

# A World in Crisis: **The Role of** Public Relations

## **BledCom 2018**

25<sup>th</sup> International Public  
Relations Research Symposium

July 5 - 7, 2018 | Bled, Slovenia

Organized by:



University of *Ljubljana*  
Faculty of *Social Sciences*

### **A World in Crisis: The Role of Public Relations**

Proceedings of the 25<sup>th</sup> International Public Relations  
Research Symposium BledCom

July 5 - 7, 2018 | Bled, Slovenia

**EDITORS:** Dejan Verčič, Ana Tkalac Verčič and Krishnamurthy Sriramesh



## **A World in Crisis: The Role of Public Relations**

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### **EDITORS:**

Dejan Verčič  
Ana Tkalac Verčič  
Krishnamurthy Sriramesh

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1. Editors	5
2. BledCom 2018 Program	6
3. BledCom 2018 Papers	11

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<b>PR Memes: Communicators' Perceptions and Reflections of Their Practice and Role</b> .....	<b>12</b>
<b>Ana Adi</b>	

<b>Erasing the Limits. When Companies Impose Themselves Between State and People.</b> .....	<b>28</b>
<b>Carolina Andrea Carbone</b> <b>Maximiliano Ortner</b>	

<b>Effects of Astroturfing in Non-Profit Organizations: Two Competing Hypotheses</b> .....	<b>44</b>
<b>Loarre Andreu Perez</b> <b>Bugil Chang</b>	

<b>Fake News, a Construction of Reality</b> .....	<b>53</b>
<b>Andrej Drapal</b>	

<b>Climate Change and Urban Youth Crisis Alertness</b> .....	<b>65</b>
<b>Zoltán Ferencz</b> <b>Gábor Sarlós</b>	

<b>The Fit To Partner Test: Practical Considerations for Establishing Corporate and NGO Partnerships in an Uncertain World</b> .....	<b>77</b>
<b>Nicky Garsten</b> <b>Kevin Read</b> <b>Caroline Diehl</b>	

<b>Teflon Reputations and Glass Jaws: Managing Reputations in the Public Sphere</b> .....	<b>93</b>
<b>Farah Latif</b>	



**Evaluating Crisis Responses on Twitter: Perspectives from Situational Crisis Communication Theory and Person-Centered Messages ..... 104**

Jennifer Owlett  
Soo-Kwang Oh  
Kyung-Hyan Yoo

**Activist groups and Public Relations: examples from two Portuguese collapsed banks and their clients..... 116**

Sónia Pedro Sebastião  
Daniela Vila Verde

**Crisis communication during a national fire disaster..... 136**

Sandra Pereira  
Paula Nobre

**Nonprofits and their communication professionals – their role in today’s world ..... 153**

Ana Raposo  
Mafalda Eiró-Gomes

**Co-Creating More Citizen Involvement in Mäntsälä Municipality.... 165**

Harri Ruoslahti  
Tero Uusitalo

**Jungian Brand Therapy. Could the new model help find brand solutions in a post-branding world? ..... 173**

Ira Vince

**Difference of CSR activities and communication between B2B and B2C companies..... 186**

Masayoshi Yamasaki  
Yusuke Ibuki



## **Dejan VERČIČ**, *University of Ljubljana (Slovenia)*

He is professor and head of Centre for Marketing and Public Relations at the University of Ljubljana, Slovenia. He received his PhD in social psychology in 2000 from the London School of Economics and Political Science. He is a former Fulbright scholar. He has published over 200 articles and book chapters and 12 books. He is a member of the European Communication Monitor research team, a fellow of the Chartered Institute of Public Relations (UK), a honorary member of the Croatian Public Relations Association, and a past president and a current member of the European Public Relations Education and Research Association. In 2016 he was awarded the Pathfinder Award, the highest academic honour bestowed by the Institute for Public Relations (IPR) in New York.



## **Ana TKALAC VERČIČ**, *University of Zagreb (Croatia)*

She is a Professor of Marketing communications and Public Relations at the University of Zagreb, Croatia. She has authored, co-authored and edited numerous books, book chapters and article and is a member of the editorial committee of the „International Journal of Strategic Communication“, and a regional editor of „Public Relations Review“. She is a former Fulbright scholar. Her research focus is oriented towards reputation and image building which she studied through various scientific projects such as “Development of strategy for building the image of the Republic of Croatia” and “Improving the capacity of the civil society”.



## **Krishnamurthy SRIRAMESH**, *Purdue University (USA)*

Professor and University Faculty Scholar, Purdue University, USA, is recognized for his scholarship on global public relations, corporate social responsibility, and culture and public relations. He has advocated the need to reduce ethnocentricity in the public relations body of knowledge and practice in 7 books, over 75 articles and book chapters and over 100 conference presentations around the world. His rich teaching experiences include teaching at 10 universities in four continents. He has won several awards for teaching and research at different universities. In 2004 he was awarded the prestigious Pathfinder Award from the Institute for Public Relations (USA) for “original scholarly research contributing to the public relations body of knowledge.”

## THURSDAY, 5 JULY 2018

14.00-15.00 REGISTRATION

15.00-17.00 PRE-CONFERENCE

*Launch of The Global Public Relations Handbook: Theory, Research, and Practice (3rd Ed.)*

The launch of the third edition will include a symposium on global public relations with each of the participating authors providing a brief synopsis of their chapter. The session will also engage in a discussion of the current state and the future of global public relations. This session is open to all BledCom attendees and so we welcome you to join and participate.

