. Concerning the rise and challenge for the Western narrative, see: Ferguson, Niall (2012) *Civilization: The Six Killer Apps of Western Power*. New York; and: Ferguson, Niall (2014) *The Great Degeneration: How Institutions Decay and Economies Die*. New York.

of a campaign together. It is persuasive and embeds values while messages are the words that deliver the narrative and can be adapted to the audience and context. Facts tell, stories sell.

As much as politicians believe a campaign is about issues and an appeal to rationality, human beings are barely rational. Voters respond to messages which tug on their emotions and are prone to feel as much as they see the world. Hence, campaigns must build upon this emotional connection.

Bill Clinton understood it best, when after three terms of Republican Presidents and running as a challenger to a sitting war president, his 1992 campaign positioned him as a new kind of Democrat who could fix the economy. 'It's the economy, stupid!' read the sign in Clinton's war room as a constant reminder to focus on change and economy. Reinventing government to spur economic growth was a new message for democrats and fit the mood of the country at the time. Tony Blair and Gerhard Schröder successfully copied the strategy and ousted two sitting prime ministers.¹²

In hindsight, this all sounds easy. However, campaigns can be described *ex post* but they must be planned with election day in mind. Their planning, strategy and tactics decide if songs of heroism are sung around political operatives' campfire or if they remain another failed adventure.

4. Strategy: Who, where and why

There is a clear-cut difference between strategy and tactics. The objective is clear: winning an election. And strategy is the long-term plan going into the fight to win. Tactics are the ways and means to get there.¹³ Translated into the field of politics, strategy is the who, where and why. Who are the potential voters? Where are they situated and why are they supportive? Tactics addresses the how and the when. How will a campaign reach out to potential voters and when does it start?

The difference between strategy and tactics

Strategy	Tactics
Who?	How?
Where?	When?
Why?	

¹² Understanding the social change and the shifting narratives, see: Giddens, Anthony (2000) *The Third Way and Its Critics*. London.

¹³ Freedman, Lawrence (2013) *Strategy: A history*. Oxford.

Answering these questions depends mainly on thorough research, good analytical thinking and sound gut instincts. Developing a winning strategy must begin with a realistic assessment of the political landscape. There are several factors that should be understood before deciding on the strategy:

- What is the political system? What are the main factors affecting this election?
- What are the characteristics of the country/district?
- Who are the voters? Who is core base and who is persuadable?
- What are their incomes, ages, education, ethnicity, occupations and religious beliefs?
- Where do people work, shop and communicate? What is the geographic break down of the electorate?
- What percentage or how many people live in the city, in the rural areas or in small villages?
- What has happened in past elections?
- What are the strengths and weaknesses of the candidate and of all the viable opponents?

Having a better understanding of the political landscape, the 'lay of the land', and the voters determines what is the precise vote goal to achieve the objective: victory on election day. Therefore, campaigns tend to divide the electorate loosely into three major groups: 'Their die-hard voters' (the base), 'undecided' (the persuadable) and 'voters of the political opponents' (their base). This simplification helps conceptualise strategy and to calculate how many votes or percent will be needed for victory and determining where these votes will come from. By geographical and demographical targeting campaigns zoom in on the best potential voting districts/voters and their social demographic features. That is how they find a winning coalition of voters needed to win.

Looking at the Trump campaign in 2016, their odds didn't look good in September. But they stuck with their strategy. Through data analysis, the Trump campaign identified 13.5 million voters in 16 battleground states, which they thought could swing in their favour. The simple formula was: Win white voters in critical battleground states with an anti-establishment and economic-oriented message.¹⁴ Trump focused particularly on the 'Rust Belt' with the states of Wisconsin, Michigan, Ohio and Pennsylvania – traditional Democratic states. In Trump's own words: 'We'll win places that a lot of people say you're not going to win, that as a Republican you can't win it.' Some critics called this a failed strategy from the get go and a political 'Hail Mary'. Probably it was a desperate strategy, because there was no other option for Trump to get enough votes for a majority in the Electoral College. But while the Republican candidate was pushing very hard with advertisement and visits in the Rust Belt states, the Clinton campaign almost neglected them. Their winning coalition took them for

¹⁴ Shaw, Daron R. (2017) 'Assessing the Impact of Campaigning and the 2016 U.S. Presidential Election'. in Römmele, Andrea, Gülden-zopf, Ralf and Mario Voigt (eds) *Der amerikanische Präsidentschaftswahlkampf [The American Presidential Election Campaign]*. Berlin.



granted and so they instead focused on Ohio, Florida and North Carolina.¹⁵ With a win in one of these three main battleground states Clinton would have been incontestable. However, she did not need these three states to become president. Clinton forgot her vote goal and a simple rule of presidential elections: You don't need more than 270 electoral votes to win.¹⁶ Generalising for all elections, having a vote goal and knowing where it will come from is simply enough. You don't have to be the best in class.

In winner-takes-it-all-elections like in the US or UK it is easier to set a clear vote goal. In parliamentary systems, more parties, issues and candidates make it trickier.¹⁷ But understanding and rationalising the potential number of votes to win gives a campaign a clear focus on whom and where to spend precious resources: time, money and people.

Finally, a strategy must consider why people are deceptive for a candidate or party. Campaigns are not rocket science. If voters are thinking about the one or two things you want them to be thinking about on election day – you win. If voters are thinking about the

¹⁵ Gülden-zopf, Ralf and Voigt, Mario (2017) 'Donald Trump – Ein Wahlkampf der neuen Regeln? [Donald Trump – Election campaign with new rules?]', in Römmele, Gülden-zopf, Voigt (eds) *Der amerikanische Präsidentschaftswahlkampf [The American Presidential Election Campaign]*. Berlin.

¹⁶ Shaw, Daron R. (2007) *The Race to the 270. The Electoral College and the campaign strategies of 2000 and 2004*. Chicago.

¹⁷ See e.g. Schoen, Harald, et al. (2017) *Election Campaigns and Voter Decision-Making in a Multi-Party System: The 2009 and 2013 German Federal Elections*. Baden-Baden.

one or two things the opponent wants them to be thinking about on election day – you lose. The legendary American Republican consultant Lee Atwater called it 'Command Focus'. Contrary to what some politicians believe the average voters don't think about politics every day. On their mind are questions about security of their jobs, education of their children or health care benefits. But from time to time a window of opportunity opens. This is where campaigns 'command the focus'. Hence, campaigns are about the one or two things that voters are thinking about when they go voting. This is best understood if a campaign is clear about target audience and thoroughly considers four areas:

- **values** (What are the core values that unite the voters in the campaigns target audience?),
- **attitudes** (Are voters optimistic or pessimistic about the future?),
- **issues** (What are the important issues that will make voters sit up and take notice of this election?),
- **desire for leadership qualities** (What qualities do voters most want to see in their leaders?).

Basically, finding answers to the question, what moves voters in this election and why? And here comes the research. Depending on the size of the race; presidential or local; the type of analytics and research may vary. Running a local race, it is probably okay to ask the neighbours and friends. National campaigns all around the globe rely on scientific methods of obtaining data, such as political polling or focus groups. In today's digital world big data is becoming the new buzzword for analytics. And indeed, social media and a waste amount of data make it better possible to understand and anticipate human behaviour.