19.00-21.00 DINNER (at Skipass Restaurant in Kranjska Gora, departure at 18.30)

## FRIDAY, 6 JULY 2018

8.30-9.30 REGISTRATION

9.30-10.00 OPENING SESSION

PROGR1TTEE

**Dejan Verčič**, University of Ljubljana (Slovenia)  
**Ana Tkalac Verčič**, University of Zagreb (Croatia)  
**Krishnamurthy Sriramesh**, Purdue University (USA)

WELCOME ADDRESS

**Prof. Dr. Monika Kalin Golob**, Professor and Dean of the University of Ljubljana Faculty of Social Sciences (Slovenia)

10.00-10.45 KEYNOTE SPEAKER

*A World in Crisis: The Role of Public Relations*  
**Dejan Verčič**, University of Ljubljana & Stratkom (Slovenia)

Partner: Zavarovalnica Triglav



10.45-11.00 COFFEE BREAK

11.00-12.00 PARALLEL PAPER SESSION 1A | Chair: Danny Moss

*Scansis as a Unique Crisis Type: Theoretical and Practical Implications*

**Timothy W. Coombs**, Texas A&M University (USA)

**Elina Tachkova**, Texas A&M University (USA)

**Sherry J. Holladay**, Texas A&M University (USA)

*Crisis Nearby or Faraway: Exploring the Influences of Psychological Distance of Crisis*

**Sungsu Kim**, University of Georgia (USA)

**Yan Jin**, University of Georgia (USA)

**Bryan H. Reber**, University of Georgia (USA)

*Rationality and Emotions: A Stakeholder-Oriented Crisis Communication (SOCC) Model in Global Crises*

**Hongmei Shen**, San Diego State University (USA)

**Yang Cheng**, North Carolina State University (USA)

*Crisis communication during a national fire disaster*

**Sandra Pereira**, ESCS IPL (Portugal)

**Paula Nobre**, ESCS IPL (Portugal)

*Nobody hears their cries: Weak signals in media narratives and crises development*

**Leanne Glenny**, University of South Australia (Australia)

**Collette Snowden**, University of South Australia (Australia)

11.00-12.00 PARALLEL PAPER SESSION 1B | Chair: Jon White

*An Issues Management Approach to Artificial Intelligence (AI) and Ethics: A Crisis with the Rising Machines?*

**Shannon A. Bowen**, University of South Carolina (USA)

*Sleeping with your enemies – and what happens day after*

**Jacek Barlik**, University of Warsaw (Poland)

*Openness and transparency practices of social media influencers and their impact on follower trust and relationships: Insights from the United Arab Emirates*

**Gaelle Picherit-Duthler**, Zayed University (U.A.E)

**Ganga S. Dhanesh**, Zayed University (U.A.E)

*Fake News, My News, Real News. Source credibility crisis and the rise of PR professionals as indirect gatekeepers*

**Michal Chmiel**, University of the Arts London (UK)

*Seeking Shared Meaning of NPOs' Reputation in the Post Period of a Social Crisis*

**Selin Metin Turkel**, Izmir University of Economics (Turkey)

**Sema Misci Kip**, Izmir University of Economics (Turkey)

**Ebru Uzunoglu**, Izmir University of Economics (Turkey)

12.00-12.45 PARALLEL PANEL SESSION 1A

*EUPRERA President's Panel*

**Betteke van Ruler**, University of Amsterdam (The Netherlands)

**Inger Jensen**, Roskilde University (Denmark)

**Günter Bentele**, University of Leipzig (Germany)

**Ansgar Zerfass**, University of Leipzig (Germany)

Moderator: **Sue Wolstenholme**, Ashley Public Relations Ltd & PRCA (UK)

12.00-12.45 PARALLEL PANEL SESSION 1B

*A world in crisis: The role of public relations*

**Craig Fleisher**, Aurora WDC (USA)

**Sarah Hall**, SarahHallConsulting & CIPR (UK)

**Barbora Maronkova**, NATO Information and Documentation Centre Kyiv (Ukraine)

**Stephen Waddington**, Ketchum Worldwide (UK)

Moderator: **Krishnamurthy Sriramesh**, Purdue University (USA)

12.45-14.15 LUNCH

14.15-15.15 PARALLEL PAPER SESSION 2A | Chair: David McKie

*A public relations discourse of remote aereality: The case of the UK's Reaper drones*

**Gareth Thompson**, University of the Arts London (UK)

*Optimization of spokespersons' use of voice in organizational crisis communication*

**Aurélie De Waele**, KU Leuven (Belgium)

**An-Sofie Claeys**, KU Leuven (Belgium)

**Verolien Cauberghe**, Ghent University (Belgium)

*Computational Propaganda and Social Bots – An Old Dog with New Tricks*

**Markus Wiesenberg**, University of Leipzig (Germany)

**Ralph Tench**, Leeds Beckett University (UK)

*Journalism and Media in Times of Crisis: Who are the Key Stakeholders and how are they Portrayed?*

**Marie-Eve Carignan**, Université de Sherbrooke (Canada)

**Marc David**, Université de Sherbrooke (Canada)

**Olivier Champagne-Poirier**, Université du Québec à Trois-Rivières (Canada)

**Tracey O'Sullivan**, University of Ottawa (Canada)

**14.15-15.15 PARALLEL PAPER SESSION 2B | Chair: Julia Jahansoozi**

*Integrating Character Assassination into Crisis Communication Curriculum*  
Sergei A. Samoilenko, George Mason University (USA)

*The Relational Turn in Public Relations Research: Signs of a Digital-Era Paradigm Shift in Communication Studies*  
Yi-Hui Christine Huang, The Chinese University of Hong Kong (Hong Kong SAR, China)  
Qing Huang, Zhejiang University (People's Republic of China)

*Agility in strategic communication research: Historical roots, conceptual specification, and implications for theory and practice*  
Lisa Dühring, University of Leipzig (Germany)  
Sophia Charlotte Volk, University of Leipzig (Germany)

*Sense-Making in a Postmodern World: Embracing Paradox Theory for Managing Organizational Tensions and Building Reputation among Hybrid-Identity Organizations*  
Ruth Avidar, The Max Stern Yezreel Valley College (Israel)

*Critical coverage: The impact of responsibility attribution on attitude, (dis)identification and trust*  
Jens Seiffert-Brockmann, Universität Wien (Austria)  
Sabine Einwiller, Universität Wien (Austria)  
Christopher Ruppel, Universität Wien (Austria)

*Redefining the Field: The Institutional Logics of Crisis Management and Crisis Communication*  
Finn Frandsen, Aarhus University (Denmark)  
Winni Johansen, Aarhus University (Denmark)

**Partner of Parallel Paper Session 2:** Pošta Slovenije



**15.15-16.15 PARALLEL PAPER SESSION 3A | Chair: Terry Flynn**

*Difference of CSR activities and communication between B2B and B2C companies*  
Yusuke Ibuki, Kyoto Sangyo University (Japan)  
Masayoshi Yamasaki, Aichi Sangyo University (Japan)

*Teflon Reputations and Glass Jaws: Managing Reputations in the Public Sphere*  
Farah Latif, George Mason University (USA)

*A World in Denial: Understanding Antecedents and Perceptual Consequences of Climate Change Denial Attitudes*  
Arunima Krishna, Boston University (USA)

*Public Reactions to CSR 2.0: A Cross-National Study on Creating Shared Values in the World of Crisis*  
Yi-Ru Regina Chen, Hong Kong Baptist University (Hong Kong SAR, China)  
Ansgar Zerfass, University of Leipzig (Germany)  
Chun-Ju Flora Hung-Baesecke, Massey University (New Zealand)  
Shannon A. Bowen, University of South Carolina (USA)  
Don W. Stacks, University of Miami (USA)  
Ben Boyd, Edelman (USA)

*Developing Participatory CSR in a Time of Distrust: Authenticity, Organizational Listening, and Dialogue*  
Chun-Ju Flora Hung-Baesecke, Massey University (New Zealand)

**15.15-16.15 PARALLEL PAPER SESSION 3B | Chair: Ronel Rensburg**

*Activist groups and Public Relations functions: examples from two collapsed banks and their clients*

Sónia Pedro Sebastião, University of Lisbon (Portugal)  
Daniela Vila Verde, University of Lisbon (Portugal)

*Headwind in sports sponsoring: the effects of crisis response messages on sponsor credibility and team credibility*

Pytrik Schafraad, University of Amsterdam (The Netherlands)  
Joost Verhoeven, University of Amsterdam (The Netherlands)

*From promoting liberal democracy and free market to the necessity of defending them: challenges for the PR industry*

Ryszard Ławniczak, Military University of Technology (Poland)

*The Fit To Partner Test: Theoretical and Practical Considerations for Establishing Corporate and NGO Partnerships in an Uncertain World*  
Nicky Garsten, University of Greenwich (UK)  
Kevin Read, Pembroke and Rye (UK)  
Caroline Diehl, INSEAD (UK)

*Implications of the paracrises on the companies' stock prices*  
Marko Selaković, S P Jain School of Global Management (U.A.E.)

Nikolina Ljepava, American University in the Emirates (U.A.E.)

Miroslav Mateev, American University in the Emirates (U.A.E.)

**16.15-17.00 ICED TEA WITH EDITORS**

Come meet the journal editors and get 15 tips on publishing your research, followed by informal Q&A.

**Journal of Public Relations Research**, Bey-Ling Sha, editor-in-chief

**Corporate Communications: An International Journal**, W. Timothy Coombs, editor

**International Journal of Strategic Communication**, Ansgar Zerfass, editor

**Journal of Public Affairs**, Danny Moss, editor

**Journal of Communication Management**, Ganga Dhanesh, co-editor

**19.00-21.00 DINNER** (at Vila Podvin in Radovljica, departure at 18.30)

**SATURDAY, 7 JULY 2018**

**8.30-9.30 POSTER SESSION**

*Stalling the regression in human rights triggered by political polarization: The new frontier of corporate social responsibility*  
Ganga Dhanesh, Zayed University (U.A.E.)