Looking at digital analytics, American campaigns have been very creative using these new ways.¹⁸ While the George W. Bush campaign in 2004 already combined different sociographical, psychographic, and lifestyle related data, Obama in 2008 ran over 60,000 simulations every night to predict voting behaviour and voters' psychological reactions. The Republicans and the Trump campaign 2016 went a step further. By matching the data of the RNC, additional consumer data, the acquisition of email lists from friendly third-party groups and social media data, they developed a database called Project Alamo, which contained detailed identity profiles for more than 200 million Americans with about 4,000 to 5,000 individual data points on their online and offline behaviour, including 2.5 million small donors with around 14 million email addresses and contact information. The 'gigantic voter telephone book' was updated continuously based on new information through online surveys of political behaviour, attitudes and fears. Thus, the Trump campaign identified policy and mental 'anger points' which motivates the choice of the respective persons. The social media provided an ideal battlefield for tracking down and addressing emotions, worries and hopes through behavioural data.¹⁹

¹⁸ Kreiss, Daniel (2016) *Prototype Politics: Technology-Intensive Campaigning and the Data of Democracy*. Oxford.

¹⁹ Hersh, Eitan D. (2015) *Hacking the Electorate*. Cambridge.

As important as research is, there is another fundamental of campaigns: do not overanalyse. Some political campaigns have the best political data but they die in paralysis of analysis. Of course, every candidate has its right to run on the issue he likes. And it's also good that political leaders care about 'their issues'. According to James Carville and Paul Begalla there is a marketplace theory of politics: if a candidate is not focusing on the issues most important to the voters its opponent will.²⁰ Keep the eye on the ball.

5. Tactics: how and when

Remember Mike Tyson? A campaign is a dynamic endeavour. If one has forward momentum its plan is working. But the strategy is put to the test when one got hit. As Clausewitz famously called it, when the 'fog of war' sets in, things don't look as clear as they were mapped out. That is when campaign tactics must adapt to the situation and a campaign must fight to gain control of the narrative aka choice for the voter. As the Spanish saying goes: La libertad no es tad. Es toca. – Liberty is not given. It's taken.

However, if the analysis has been done right, implementing the strategy into tactics comes handy.

Tactics basically mean developing a voter contact plan. Once a campaign decides whom to talk to and about what, the next step is to decide how. In other words, how will a campaign get their message out to voters? Does a campaign lack a reasonable plan of what to do between now and election day to persuade voters, it is bound to fail. These types of campaigns waste time, money and people by wandering aimlessly toward election day. Often distracted by the days' events, by things the opponent's campaign does or by things the press says, they passively spend more time reacting to outside factors than promoting their strategy and ideas.

The following strategy and message grid help candidates and parties to think through their election strategies and design their messages methodically and thoroughly. This SWOT analysis requires campaigns to not only determine what they will be saying during the campaign, but also how they will respond to their opponents' attacks and how they will win.

Message Grid

What We Say About Us	What We Say About Them
What They Say About Us	What They Say About Them

²⁰ Carville, James and Begala, Paul (2002) *Buck Up, Suck Up . . . and Come Back When You Foul Up: 12 Winning Secrets from the War Room*. New York.

If done properly, the complete message grid should outline everything that could possibly be said during the election campaign. It helps campaigns to anticipate the other side and focus on their strategy and message, link the messages to the narrative, and define the values on which the campaign will be fought.

Campaigns derive from a message grid a narrative for the campaign. When the Bush 2004 re-election team had to face a bad economy and an unpopular war in Iraq, the campaign framed the election around security. Their question was: who is better capable to keep the people and the country safe. As a democratic consultant James Carville decrypted their narrative: 'They had a narrative. They say: "I'm going to protect you from the terrorists in Tehran and the homos in Hollywood".'

Having understood the narrative, a campaign must figure out how to reach out to voters and how much each voter contact method will cost in terms of time, money and people. Depending on scale and budget of a campaign they use different techniques to communicate their message, ranging from paid advertisements, to earned media to grassroots activities.

The most common ways to share a message with the voters are the following:

Candidate visits: A basic truth of campaigns is, 'the candidate has to show up if he expects to win'. Hence, from local to national race campaign events are important to mobilise voters or to produce news coverage.²¹ In every European campaign they occur, and particularly in Asia and Latin America huge crowds show up, when politicians make their appearance. When Mauricio Macri surprisingly won the election in Argentina in 2015 he regularly talked to several ten – sometimes hundred thousand people. Surely a candidate visit is not a guarantee for a victory in a region or a state. A candidate appearance, however, signals to the electorate the absolute will to victory and the increased interest. The strategic benefit is the national or local media reporting about it. The local cable channels are devoted intensively to the visits of the candidates and their statements referring to the region.

Newspaper advertisements: These ads tend to play a minor role in campaigns. They are often overwhelmed by the mass of consumer advertisement in most newspapers. Hence, political ads get lost in the shuffle of pages. And they tend to be expensive, too. However, sometimes it can be useful, because newspapers are primarily a local medium and help in local races.

Billboards and out-of-home advertisement: Billboards, posters, ads on buses or in the subway, bumper stickers on cars or political signs are part of most political campaigns and they tend to rely extensively on the highly visible advertisement. Sometimes themes,

²¹ Newman, Bruce (1999) *The Mass Marketing of Politics. Democracy in an Age of Manufactured Images*. Thousand Oaks.

colours or placements generate a great deal of discussion among political activists or journalists. When, in 2013, the CDU put up the biggest campaign poster ever, showing just the two hands of Angela Merkel with the claim 'Germany in good hands' at the construction site of the new Berlin train station, it aimed at a public discussion. Ultimately it succeeded when political tabloids picked up on it. Even more it broke into pop culture. An own Tumblr competition in the internet started where people put their own face above the hands. These are the rare examples where political outdoor advertisement has been effective. In general, in today's world with information overflow, outdoor ads don't accomplish much. Out-of-home advertisement is meant to establish the big national battleground themes – e.g. the economy, education, health. But the impact will fade into obscurity as the election campaign progresses and the battles become more tactical and more targeted. After a first visual effect, they tend to blend into the environment as other posters appear. It mainly serves to improve name recognition in down the ballot races.



© CDU Germany

Campaign poster of Angela Merkel's hands in Berlin becoming part of the German pop culture

Paid media: In most national campaigns, TV (and sometimes radio) represent the biggest advertising expenditure.²² While most countries around the globe, and particularly in Europe, are strictly regulated and provide a defined, publicly subsidised air time, in the US the limit just depends on the financial power. American campaigns rely heavily on TV ads. A presidential campaign season with all national campaigns for president, Senate and down the ballot races can feature more than one million political spots. Closing in on election day around eight out of ten spots on the major networks in battleground states have political content.²³ Television reduces the complexity and puts people and/or candidates at the

²² Blumler, Jay G. and Kavanagh, Dennis (1999) 'The Third Age of Political Communication. Influences and Features'. *Political Communication* (16), pp. 209-230. See also: Trent, Judith S. and Friedenberg, Robert V. (2000) *Political Campaign Communication. Principles and Practices*, 4. ed, Westport.

²³ Goldstein, Kenneth and Freedman, Paul (2002) 'Lessons Learned. Campaign Advertising in the 2000 Elections'. *Political Communication* (19), pp. 5-28, p. 8, also: Wertheimer, Fred (1997) 'TV AdWars. How to Cut Advertising in Election Campaigns'. *The Harvard International Journal of Press/Politics* (2), pp. 93-101.

centre of the reporting through visualisation.²⁴ Through messages and memorable spots, the campaigns try to build their own or the opposing image. Interestingly, looking at the two last presidential elections in the US, both Clinton and Trump spend significantly less on TV advertising as Obama and Romney did.²⁵

While the former techniques are rather indirect, most campaigns supplement their voter outreach nowadays again with more direct communications. Two major developments have happened recently. Campaigns start to shift their resource for voter contact towards more digital and person-to-person communication.²⁶

Door-to-door: The rise of new media has altered how people use traditional media and advertising as sources of information and ideas. Research shows that voters are more likely now to trust the recommendation of family or friends over advertisements or editorial content. Person-to-person – which has always been a very effective form of communication – is more important than ever in an increasingly fragmented media environment, as people turn to their own social circles for ideas and information. From persuasion to the so-called get-out-the-vote (GOTV), campaigns tend to rely more and more on the old shoe leather approach of politics. The two Yale political scientists Donald P. Green and Alan S. Gerber produced with 'Get Out the Vote', a book which quantified the effect of voter contact tactics on GOTV. In a nutshell, the more personal the tactic, the more likely that tactic would produce a vote. In the understanding of the sociologist Paul Lazarsfeld: 'more than anything else people can move people.'²⁷ Parties and candidates knock on doors like never before, but with a very focused intent and hyper targeting of local messages. New technology enables campaigns to drive person-to-person communications.

A turning point for these forms of ground game has been the re-election campaign of George W. Bush. Bush's re-election architect, Karl Rove, designed a modern turnout operation linking voting history analysis with consumer data and a direct door-to-door

²⁴ Plasser, Fritz (2002) *Globalisierung der Wahlkämpfe: Praktiken der Campaign Professionals im weltweiten Vergleich [Globalisation of election campaign: Practices of campaign professionals in a worldwide comparison]*. Wien p. 25. Strohmeier refers to the different communicative possibilities to address voters. The campaigns use contrasting (for affective swing voters), integration of the opinion leaders (for traditional base voters), ideologisation and the creation of an enemy (for value-rational base voters), as a call to action for a close election (for purpose-rational swing voters) see Strohmeier, Gerd (2002) *Moderne Wahlkämpfe. Wie sie geplant, geführt und gewonnen werden [Modern election campaigns. How they are planned, executed and won]*. Baden-Baden, p. 80.

²⁵ Wesleyan Media Project (2016) 'Clinton Crushes Trump 3:1 in Air War'. November, <http://mediaproject.wesleyan.edu/releases/nov-2016> (24 April 2017).

²⁶ Nielsen, Rasmus (2012) *Ground Wars: Personalized Communication in Political Campaigns*. Princeton.

²⁷ Lazarsfeld, Paul, Berelson, Bernard and Gaudet, Hazel (1968) *The People's Choice. How the Voter Makes up His Mind in a Presidential Campaign*. New York/London: Columbia University Press.



Mobile app for CDU campaign to do door-to-door and connect volunteers

programme mobilising the base and reaching out to new voters.²⁸ The Obama campaign took it with their digital approach even further, combining data analytics and traditional door-to-door campaigning.²⁹ Campaigns like Labour in Great Britain or Macron's rise in France were following in their footsteps. Angela Merkel's re-election bid in 2017 is accompanied by a more sophisticated turnout operation combining digital and door-to-door outreach with their GOTV programme 'connect17'.³⁰ In the early 2017 state elections, the CDU has applied successfully these turnout methods to boost participation by more than 5 percent, increasing their vote share and gaining two new governors.³¹ Door-to-Door has made a comeback into campaigns around a globe.

In the same category of direct voter contact belong **political telemarketing** through the telephone and **direct mail**. In some countries, there is still a significant use of them, because campaigns can communicate with a highly-targeted audience. Changing data protection laws, rising costs and new technology (cell phones and internet) are pushing these voter techniques back.

Digital media: Since the former wrestler Jesse Ventura first used internet in a major campaign to become Governor of Minnesota nothing has fired the imagination of political campaigners

²⁸ Voigt, Mario (2010) *Der Amerikanische Präsidentschaftswahlkampf [The American presidential Election campaign]*. Berlin; also: Sosnik, Douglas; Dowd, Matthew and Fournier, Ron (2006) *Applebee's America: How Successful Political, Business, and Religious Leaders Connect with the New American Community*. New York

²⁹ Issenberg, Sasha (2013) *The Victory Lab: The Secret Science of Winning Campaigns*, New York.

³⁰ For reasons of transparency it should be mentioned that the author of this article works as a consultant for mobilisation and voter turnout for the CDU and was significantly involved in the development of 'connect17'.

³¹ For an assessment on the turnout and volunteer programme of Angela Merkel's first campaign, see: Melchert, Florian, Magerl, Fabian and Voigt, Mario (2006) *In der Mitte der Kampagne: Grassroots und Mobilisierung im Bundestagswahlkampf 2005 [In the middle of the campaign: grassroots and mobilisation in the German parliamentary elections]*. Berlin.

more than the internet and its possibilities to communicate directly with the voters.³² It threatens to upset the balance of communication power by sending information at almost no cost. It offers distinct possibilities to adapt according to the audience and personalise the campaign message.³³ Campaigns can provide almost endless policy information, raise funds, start a dialogue or advertise to a narrow-targeted audience through internet.³⁴ Digital media, and especially social channels, play now a key role in the campaigns and political parties' communications efforts. In the 2015 election, the Conservative Party in the UK spent more than 1 million pounds (around 1.2 million Euro) on Facebook and their online campaign videos have received 6,500,000 views, over 4,000,000 more than Labour in second place. In the US, digital media in political advertisement broke the 1 billion US Dollars (approx. 940 million Euro) level for the first time in 2016, and matched the share of spending allocated to print and radio combined.³⁵ The Trump team alone spent over 70 million US Dollars (ca. 66 million Euro) a month on digital communications.

There are different ways to reach out to voters. Smart campaigns use all of them in proper ratio. Some methods are interchangeable and vary in their degree of effectiveness at persuading voters, identifying supporters and turning out the voters. It is important to plan well in advance for each phase of the campaign.

When to start? Another critical element remains the timing of a campaign. There are at least three distinct phases of a campaign: the introduction, the persuasion and the final push – get out the vote.

In the '**introduction phase**', campaigns present their candidates and their vision for the future. They start inviting and recruiting people to join the campaign. In this phase, a campaign builds its foundation, sets up basic administrative, finance and management systems, builds its leadership/campaign team, and develops the campaign narrative and strategy. Recently, campaigns have also tended to pay particularly attention to building and training volunteers. Mobilising the core base has been always an important part of this phase of the campaign. But it is rather new, involving volunteers as early as possible in the campaign, focusing exclusively on engaging, motivating and training supporters in the early stage.

³² Kiyohara, Shoko, Maeshima, Kazuhiro and Owen, Diana (ed) (2017) *Internet Election Campaigns in the United States, Japan, South Korea, and Taiwan*. London.

³³ Jungherr, Andreas (2015) *Analyzing Political Communication with Digital Trace Data: The Role of Twitter Messages in Social Science Research*. Wiesbaden.

³⁴ Jungherr, Andreas (2016) 'Four Functions of Digital Tools in Election Campaigns: The German Case'. *The International Journal of Press/Politics* 21(3), pp. 358-377. See also: Davies, Richard, Holtz-Bacha, Christina and Just, Marion (eds) *Twitter and Elections Around the World: Campaigning in 140 Characters or Less*. Routledge.

³⁵ Borrell Associates (2017) *The Final Analysis: Political Advertising in 2016*. Williamsburg.

The second phase, campaigns start an extensive dialogue with voters and engage them. This **persuasion phase** of the campaign is on identifying supporters and persuading undecided voters. The message will be communicated in a coordinated manner across multiple channels – paid media, earned media, new media or directly. As more and more voters start to tune in the election dialogue they need to hear it many times before it registers with them. Campaigns relentlessly and repeatedly communicate a persuasive message to people who will vote.