*Making PR Great Again: Global Agencies Respond to the Trump Presidency*  
Elina Erzikova, Central Michigan University (USA)  
Shannon A. Bowen, University of South Carolina (USA)

*Crisis narratives of #Harvey and #Irma: Conversations on Twitter and Instagram*  
Jeanine D. Guidry, Virginia Commonwealth University (USA)

Lucinda Austin, University of North Carolina (USA)

Seoyeon Kim, University of North Carolina (USA)

Baobao Song, Virginia Commonwealth University (USA)



*Enacting mediatization in public sector organizations: The role of communication managers*

Sandra Jacobs, University of Amsterdam (The Netherlands)

Anke Wonneberger, University of Amsterdam (The Netherlands)

*Experts' perception of the influence of cooperation between PR agencies and organization on stakeholders' relationships – results of a Delphi study with Croatian practitioners*

Petra-Marija Jelčić, Agency IMC & Quadriga University of Applied Sciences (Croatia)

*The Crisis Manager in Popular Crisis Management Books (PCMBs)*

Winni Johansen, Aarhus University (Denmark)

Finn Frandsen, Aarhus University (Denmark)

*Immigrant labor in the context of liquid modernity: An analysis of discursive strategies of Sindacato Cinese Nazionale*

Zhuo Ban, University of Cincinnati (USA)

Alessandro Lovari, Università di Cagliari (Italy)

*Co-Creating More Citizen Involvement in Mäntsälä Municipality*

Harri Ruoslahti, Laurea University of Applied Sciences (Finland)

*Intellectual ecology in the age of disturbing social relationships*

Kaja Tampere, Tallinn University (Estonia)

*Jungian Brand Therapy. Could the new model help find brand solutions in a post-branding world?*

Ira Vince, Bijeli zec d.o.o. (Croatia)

*Reflexivity on contradictions. Self-definitions of PR-people, journalists, v-/blogger and instagramer facing the climate crisis*

Franziska Weder, Alpen-Adria-Universität Klagenfurt (Austria)

Larissa Krainer, Alpen-Adria-Universität Klagenfurt (Austria)

*Agenda Setting in the Dialogue of Community of Human Shared Destiny*

Hui (Peter) Zhang, Shanghai Polytechnic University (People's Republic of China)

Xialoin Zhu, Shanghai Polytechnic University (People's Republic of China)

**9.30-10.30 PARALLEL PAPER SESSION 4A | Chair: Piet Verhoeven**

*Erasing the limits. When companies impose themselves between State and People*

Carolina Andrea Carbone, Universidad de Belgrano (Argentina)

Maximiliano Ortner, Universidad de Belgrano (Argentina)

*How Big Is Public Relations (and Why Does It Matter)*

Toni Muzi Falconi, Methodos (Italy)

Frank Ovaith, Institute for Public Relations (USA)

*Managing in a volatile, complex, and ambiguous world: A systematic review of 25 years of management research in communication and public relations*

Danny Moss, University of Chester (UK)

Barbara DeSanto, Kansas State University (USA)

*Addressing academic and social neglect:*

*Narratives of progress involving discipline disruptions, financial communication, and a new role for PR*

David McKie, University of Waikato (New Zealand)

*Social Media Research, Measurement, Evaluation in the Public Relations Industry: A Ten-Year Longitudinal Analysis*

Donald K. Wright, Boston University (USA)

**9.30-10.30 PARALLEL PAPER SESSION 4B | Chair: Ryszard Ławniczak**

*The impact of emotional crisis communication on stakeholders' empathy with an organization in crisis and post-crisis reputation*

Lieze Schoofs, KU Leuven (Belgium)

An-Sofie Claeys, KU Leuven (Belgium)

*Climate change and urban youth crisis alertness*

Gábor Sarlós, RMIT (Vietnam)

Zoltán Ferencz, HAS Center for Social Sciences (Hungary)

*Understanding corporate values in a crisis-prone environment: A comparative study between Turkey and USA*

Nilüfer Geysi, Bahcesehir University (Turkey)

Selin Turkel, Izmir University of Economics (Turkey)

Ebru Uzunoglu, Izmir University of Economics (Turkey)

*Nonprofits and their communication*

*professionals – their role in today's world*

Ana Raposo, ESCS IPL (Portugal)

Mafalda Eiró-Gomes, ESCS IPL (Portugal)

*The intersection of Litigation, Reputation & Brand Trust: The High Cost of Low Trust*

Shih-Chia Wu, The Chinese University of Hong Kong

(Hong Kong SAR, China)

**10.30-10.45 COFFEE BREAK**

**10.45-11.45 PARALLEL PAPER SESSION 5A | Chair: Ganga Dhanesh**

*PR Memes and communicators' perceptions and reflections of PR*

Ana Adi, Quadriga University of Applied Sciences (Germany)

*Fake news, a construction of reality*

Andrej Drapal, Consensus (Slovenia)

*Fake news and the crisis of public communication:*

*How organizations are affected by false*

*information and prepared to handle it*

Ansgar Zerfass, University of Leipzig (Germany)

Dejan Verčič, University of Ljubljana (Slovenia)

Ángeles Moreno, University Rey Juan Carlos (Spain)

Piet Verhoeven, University of Amsterdam (The Netherlands)

Ralph Tench, Leeds Beckett University (UK)

*Strategic Church Communication in Times of*

*Religious Pluralism in Western Europe. Some*

*Comparative Evidence*

Markus Wiesenberg, University of Leipzig (Germany)