The **final phase 'GOTV'** is focused on the ultimate objective – turning out votes to win on election day. It is a culmination of a campaign's electoral efforts, where a campaign delivers as many 'go vote' messages as possible to those favourable. A campaign applies limited resources to areas of identified support.³⁶ Getting voters to the polls (or the mailbox) in a systematic way to ensure victory has become a major endeavour of campaigns in most western societies. Low turnout, late deciders and shifting moods in the electorate let campaigns focus on the final days before election day.

Nevertheless, if a local or a national race is at stake, there is something very important to understand about time and campaign planning. A campaign is a big sales and marketing job where all the sales have to 'close' in one day: ELECTION DAY. This is the difference to every commercial marketing campaigns where brands like BMW or Apple define a release day. Then they go as long as the expected return on investment is reached. If necessary they adjust along the way. Political campaigns must deliver on election day. There is no second chance.

It gets even more complicated, if early voting is legally possible. In some countries people can vote early or by mail. For example, in Germany everyone can also vote early starting around six weeks before election day. More and more Germans make use of this way of voting and its popularity is steadily on the rise. In the last national election it topped the list with 24.3 percent of all German voters. This is a challenge for campaigns for two reasons. Firstly, the election span exponentially grows and six weeks is a lifetime in politics. A lot can happen and campaigns must organise properly their voter outreach. Secondly, campaigns used to approach the dialogue with the voter like a good movie: With a good start, a narrative and a happy end. However, this long period of voting makes it hardly possible to develop a campaign narrative which culminates on election day. Comparing the results of Angela Merkel's CDU in 2013 by voters from mail and on election day a two-percentage point deficit occurs.

Regardless of the voting system every campaign understands the concept of closing all sales on election day. Hence, the efforts of campaigns are planned backwards starting with election day.

³⁶ Green, Donald and Gerber, Alan (2015) *Get Out the Vote: How to Increase Voter Turnout*. 3.ed, New York.

6. The four P of politics

Rapid global transformations have led to changes in political and electoral practice and a global trend of professionalisation of political campaigns. Political operatives exchange cross continental strategies, ideas, and techniques with each other. This process of convergences and professionalisation will increase. Campaigns as well as academia have a lot to learn from each other.

There is no better season than campaigns season. A constant up and down, a battle of ideas and people – campaigns are an aphrodisiac for every political animal. From the emergence of new media, to demographical shifts in western societies to global challenges like wars or handling of refugees – the political dialogue has increased. Voters have become more demanding and insecure. They demand answers and visions, they fear uncertainty and change a global economy and communication world brings. In such an environment, political campaigns need a strategic plan, discipline, and a bias for action. Successful campaigns are structured to keep momentum. They know who and where their voters are, why they are in favour, and how and when to reach to them. By building an emotional connection these campaigns successfully ask, 'change or more of the same'. Hence, they will convince undecided voters and turn them out on election day.

Winning an election is very gratifying. All the planning, strategizing and decisions have paid off. But the next campaign begins the day after the last election. Elected officials, potential candidates and political parties must view political campaigns as an ongoing, constant process. Or in the words of the slaves, which were ordered to repeat while Caesar rode the streets of Rome: *Sic transit Gloria mundi* – all glory of this world is fleeting.

All around the globe elections are democratic adventures in a constant struggle for power. But elections and campaigns are not just about the next leader, but about the next generation. As Thomas Jefferson once stated: 'Our liberty can never be safe but in the hands of the people themselves'. There are four universal Ps of politics and campaigns. Elections are about and for the PEOPLE. Their PURPOSE is to make things better and provide change for a better future. This is based on PRINCIPLES which derive from a core set of values and deliver meaningful understanding of society. And finally, a campaign is about PARTICIPATION to involve more people for the better of the country and society. This is what elections and campaigns are about. There is no blueprint for victory, but a good strategy and flexibility will prepare for the Mike Tyson moments of campaign season.



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The battlefield in your pocket: how to run successful digital campaigns

Juri Schnöller

Despite the fact that change in the world around us is accelerating, it is important to keep in mind that the digital revolution is still in its early days. Massive changes have come about since the first launch of smartphones and social networks just a decade ago. A look at the exploding rate of discovery in fundamental research and development as well as in practical engineering leaves us little doubt that more upheaval is on the way.

McKinsey recently predicted in a report that by 2050 almost 40 percent of all jobs might be automated and replaced by robots or artificial intelligence.¹ While the digital revolution will eliminate very few jobs entirely within the next decade, it will affect portions of almost all branches to a varying degree, depending on the type of work they entail and how quickly it can be automated.

Many industries have already been disrupted and the tech giants out of the Silicon Valley are developing new business models each day to fundamentally transform every part of our life. As it has mostly been the case in history, political parties and public institutions are the very last to adapt to these new developments which are constantly changing our societies at the speed of light.

We can identify three basic indicators in politics that make a new style of thinking for political campaigns necessary. In the following we will address the challenges political parties and campaign professionals face and then outline concrete steps and strategies in order to run cutting-edge campaigns for the digital age.

Challenge No 1: regain trust or become dust

The numbers are not looking good. Trust in political parties and politicians as legitimate entities have been decreasing across the Western hemisphere in recent years. According to a recent study by the GfK Institute politicians are even considered the least trustworthy group compared to all other job categories.² This is especially worrisome if you consider

¹ Chui, Michael, Manyika, James and Miremadi, Mehdi (2016) 'Where machines could replace humans – and where they can't (yet)'. McKinsey Quarterly July, <http://www.mckinsey.com/business-functions/digital-mckinsey/our-insights/where-machines-could-replace-humans-and-where-they-cant-yet> (24 July 2017).

² GfK Institute (2016) 'Weltweites Ranking: Vertrauenswürdige Berufe' [Worldwide ranking: trustworthy professions]. March, <http://www.gfk-verein.org/compact/fokusthemen/weltweites-ranking-vertrauenswuerdige-berufe> (16 March 2017).

the general feeling people have that the world with its fast-paced news-cycle, the increase of armed conflicts and a general anxiety of the personal future is turning into a dark and grim place.

Much of continental Europe is convulsed with combinations of disaffection protectionism and, in some cases, nationalism even racism that have morphed into a more-or-less generalised anger against globalisation and the existing political elites.

The anger is real and deep. For too long political parties have underestimated the growing frustration of large parts of the population over their communication and leadership style. This climate of fear, insecurity and frustration leads to unpredictable implications and simply waiting for it to dissipate by itself would be disastrous. And although primarily economic countermeasures are important, such as the joint G20 declaration in Hangzhou last year calling for faster growth and a better education infrastructure, they are unlikely to suffice because emotions, not just economics, are heavily involved.

For example, the parts of the UK that voted by the biggest margins to leave the EU included some of the areas that are most dependent on exports to the EU, as well as some big beneficiaries from transfer payments from the EU budget. Political campaigns need to realise that in such a climate it is of paramount importance to acknowledge the need for identity politics and shaping movements that give people a purpose of belonging, a vision for the country, and a personalised approach to address the individual interests and opinions of the people one by one.

Challenge No 2: the meltdown of the gate keeper

The digital disruption has finally arrived in political communication and the public sphere with its fundamental shift in media consumption of voters and a rise of new players on the political landscape. Events like the unprecedented surge of Donald Trump in the recent US elections as well as the surprising exit of the United Kingdom out of the European Union have demonstrated the significant role of digital communications in political campaigns.

The recently published Digital News Report by the University of Oxford has shown that already nearly a third of younger voters receive their news primarily via social media feeds.³ This was heavily discussed in the aftermath analysis of the recent US elections, along with the problem of the so-called 'filter bubbles' – social echo chambers that are created automatically due to the complex platform algorithms, which seek to keep users on the respective sites as long as possible. Therefore, they primarily show content as well as news that are most likely to attract user attention. However, this has led to two

³ Newman, Nic, Fletcher, Richard, Levy, David A. L. and Nielsen, Rasmus Kleis (2016) *Reuters Institute Digital News Report 2016*. http://reutersinstitute.politics.ox.ac.uk/sites/default/files/Digital-News-Report-2016.pdf?utm_source=digitalnewsreport.org&utm_medium=referral (16 March 2017).

their very survival. It starts with having at least one data scientist in the campaign who is able to coordinate all targeting activities and voter modelling efforts and ends with internal boot camp trainings where the focus is on constant improvement of digital knowledge and new trends in social media, content and targeting.

One major problem is that most political parties do not exactly have a well-structured long-term digital strategy in place – why and especially how to use digital capabilities in order to run smarter and more effective campaigns. It starts by asking honest questions, which quickly put the spotlight on the weaknesses and blind spots of any campaign organisation:

- Does the campaign adjust its financial resources to the actual digital media consumption behaviour of its electorate?
- What kind of voter modelling does it have in place for testing messages and running simulations of turnout numbers?
- What existing data points does the campaign own and how can digital tools play a crucial role in order to expand these to gain more information about supporters and offer them tailor-made messages and activities within the campaign organisation?
- What skills do the campaign staffers have and are they sufficient for carrying out the required tasks?
- Is the digital team agile and has the authority to quickly respond to digital messages without the need of involving political leadership?
- What specific digital activities create engagement with the electorate and seek to establish digital channels not just as a source of information but a central hub of a political movement that seeks to change the country for the better?

These are all very relevant questions that shape and define the ability to campaign via digital channels of any political player that seeks to run a data-driven cutting-edge campaign adjusted to the needs of 2017 and beyond.

Preparing for battle – six things you should do right away to build digital campaign capabilities that last

Critically, digital campaigning in 2017 is all about implementing a cyclical and agile dynamic where processes and capabilities are constantly evolving based on inputs from either voters or campaign staffers fostering ongoing engagement with our organisation. Making this happen requires an interconnected set of seven integral capabilities that enable an organisation to run great digital campaigns.

Data-first mind-sets

Being truly digital in your campaigns is about using data to make better and faster decisions, devolving decision-making to smaller teams, and developing much more iterative and rapid ways of doing things. Thinking in this way shouldn't be limited to just a handful of functions. It should incorporate a broad swath of how your campaign operates, including

creatively partnering with external stakeholders like agencies or freelancers to extend necessary capabilities for the required timeframe. A digital mind-set institutionalises cross-functional collaboration, flattens hierarchies and builds temporary expert clusters, and builds environments to encourage the generation of new creative ideas. Incentives and metrics are developed to support such decision-making agility. Create internal hackathons or test labs where all campaign staffers are invited to contribute creative solutions to existing problems and cherish a solution-driven organisation culture that enables everyone to contribute something to the improvement of your campaign structure based on data intelligence.

Proactive and agile decision-making

Relevance and speed are the crucial currencies of the digital age. This requires making decisions, based on data-gathered intelligence, that deliver content and experiences which are personalised and relevant to the campaign supporter. Remembering preferences is a basic example of this capability, but it also extends to personalising and optimising all steps across the so-called 'ladder of engagement.' This means structuring your engagement tactics not based on who someone is but to what extent they are willing to contribute something to your campaign. It enables you to communicate on digital channels differently with someone who never heard of you before, someone who might passively follow you and someone who is already a party member. Each of them receives – thanks to data – a unique offer to get involved and become part. Analytics and intelligence tools like the Facebook Power Editor provide near-real-time insights about relevant conversations and behaviours of your supporters that then determine the types of messages you can deliver to them. Agility in decision-making across departments and teams is crucial to put speed before hierarchy.

Contextual interactivity and chatbots



The rise of chatbots in messaging applications will offer new ways of interaction with potential voters.

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This means analysing how a person is interacting with your organisation and modifying those interactions to improve the user experience. For example, the content and experience may adapt as a person shifts from a mobile phone to a laptop or based on how much time someone has offering him specific adjusted ways to quickly get involved. The rising number of voter and supporter interactions via a homepage, social media or email generates a stream of intelligence that allows political campaigns to make better decisions about what

their specific supporters want. And the rapid rise of wearable technology and the 'Internet of Things' represents the latest wave of touch points that will enable political campaigns

to blend digital and physical experiences even more. The rise of chatbots in messaging applications will offer new user experiences how potential voters can interact with a campaign and quickly receive the information they want. Without the need of substantial programming knowledge it is already becoming much easier to build a simple bot via specific tools and get started right away.

Real-time automation

To support this cyclical give-and-take dynamic with potential voters in order to quickly make them a part of a campaign now requires extensive automation. Automation of supporter interactions can boost the number of self-service options that help resolve problems quickly, personalise communications with specific tailor-made messages to be more relevant, and deliver consistent campaign journeys no matter the channel, time, or device. So, when someone signs up for foreign policy issues he permanently receives content about campaign activities related to that field and how he or she can easily get involved to take action and contribute to succeed the specific goals. Therefore, a triggered retargeting strategy for social media (if you click on this Ad X you will be ranked for that category and sent to sub landing page Y etc.) and automated email processes are easy ways how to save money and time within your campaign. E.g. if you haven't opened the past five emails you will receive a triggered mail from the campaign manager asking you if everything is okay and how to eventually make communication with you as a supporter more relevant so you can become more active.

Ability to test and scale

At the heart of agile cultures is a test-and-learn mindset and data-driven methodology, which can be usefully applied, or translated, to nearly any project or process that the campaign undertakes. Instead of awaiting the perfect campaign slogan by an agency or waiting for peer groups feedbacks by polling institutes, digital savvy campaigners quickly postulate a hypothesis what test to run, execute it, learn, track, and react based on the result of the test by either scaling or changing the test case. That enables political campaigns to have an internal test lab for pictures, messages, framing of the candidate, in particular peer groups, and the overall possibility to test anything in a smaller group before deploying the optimised result to the general audience. It requires a constant open and innovative mind-set that accepts failure and error along the way. However, it will allow you to permanently optimise your communication efforts with voters in between two elections and stay connected to your electorate by testing your messages along the way.

Content that involves and engages

You can have the best data-and-testing culture in the world and still gain no traction if your content is not focused on involvement and engagement of voters. So instead of constantly talking about your candidate, your party or your campaign, try to put the user at the core and create specific social media formats that are primarily designed for interaction. This can be a Facebook Live with your candidate and relevant people designed for Q&A with

followers or just stories about existing supporters and their background. No matter what it is – always try to keep the four basic questions in mind when planning your content:

- Does the format engage and focus on interacting with my audience?
- What is the frequency of the format and who is responsible to implement it?
- Have I defined my key performance indicators and goals so I know when it is successful and what do I want to achieve with the format?
- What are the resources I need in order to carry it out?
- You will quickly see how an interaction-driven digital presence will boost your engagement with your audience and enable more possibilities how to convert them into campaign supporters along the way.

Summary: There was never any more inception than there is now

The road to an agile digital data-driven campaign organisation is not easy and you will experience many setbacks along the way. However as long as you stay focused with your commitment to use data and testing along the way and cherish innovation and participation of your campaign staffers to develop innovative solutions you will have the perfect ecosystem in place. The best time to get started is after you have finished these lines – no matter how far away the next election is. Digital capabilities are nowadays a 24/7 cycle and demand permanent attention in order to use them as an integral part to shape your candidate and your campaign. Start building the campaign infrastructure for the current year and beyond and success for your endeavour will only be a matter of time.