*Missing the good old days? PR in the era of online*

*misbehavior*

Deniz Maden, Ege University (Turkey)

Özgür Köseoğlu, Ege University (Turkey)

Nahit Erdem Köker, Ege University (Turkey)

**10.45-11.45 PARALLEL PAPER SESSION 5B | Chair: Ruth Avidar**

*Evaluating Crisis Responses on Twitter:*

*Perspectives from Situational Crisis*

*Communication Theory and Person-Centered*

Jennifer Owlett, William Paterson University (USA)

Soo-Kwang Oh, Pepperdine University (USA)

Kyung-Hyan Yoo, William Paterson University (USA)

*Adoption and Impact of Internal Social Media use in Organizations*

Joost Verhoeven, University of Amsterdam (The Netherlands)

Youri Dechesne, ISM Consultancy Evolve (The Netherlands)

Peter Haan, ISM Consultancy Evolve (The Netherlands)

Maria Franken-Farag, ISM Consultancy Evolve (The Netherlands)

*Real-time Social Media Engagement and Millennials' Event Experience*

Kyung-Hyan Yoo, William Paterson University (USA)

Gabriela Mera, Today's Business (USA)

*Signs of trust. Investigating social media as connective enablers between municipalities and digital publics*

Alessandro Lovari, University of Cagliari (Italy)

Letizia Materassi, University of Florence (Italy)

*Social Media and Crisis Communication Practices: Ideas, Ideals and Nightmares of Our Time*

Ulfet Kutoglu Kuruc, Eastern Mediterranean University (Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus)

Baruck Opiyo, Eastern Mediterranean University (Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus)

**11.45-12.45 PARALLEL PAPER SESSION 6A | Chair: Wim Elving**

*Public Relations for Peacebuilding: Case Study from Colombia*

Krishnamurthy Sriramesh, Purdue University (USA)

Ivana Monnard (Switzerland)

*Market-oriented relations in the digital era: A study of public relations and marketing professionals in Hong Kong*

Suk Chong Tong, Hong Kong Shue Yan University (Hong Kong SAR, China)

Fanny Fong Yee Chan, Hang Seng Management College (Hong Kong SAR, China)

*Turkish press coverage of the Syrian conflict and the possibilities of peace journalism*

Aysun Akan, Izmir University of Economics (Turkey)

*The Role of Public Relations in Building the Bridges: Rethinking the Communication Strategies in Negotiation Process in Cyprus*

Münever Çağın Bektaş, Near East University (Cyprus)

*"The people have spoken" - listening to the nation's voice on corruption and state capture in South Africa*

Ronel Rensburg, University of Pretoria (South Africa)

Andrea Gevers, Ask Africa (South Africa)

Melani Prinsloo, Infusion (South Africa)

**11.45-12.45 PARALLEL PAPER SESSION 6B | Chair: Winni Johansen**

*How publics respond during infectious disease outbreaks: Blame and information seeking*

Lucinda L. Austin, University of North Carolina (USA)

Brooke Fisher Liu, University of Maryland (USA)

Yan Jin, University of Georgia (USA)

Seoyeon Kim, University of North Carolina (USA)

*Public Relations and Behavioral Insights*

*Nudging: How Grunig and Hunt's Domino Model of Communication Effects Lies at the Center of Successful Behavioural Change*

Terence (Terry) Flynn, McMaster University (Canada)

*Supporting the evolution of emancipative values: a new purpose for public relations*

Piet Verhoeven, University of Amsterdam (The Netherlands)

*Model of Strategic Public Relations – MSPR: the role of PR in a VUCA world*

Susana de Carvalho Spinola, University of Lisbon (Portugal)

*Challenges in enhancing disaster communication through spontaneous stakeholder communicative self-organisation*

Tanya Le Roux, Bournemouth University (UK)

Dewald van Niekerk, North-West University (South Africa)

12.45-14.15

LUNCH

**14.15-15.00 PARALLEL PANEL SESSION 2A**

*What university student leaders expect for practicing PR in a turbulent world, and how global networking can assist their needs*

Andrew Cook, PRSSA & Brigham Young University (USA)

Jan Jamšek, Student Section of Slovenian Marketing Association & University of Ljubljana (Slovenia)

Carolina Falcão, UFAM & Federal Justice of Amazonas (Brasil)

Daniel Ziegele, Leipzig University (Germany)

Moderator: **Robert Wakefield**, Brigham Young University (USA)

**14.15-15.00 PARALLEL PANEL SESSION 2B**

*PR measurement & evaluation: the compass to navigate a VUCA (volatile / uncertain / complex / ambiguous) world – and providing users with the skills to use it*

Ilija Krustev, A Data Pro (Bulgaria)

Hans Ruijgers, KWR Watercycle Research Institute (The Netherlands)

Fraser Likely, Likely Communication Strategies (Canada)

Moderator: **Ana Adi**, Quadriga University of Applied Sciences (Germany) & **Thomas Stoeckle**, The SmallDataForum (Germany)

**15.00-15.50 PARALLEL PAPER SESSION 7A | Chair: Finn Frandsen**

*How actors shape issue arenas on Twitter: Food issues in the Netherlands*

Sandra Jacobs, University of Amsterdam (The Netherlands)

I.R. Hellsten, University of Amsterdam (The Netherlands)