As Founder and Managing Director of 'Cosmonauts and Kings' Juri Schnöller loves and lives digital campaigning. Among others, he worked for 'Obama for America', Angela Merkel, Jean Claude-Juncker and the Austrian presidential candidate Andreas Kohl. For him the power of mobilisation with help of data and artificial intelligence is the key for successful campaigns of the future.

Hero or villain: framing in political communication

Hans de Bruijn

Introduction¹

In this chapter, I will discuss the phenomenon of framing. In our complex world with its many complex challenges, framing should be a key competency of politicians. Framing is about reducing this complexity to a concise and convincing message. Reducing complexity is, however, not a neutral activity, it is a political activity. When a polluting company produces many jobs, a conservative politician might emphasise the many jobs, a green politician might emphasise the environmental pollution. They both frame, they both play the game of over-interpreting and under-interpreting and try to convince us that they are right – and that their opponent is wrong.

There is nothing morally wrong with framing. Politics is a competition of ideas and values; values shape our perception of the real world. Our conservative politician will probably be deeply convinced that the company does something good – and will therefore over-emphasise the many jobs. Our green politician has other values and will perceive the company differently – as a polluter. Their frames represent their values – and the interesting question is which frame will convince us most. The answer to that question has everything to do with us and our values, but also with the framing strategies of the politicians – with how they play the framing-game. This chapter will show what the main characteristics of a good frame are, what the impact of framing is, and it will present one of the main models in the framing game: the victim-villain-hero model.

The five main characteristics of a frame

A 'frame' or a 'message frame' can be defined as the structure of a message, aimed at activating a specific interpretation of the world. What are the features of a good frame?

Frames are sticky

Conservative politicians often object to development aid on the grounds that it distorts markets, disempowers people, protects corrupt regimes, and increases donor-dependence. What is the essence of these arguments? How do we summarise this complex set of arguments? This is the frame that is frequently used in the debate on development aid:

¹ This part can also be found in de Bruijn, Hans (2017) *The Art of Framing. How Politicians Convince Us That They Are Right*. Harlem: Etopia.



This frame is sticky as a fish. But it is also the most known frame in the field of development aid: 'Don't give poor people fish: give them fishing rods.'

Don't give poor people fish: give them fishing rods.

It will be clear: this frame is 'sticky' – it sticks in our minds – because it conveys such a simple and convincing message. Everybody understands that teaching a man to use a fishing rod is more effective than giving him a continuous supply of fish. Sticky frames attract attention and are easy to retain.² These two qualities can allow the owner of the frame to dominate the debate and make life difficult for his opponents.

We intuitively agree with frames

The second feature of a good frame is that most listeners will agree with it almost immediately. We find it hard to imagine that there are politicians who would prefer to hand out fish and prevent poor people from learning to use fishing rods.

Many right-wing parties place the fight against crime high on their agenda, and security is often a key issue during elections. The frame is often that these parties are

Tough on crime

'Tough on crime' is a sticky message. But there is more: is anybody actually against being tough on crime? Obviously not. Most people will intuitively agree with this frame.

² Gladwell, Malcolm (2002) *The Tipping Point. How Little Things Can Make a Big Difference*. Boston: Little Brown and Company, pp. 89-132.

Frames contain a villain

Frames like the fishing rods frame are sticky – they are intuitively right, so the next question is: Who on earth wants to keep on handing out fish? Who doesn't want to be tough on crime? This brings us to the third feature of frames. All good frames contain a villain – somebody who refuses to do the right thing or simply doesn't know how to. The 'teach them how to fish' frame clearly points a finger at the naïve do-gooders on the liberal side of the political spectrum.

Frames challenge your opponent's core values

When you have a good frame, your opponents should think twice before stepping into it. This is because, if they do, they will be forced to discuss the issue on your terms. Unfortunately for them, a good frame has another important feature: it is constructed in such a way that opponents are practically forced to step into it, because it challenges their core values.

Take the following example. In many European countries, universities charge low tuition fees and students receive government-funded maintenance grants. These low fees and government grants enable young people to go to university without incurring significant debt, which helps attract students from less affluent backgrounds. Left-wing parties generally emphasise the latter aspect, arguing that this system makes a university education available to all – not just to the children of rich parents.

But there is also another way of looking at this issue. Graduates generally go on to earn much more than non-graduates, so government funding of higher education is particularly unfair to those who don't go to college. Most European universities are already funded through taxation. Should tax-payers really be forced to cover the cost of maintenance grants as well? No, say some politicians, it is entirely reasonable to expect students to take out loans to cover their living expenses instead of receiving government grants. They frame this position with the help of a simple rhetorical question:

Why should a plumber pay for someone else to go to law school?

In fact, there is an even better version of this question: why should the plumber's assistant pay for the son of a lawyer to go to law school? This question has all the hallmarks of a good frame: it is 'sticky' and many people will intuitively agree with it. It is true that a person who works hard for little pay should not be expected to pay for someone else to go to college, who will later earn much, much more than the plumber. That would be very unfair. But there is more. This frame challenges the core values of the Left, which claims to champion the less well-off – like the plumber's assistant – but in reality supports those who will go on to earn a lot of money – like the lawyer's son. The 'plumber vs. lawyer' frame thus implies that the Left has abandoned one of its core values and that this particular value is actually safer

in the hands of its political opponents, who are sticking up for the plumber's assistant by insisting that the lawyer should pay for his own studies. An experienced left-wing politician would dismiss this frame as nonsense and present arguments to back this up. However, the point is that the attack on his core values forces him to step into this frame, thus putting him on the defensive.

Frames tap into social undercurrents

Every society has its undercurrents – widely held views that are largely taken for granted.

In many Western countries, people have a strong dislike of bureaucracy and over-management in public organisations like schools, hospitals and the police. The common view is that there are too many managers and bureaucrats – pen-pushers and box-tickers – who only make things difficult for the real professionals. This is an undercurrent, a feeling of discontent shared by many people. A good frame exploits those undercurrents. Suppose, for example, that two hospitals decide to merge. This is what an opponent of the merger might say:

A bigger hospital means more managers and less health professionals, more bureaucracy and less care.

This message taps into this undercurrent. It evokes a feeling of here we go again: more managers, more bureaucrats. By framing your message in this language, you make it more likely that it will 'stick.' Many people are strongly opposed to over-management and bureaucracy in the public sector, so if a merger is framed to reflect this undercurrent, people will be more inclined to condemn it.



There are lot of frames, but how to get a good frame?

How does a good frame work?

As already noted, a good frame practically forces your opponent to discuss an issue on your terms. What effect does this have? What happens when a person steps into another person's frame?

Frames put opponents on the defensive

The stronger the frame, the more its opponents are put on the defensive. When people intuitively agree with a frame, the implication is that anyone who opposes it is firmly in the wrong – like those who insist on giving poor people fish rather than fishing rods. Consider the following example.

Many countries carry out national scholastic achievement tests in primary and secondary schools. Such tests help the authorities to quantify the performance of all students. Should the government make these tests compulsory? And should schools be required to publish test scores so that they can be ranked? No, say many politicians. Such tests reveal very little, are far more biased than is usually claimed and cannot deal with the great differences that may exist between students. Moreover, publishing test scores will result in school rankings. In practice, such rankings are largely meaningless, but there is a risk that parents will focus on them to the exclusion of everything else when choosing schools for their children.

Now suppose that a certain politician is in favour of compulsory tests and school rankings. In order to frame his position in a more attractive way, he could say:

*Parents have a right to know
how well schools are doing.
After eight years of education,
students have a right to an
objective assessment of where they stand.³*

This way of framing, turns a large and complex debate about the merits of tests and rankings into a debate about a right to information. Most people would intuitively agree that such a right exists. This puts the opponents of tests on the defensive – they are trying to strip parents and students of their rights. Once they have been put in this position, it is very hard for them to find a way out.

Frames easily get free airtime

Suppose that a minister for development cooperation becomes involved in a debate with a right-wing opponent who keeps using the 'teach them how to fish' frame. Now imagine that he responds to his opponent's arguments in the following manner:

³ Sander Dekker, the Dutch education minister, speaking on the Buitenhof political discussion programme, 17 March 2013.

*I am really annoyed by this cheap rhetoric.
 My policy has always been to empower people,
 to teach them how to fish.
 Development aid is all about handing out fishing rods.
 The essence of my policy is to teach people how to fish.*

This response may win over various observers, but the minister is still taking a big risk by stepping into his opponent's frame. This is because he is using the language – the words and images – of his opponent. Language is not a neutral vehicle for conveying information: it is loaded with value. If you use your opponents' language, you give their frame free airtime. Suppose we had watched this debate on television. What would we remember about it a few days later? If nothing else, it would be the message that, instead of giving poor people fish, you should teach them how to fish. In other words, the minister will have actually helped to spread his opponent's message. According to American linguist George Lakoff, you should therefore never step into someone else's frame. 'Do not use their language,' he warned the Democrats about the Republicans. 'The words draw you into *their* worldview.'⁴

Frames place a heavy burden of proof on opponents (and a light one on their creators)

Imagine that we – the audience – have been convinced that the 'teach them how to fish' frame makes sense and that we therefore have serious doubts about the impact of development aid. This will have a strong impact on the division of the burden of proof in the debate. Suppose that a politician who opposes development aid presents two reports describing failed development projects. There may be hundred other reports on projects that have been successful. However, because we are observing the debate through the 'teach them how to fish' frame, the two negative reports might be enough to confirm our views and convince us that, once again, we have been giving poor people fish instead of teaching them how to fish.

The general mechanism is that when a frame or filter has been set, we are very receptive to information confirming that frame. Consequently, the owners of a frame have a light burden of proof and their opponents have a heavier burden of proof.

Frames require complex rebuttals

Frames are almost always simple and a simple frame often requires a complicated response. Consider the following example. A roads authority has built a new tunnel that is experiencing many accidents and traffic jams. The authority's chief engineer is asked to explain why there are so many problems with the tunnel. His opponent is a politician who has criticised the roads authority for many years. The discussion between the two of them unfolds as follows.

⁴ Lakoff, George (2004) *Don't Think of an Elephant: Know Your Values and Frame the Debate*. White River Junction: Chelsea Green Publishing, pp. 3-4.

Chief engineer: The tunnel employs new road markings that apparently confuse some drivers. We're also going to see if we can do anything about the lighting in the tunnel. Drivers are telling us that the tunnel is too dark at certain points, especially in the two places where it curves slightly.

Politician: Look, of course we have to talk about road markings and lighting and curves. But there is a more fundamental problem here. The roads authority no longer has the expertise to build this type of tunnel. There are too many managers and not enough engineers. Your managers have made your organisation 'lean and mean.' As a result, you have lost all your expertise. And if you don't have the expertise, things go wrong.

Chief engineer: We do not lack expertise. We have more than a hundred senior engineers working for us. We invest a great deal of time and effort in our people's professional development. And we make sure we keep up with the latest innovations. All our work processes are certified.

Politician: Again, there are too many managers and not enough engineers. I understand that you are investing heavily in professional development, because there is a lack of expertise within your organisation. When there is a lack of expertise, things inevitably go wrong.

The 'too many managers, not enough engineers' frame is sticky, attacks the roads authority's core values (expertise and professional development), and taps into the undercurrent that holds that many public and private institutions are over-managed. In this discussion, the chief engineer steps into the politician's frame and presents some impressive arguments. However, because he puts forward four arguments, he gives the politician four possible ways to respond. The politician focuses on the weakest of the four arguments and builds on it. It is a well-known mechanism: a simple frame evokes a complex response and complex responses are almost always vulnerable. The engineer's response is what we call a multiple-hurdle response – once he misses one hurdle he has lost the whole race.

Frames are confirmed by denying them

American linguist George Lakoff frequently refers to a mechanism that is as powerful as it is simple: 'When we negate a frame, we evoke the frame.'⁵ In 2010, Christine O'Donnell was an inexperienced Republican candidate in the Delaware Senate race. In response to accusations that she had dabbled in witchcraft in the past, she said:

I am not a witch.

What sticks out in this response? The word 'witch,' which we will associate with her – something she probably wanted to prevent with her statement. The well-known example

⁵ Lakoff, George (2004) *Don't Think of an Elephant: Know Your Values and Frame the Debate*. White River Junction: Chelsea Green Publishing, p. 3.

here is Richard Nixon's 'I am not a crook,' which he said when the stories about Watergate emerged. There is, however, no smoke without fire. When a president feels obliged to deny that he is a crook, many people will wonder why he said that and will regard it as a confirmation instead.

In 2014, the French prime minister visited his Dutch counterpart to discuss the state of the European economy. He made the following statement – first in Dutch to please his hosts – and then in French: *La France n'est pas l'homme malade de l'Europe.*

France is not the sick man of Europe.

Even if you are not familiar with economic issues, you start to wonder why the French prime minister would say such a thing. Why would he emphasise that France is not the sick man of Europe? Again, there's no smoke without fire. Perhaps he knows in his heart that France really is in poor health?

Many politicians in the northern parts of Europe then had the opinion that France is the sick man of Europe: low economic growth, an inability to control its budget deficit. By denying this frame, the prime minister in fact confirmed it by reminding us that there is something wrong in the first place. We end up associating 'France' with 'sick man,' just like we associate O'Donnell with 'witch' and Nixon with 'crook.'

Reframing

Framing is a highly effective strategy, because it is hard to avoid stepping into a sophisticated frame – and anyone who does so is immediately at a disadvantage. So, what to do when confronted with a frame?

1. Never step into someone else's frame.
2. Try to reframe the debate by changing the language that is being used to discuss the issue.

This game of framing and reframing has a series of patterns and behind these patterns are often very simple and powerful models. In the following I will discuss one of the most important models, which is about victims, villains, and heroes.

Victims, villains and heroes

In a large European city with a sizeable Caribbean immigrant community, there is anger about the behaviour of some of the community's young men. What is the problem? It appears that a number of them have fathered children with several different women and then abandoned them. The mothers in question, who are often as young as 18, are left to

raise these children by themselves. As a result, most of them are living on benefits. One local politician is particularly incensed by this:

I believe this is unacceptable.

I believe a man should take responsibility for any children he fathers. You can't expect society to pick up the tab.

It's perfectly reasonable that he should cover the cost of raising his children.

It is even worse, the politician says, some of the men are also claiming benefits. That is why he proposes a *daddy tax*

which would be, first, deducted from the benefit payments of the fathers and, second, be paid to the mothers.

Is this proposal feasible? Not in the slightest: there are all kinds of legal impediments. For example, the men could simply deny paternity, and refuse DNA testing. Despite this, the politician receives widespread praise for his proposal.

What makes this daddy tax frame so powerful? Let's answer this question with help of a little thought experiment. There is a second politician who argues that this is a much more complex problem than suggested by the 'daddy tax' politician. What explains the behaviour of these men? There are structural causes, like social and economic disparities, and educational inequality. He advocates an entirely different approach: the authorities should enter into a dialogue with the fathers and mothers, provide mediation and counselling and intervene as early as possible. It might even be a good idea to organise parenting classes.