Anke Wonneberger, University of Amsterdam (The Netherlands)

*NGOs' visibility in conflict news coverage – on the relevance of evidence-based communication*

Marc Jungblut, Ludwig-Maximilians-University of Munich (Germany)

Romy Fröhlich, Ludwig-Maximilians-University of Munich (Germany)

*Effects of Astroturfing in Non-Profit Organizations: Two Competing Hypotheses*

Loarre Andreu Perez, University of Oklahoma (USA)

Bugil Chang, University of Oklahoma (USA)

*The role and impact of Public Relations on enhancing the visibility of non-profit organisations. Case study: foundation "Croatia for children"*

Nataša Cesarec Salopek, IMC (Croatia)

Mirela Polić, IMC (Croatia)

**15.00-15.50 PARALLEL PAPER SESSION 7B | Chair: Betteke van Ruler**

*Managing Reputational Costs Via Internal Issues Management: Testing the Effects of Employees' Issues Perceptions and Informational Leak*

Katie Haejung Kim, University of Oklahoma (USA)

Yeunjae Lee, Purdue University (USA)

Jeong-Nam Kim, University of Oklahoma (USA)

*PR and society: The generative power of history in the present and future*

Julia Jahansoozi, Royal Roads University (Canada)

Virginia McKendry, Royal Roads University (Canada)



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*Renegotiating the non-social license to operate:  
Natural gas extraction from goldmine to  
controversial business*

*Wim J.L. Elving*, Hanze U. of Applied Sciences (The Netherlands)

*Roel van Veen*, Hanze U. of Applied Sciences (The Netherlands)

*Julliette Jansz*, Hanze U. of Applied Sciences (The Netherlands)

*Carina Wiekens*, Hanze U. of Applied Sciences (The Netherlands)

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*Crisis communication consulting: The (new) role of  
PR agencies in solving organizational crises*

*Damir Jugo*, Edward Bernays College of Communication Management (Croatia)

*Ivan Pakozdi*, Edward Bernays College of Communication Management (Croatia)

*Zdeslav Milas*, Edward Bernays College of Communication Management (Croatia)

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## 15.50-16.20 CLOSING SESSION

### PROGRAM COMMITTEE

**Dejan Verčič**, University of Ljubljana (Slovenia)

**Ana Tkalac Verčič**, University of Zagreb (Croatia)

**Krishnamurthy Sriramesh**, Purdue University (USA)

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**19.00-21.00 DINNER** (at Gostilna Krištof in Predoselje, departure at 18.30)

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# BledCom 2018 Papers

# PR Memes: Communicators' Perceptions and Reflections of Their Practice and Role

**Ana Adi**

*Quadriga University of Applied Sciences, Berlin, Germany*

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**Purpose:** This study explores communicators' perceptions of their profession, something so far insufficiently explored by academic and professional research. In doing so, it uses more than 80 self-generated PR memes to report on emerging themes and commonalities with existing literature and it then compares them to van Ruler's (2004) 7 PR roles.

**Design/Methodology/Approach:** Students of Quadriga University of Applied Sciences enrolled four MBA and MA programs and taking the Applied Communication Course during 2015-2018 have been asked to create their own PR meme. They have been presented with a blank 6 questions model: "What my friends think I do", "What my parents think I do", "What the other side thinks I do", "What society thinks I do", "What I think I do", and "What I really do" and asked to fill it in prior to being presented with existing online PR memes using the same model or prior to discussing PR definitions, perceptions and history. As all the students enrolled in Quadriga University's programs are communication professionals with a minimum of two years of full-time experience in the field (PR/marketing/public affairs departments or agencies), this study is reflective of communicators' perceptions, something that the literature is consistently missing. A qualitative content analysis of the entries was carried out aiming to identify common themes and associations. The analysis is then completed with another qualitative content analysis comparison with van Ruler's (2004) 7 PR roles.

**Findings:** All in all, the reported perception of practitioners of their own profession is generally negative, repeating many of the characteristics both literature, media and pop culture have accustomed us with. This is a clear indication that the practitioners are aware of the perceptions or misperceptions of their profession, yet this is no indication of their taking any action towards addressing this gap. Perhaps more telling in this sense are the responses in the categories "what I think I do" and "what I really do" with many practitioners reporting too often of having an operational focus writing, answering emails, calling, "work long hours", "struggling to be heard") rather the desired strategic one ("consult senior management", "inform internal and external publics").

**Practical Implications:** Public relations as a profession continues to carry along its negative connotations and practitioners in the field, according to this study, are well aware of them. Despite the negative connotations, public relations continue to be an appealing, growing and lucrative field. The question thus emerges of whether these negative perceptions are going to harm in the long term the profession or stick around regardless. Their perpetuation however points out to the need of a deeper and more meaningful discussion about the role of public relations in society as well as to the boundaries within which the professionals can operate within their organization and putting the public interest first. This points out not only to the

need of universities and training centers to address the issue in a wider context (including ethics, debating history, inviting and including critical perspectives) but also to organizations and professional associations to continuously check and challenge the existing perceptions. It might be “good fun” for a class to joke and discuss in a light-hearted manner the ups and downs of the profession, but the downs in this case are a warning and telling sign as of why PR continues to struggle to be taken seriously.

**Originality/value:** At a time when discussion about the capabilities for PR practitioners is intensifying, discussions about the role practitioners perceive they play or they believe others assign to them should provide scholars and practitioners alike with a the benchmarking element needed in identifying gaps to be filled. A study into practitioners’ perspectives and perceptions of their role are also important in identifying historical connections, lingering stereotypical baggage as well as concerns.

**Keywords:** PR perceptions; PR memes; PR image; PR profession

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## 1. Introduction

Recent developments in the media, communication and political arenas from fake news to decrease in trust and coping with digital transformation, have renewed and perhaps intensified attention over communication professionals with questions ranging from identifying their competences, mapping out their competences, defining their role and clarifying their ethics. Using a sample of communication professionals, this study identifies the professional’s self-perceptions about the profession and maps them out to their described roles. In doing so, it fills a gap in current research and professional debate, where perceptions about the profession are explored only with categories of public coming in contact with the profession rather than practitioners themselves.

## 2. Literature review

Public relations have a contested history and, arguably, a continuously contested image, its function within organizations as well as role in society being often discussed by professionals and academics alike.

## 2.1 PR portrayals in the media

Over the years, researchers have confirmed what practitioners have often reported noticing: a difficult relationship with journalists, whereas the latter respect them as individuals and practitioners but lack credibility as a group. In fact, studies have shown that the journalists’ expectation often was that PR practitioners would mislead them or withhold information from them (see Aronoff, 1975; Brody, 1984; Ryan & Martinson, 1994; Sallot & Johnson, 2006; Frolich & Kerl, 2012). DeLorme and Fedler (2003) track some of this hostility to the past and to the difference in ethical standards and professional goals between journalist and PR practitioners, as well the contrast between the two fields.

This antagonism has however spilled into media and news reports. Bishops’ (1988) investigation of 16,000 stories shows that journalist conflate public relations with the attributes and duties of a spokesperson. This is perhaps justifiable as journalists mostly interact with spokespeople and media relations people, but it also shows a limited understanding of the wide range of activities the public relations professional would undertake. Spicer’s (1993) study noted that the term “public relations” was almost pejoratively used. His analysis of 84 journalistic texts identified seven recurring themes associated

with PR: distraction (as in the practitioner trying to move a journalist's attention away from a line of questioning), disaster (references here are to PR disasters and thus image and reputation harming effects), challenge (as in PR as challenge, "a 'genuine' public relations difficulty as opposed to a one-time disaster or distraction"), hype (as in overstatement and exaggeration), merely (as in "merely PR" suggesting that "that public relations techniques are often used in place of substance"), war (as in "an ongoing battle or fight to gain positive public opinion"), and finally, PR as schmooze, "a still prevalent stereotype of the glad-handing, smooth-talking, personally charming front man or woman" (Spicer, 1993, pp. 53-57).

In Spicer's study only 17% of the codable material referred to practitioners in terms of someone who is NOT "trying to distract, deflect or avoid an issue, or event but is honestly attempting to deal with" (p. 55).

Pincus et al's (1993) study links to Grunig & Hunt's (1984) situational theory of publics. Their survey of 166 business, news and sports editors at daily newspapers in California confirmed the negative perceptions of PR practitioners and the materials they supply, with significant differences in these perceptions being noted when the editor has completed a university course in PR.

Keenan's (1996) investigation of a census of network television news stories about PR identifies two distinct themes: that of expertise of PR practitioners, where practitioners were usually positively referred to and their knowledge and/or opinion of a topic, and that of the role and perception of PR in society where the associations were generally negative, classing PR as a stressful occupation with "little job security and elements of criminality". In his study politicians and foreign governments are the most likely users of PR expertise. Spicer's themes of war, disaster and distraction find their way into Keenan's study as well, the addition here being that considering Grunig and Hunt's (1984) four models of PR, most PR is classed as press

agency, confirming and at the same time contributing the perpetuation of the association of PR with media relations and press agency.

Picking up from Keenan's (1996) PR link to Grunig and Hunt's (1984) models, Kinsky and Callison 2009 study proposes an extended list of PR-related terms which they used to analyze a random sample of 530 stories published in the media during 1997 to 2005 and found by searching Lexis Nexis' database. While "PR" is found to be used more often than "public relations":

Significant differences were found when comparing the valence of the use of the term to the network where it was used. ABC had a less harmful framing (more positive and neutral uses) than the other networks, while CBS had more harmful framing (62%). Also significant was the fact that politics/government story topics had the highest number of negative valence uses of PR terms (38.2%). Another significant result was found based on who said the term and what the focus of the story was. PR terms were more often spoken by reporters in war/government stories (59.9%) (Kinsky and Callison, 2009 cited in Kinsky, 2011, p. 110).

Sterne's research into media perceptions of public relations in New Zealand bring a new geographical perspective (2010). Yet, despite the new setting, media perceptions are largely (but not exclusively) negative Sterne finds, the relationships described ranging from sworn enemies, to traditional rivals and in between featuring close collaboration or parallel existences.

Antagonism from media practitioners is largely based on experiences with public relations practitioners but also on self-created identities. Variations are due to power differentials such as self and other definition, realities in the media landscape, and perceived misalignment of interests.