The two above-mentioned politicians are thus on the opposite sides of the debate. One is proposing a daddy tax, while the other is in favour of dialogue. Which approach is likely to be more popular with the public? From the outset, the daddy tax satisfies many of the requirements of a good frame. First, it is simple and sticky. Second, we intuitively agree that the authorities need to crack down on these 'deadbeat dads'. Third, any politician who opposes this narrative runs the risk of becoming a villain who refuses to do what needs to be done.

Three roles

But that's not all. The actions of these young men also provoke anger and moral outrage. When we experience such strong emotions, our tolerance for complexity often decreases. As a result, we like to keep things simple: there are victims (the mothers and children) and villains (the fathers). Once we have established this, we start looking for someone to play the third and final role in this scenario – that of the hero.

What do we expect from a hero?

Firstly, heroes must show compassion for the victims and condemn the villains. One of the strengths of the proposed 'daddy tax' is that it smacks of righteous anger. In contrast, the dialogue-based solution proposed by the second politician does exactly the opposite. Why should we have dialogue with villains?

Secondly, we expect the hero to act – to protect the victims and punish the villains. The 'daddy tax' is a tough sanction that fits this expectation perfectly. The soft measures proposed by the second politician are not appropriate for villains.



Hero or villain: What frame to use?

Thirdly, a hero who takes firm action also shows that he is in control of the situation. There is a clear problem (the women who are forced to raise their children single-handedly), a clear cause (the young men), and a clear solution (the 'daddy tax'). The second politician's narrative is much more complicated. Because there are so many causes (social, economic, and educational), the problem is no longer clear-cut, and the solution even less so – our second politician seems to be out of control.

And, finally, we expect the hero to take immediate action, especially in highly emotive situations. Once again, the second politician does not live up to this hope. On the contrary, dialogue, mediation, and counselling will clearly not have an immediate impact on the problem. The 'daddy tax,' on the other hand, is practically synonymous with an instant result. Money taken from the fathers can be given directly to the mothers.

The emotional trigger

Critics will argue that this victim-villain-hero frame oversimplifies complex issues. In real life, problems usually have several causes, so there is often no clear-cut villain. Likewise, solutions may be incomplete and create new problems in other areas, so there is often no obvious hero. And what about the victims? Even they may not be as innocent as they first appear. In other words, reality is much more complicated than this frame implies.

Despite all this, the frame is an effective tool for controlling the political debate, especially when it comes to highly emotive issues. As our emotions take over, we become increasingly susceptible to the kind of simple reasoning that underlies this frame. Emotions are thus the trigger of this frame – the spark that lights the fuse of this frame. There is of course the question how this simple frame relates to the real-world complexity – I will come back to this question in the final section of this chapter.

What happens when you step into a frame with victims, villains and a hero?

In order to answer this question, let's return to the debate about the daddy tax. When the second politician steps into the first politician's frame, he immediately finds himself at a disadvantage:

- Because he doesn't unequivocally condemn the behaviour of the young fathers, he will be accused of failing to express moral outrage at their actions and siding with them, thus effectively becoming a villain himself.
- Because the measures he proposes are not considered appropriate for tackling villains, he will be accused of being unable to control the situation.
- Because he presents various explanations for the behaviour of the young fathers, he will be accused of justifying or condoning their actions. This is especially true in the case of highly emotive issues.

But there is more. In this frame, the hero has of course a strong incentive to reconfirm the frame – being a hero is a very attractive role. The same goes more or less for the victim – a victim has the moral right to be supported and safeguarded. The villain is often faced with a double bind – no matter how the villain responds, the frame of being a villain will be reconfirmed. It might therefore be very difficult to escape this frame, once the roles have been attributed.

An example of this double bind comes from the healthcare sector. In many countries, there is a lot of resistance to the proliferation of managers in the healthcare sector. They are branded as villains because they have no medical expertise and because the procedures they introduce only create more bureaucratic hurdles and restrictions. Who are the victims? Patients who need good care and doctors who want to provide it but are prevented from doing so by red tape and over-management.

Once there is a victim and a villain, the role of the hero becomes increasingly attractive. In this case, the hero could be a politician who is willing to take on the managers using the following language:

We need to cut bureaucracy and red tape.

There should be fewer administrators

and more front-line medical staff.

The country does not need useless pen-pushers and box-tickers.

We need to cut the 6,500-strong army of health bureaucrats.

What effect does this division of roles have on managers-villains? If they deny that the healthcare sector is over-managed, they are obviously blind to what is going on. This simply turns them into even bigger villains. Alternatively, if they admit that there is a problem, they simply end up confirming the hero's frame. Once you have been framed as a villain, you will be faced with this double bind, which is one of the reasons why this frame is often so powerful.

The frame also makes things very easy for the victims, who don't have to think too hard or take a critical look at themselves. Fortunately for them, it turns out that there is a single scapegoat for all the problems in the healthcare sector: the villain. Victims can therefore issue demands and are clearly entitled to the hero's help. Who to tell the victims in the healthcare sector that they need to be more resilient, that they should show some initiative, or that they are partly responsible for some of the problems in the sector? You can try this, but it is a risky strategy.

Reframing the victim-villain-hero frame

How should you respond to a frame, that portrays you as a villain? The answer to this question is very simple: present the same facts in a different narrative, in which the villain becomes the hero.

Kevin Rudd and Australia's boat people

In 2013, Australian Prime Minister Kevin Rudd announced that all asylum seekers who arrived in Australia by boat would henceforth be sent to neighbouring Papua New Guinea, under a new agreement between the two countries. His left-wing opponents framed this as a disgraceful move and argued that he should be ashamed of 'dumping' asylum seekers in one of the world's poorest and most poorly governed countries. The fact that Australia was effectively slamming the door in the face of some of the world's poorest and most marginalised people caused widespread outrage.

The division of roles in this frame was clear. The asylum seekers were the victims, Rudd was the villain, and the politicians attacking him were the heroes. Nevertheless, the prime minister managed to reframe the debate by presenting an alternative narrative that focused on an entirely different aspect of the same issue. According to Rudd, the country's dire refugee problem was caused by unscrupulous people smugglers who were charging asylum seekers a fortune to dump them on Australia's coast after a perilous journey across the Indian Ocean.

*Australians have had enough
of seeing asylum seekers dying in the waters
to our north and our northwest.
They've had enough of people smugglers profiting from death,
I also have a message for the people smugglers in our region of the world:
your business model is over.⁶*

In Rudd's reframe, the asylum seekers were still victims, but the villains were now the people smugglers, whose unscrupulous practices and exploitation of human suffering inspired profound outrage. Just like that Kevin Rudd became the hero who was

⁶ Rudd, Kevin (2013) 'Prime Minister Kevin Rudd – Address to the nation'. 19 July, Youtube, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kIapYIBRZIs> (31 March 2017).

challenging these villains, destroying their business model, and tackling the problem at its root.

What is the impact of this role reversal?

A villain-victim-hero frame always paints a very clear picture: there is a victim, you are a villain, and I am a hero. However, when someone counters the frame by presenting a different narrative based on the same facts, that picture becomes more ambiguous. The best-case scenario for designated villains is that they emerge as the heroes of the new narrative. If that doesn't work, they still have a good chance of blurring the original division of roles if they can prove that there are other ways of looking at the facts or that a different emotional response might be just as – or even more – appropriate.

More importantly, this strategy provides further proof that framing contributes to the quality of political debate. Politics is all about perspective, and reframing through role reversal demonstrates that it is possible and legitimate to interpret the same facts in a variety of ways. Reframing is more than a rhetorical trick: it provides the public with several different perspectives on an issue and might be helpful in deciding which one it likes best. If you don't agree with a villain-victim-hero narrative because it does not do justice to the complexity of the real world, try to reframe it by designing your own narrative. That might be much more effective than stating that your opponent's narrative is too simple.



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