While the hostility and competition between journalism and PR is partly inherited and his-

torical (Seidenglanz, 2018), the portrayals on their relationship (whether in the mass-media) will resonate beyond these two spheres with long-term effects: on the perceptions and credibility of the profession, on the appeal of the profession to future generations, on the relevance of the profession to organizations, institutions, companies, governments and nations. It is thus, just a natural step, to seek to identify the images and portrayals of public relations in film, television (pop culture) as a means to understanding public but also professional's perceptions of the profession.

## 2.2 PR portrayals in pop culture

Larry Tavcar's (1993) might have been the first with his list of 17 movies to watch which either depicted PR or had a PR dimension excluding though the plots where manipulation of the media is a central part of the plot. Tavcar's list was published in the hopes that it could provide "an extra flair to PR education" focusing thus on how the profession is portrayed in pop culture (and would thus perhaps attract younger talent).

But it is Karen Miller's (1999) study of depictions of PR and its practitioners in films and fiction in the USA from 1930 to 1995, including print images, that seems to have inspired an entire body of study into portrayals and depictions of PR in films and television series. Showing "woefully inadequate" these representations were in "explaining who practitioners are and what they do" (p. 1), Miller notes that practitioners are often portrayed in rather negative terms from ditzy and obsequious to cynical, manipulative, money minded, isolated, accomplished or unfulfilled. Her categories have been included in later studies (Kinsky, 2011; Yoon & Black, 2011; Saltzman, 2012), each confirming her findings while adding new insights.

Lee's 2001 study analyzing 20 films released from 1944 to 2000, identifies several consistent attributes: the characters are almost all men and conduct primarily media relations. Moreover, PR practitioners are always at the

extreme of a spectrum: either comic to serious, either the "good guy" or the "bad guy". In his 2009 study, Lee extended his analysis to an additional seven movies released during 1996 and 2008 noticing the similar characteristics. In these movies as well, the PR "guy" was working for the federal government or a police department (before it used to be more military) and "sometimes their work was of questionable truthfulness or helpfulness".

Negative portrayals of the profession and rather drastic gender differences are noted by Kinsky (2011), Yoon and Black (2011) and Saltzman (2012). Echoing Spicer's (2009) findings of associations of public relations in media reports with disaster, distraction, hype and schmooze and using Miller's (1999) archetypes, Kinsky's focus on the West Wing series emphasizes the portrayal of professionals as "accomplished" with some notable gender differences with women being portrayed as "silly" more often while male characters were more likely to be included in the decision making processes but also to be disciplined on the job. Saltzman's (2012) review of 222 movies and 105 TV programs covering the period between 1901 and 2011 also uses Miller's (1999) job descriptions (press agent; business/private sector/publicist; government/politics; military/police) but clusters them according to positive or negative portrayals.

The two most prominent areas — press agents (71) and public relations professionals working in the private sector (189) — usually end up at the opposite ends of the spectrum, with the image of press agents as grasping, I'll-do-anything-for-publicity, stunt managers labeled as one of the worst, and the image of the professional public relations practitioner working for his client gradually becoming one of the more positive images (although with a few glaring exceptions) (Saltzman, 2012, p. 6)

Yoon and Black (2011) also find similar associations of PR with negative and "silly" actions, confirm gender barriers and confirm that the specifics of the work are hardly shown or discussed; they also point out that television

has a tendency to focus on practice areas dealing with the rich and powerful elements of society. Moreover, Yoon and Black's analysis discussed at large about what they call "the unbearable lightness" of public relations practices (p. 95), where the tasks and activities they are involved in, although successful, are "so trivial and nonessential to public relations practice that they are almost embarrassing" (p. 95).

Some positive improvements are noted by Ames' (2010) extensive follow-up of Miller's study. While Ames also concluded that the images of PR practitioners popularize stereotypes that usually underscore the practitioners' role and practice, she also pointed out that the job description of the practitioner displays more variety and complexity while the practitioners are portrayed more often as a credible, influential and respected individuals and not as not bitter ex-journalists or isolated anti-social novelists who have gone into PR for the money. Public relations is now presented as a profession in its own right, not a desperate, fallback position (p. 169).

This shift is also noted by Everidge's (2010) content analysis of four films and two television shows, her sample indicating a prevalence of neutral portrayals. Everidge's study results also indicate that there is a higher number of portrayals of the management function in comparison with event planner or planning functions, something reflecting reality more closely. However, the gender disparities noted by other studies is maintained in Everidge's findings, with males being portrayed positively and in managerial positions more often.

## 2.3 Public relations status

Public relations are consistently portrayed in negative terms both in the mass-media and in entertainment (series, movies) with a move towards neutrality in recent years. Irrespective of their findings, the premise of all research reviewed is the same: that media (in whatever form) has an influence on the

understanding of a profession with serious repercussions on its development, whether professionalization, legitimacy and credibility or choice of career path. The low regard for PR maintained by business managers (Sterne, 2008) and to a lesser degree by members of the general public (White and Park, 2010) seems to confirm this.

What these studies usually start with is also the premise of disgruntled practitioners or concerned academics that the field is misrepresented and misunderstood (Keenan, 1996; Ames, 2010; Kinsky, 2011; Saltzman, 2012). This concern with PR's image seems to have hit the professional milieus in 2014 when several blogs posts and media articles were published considering the question.

Writing for the Huffington Post in 2014, Molly Borchers reflects about her exhilarating yet exhausting new career in PR (she used to work in journalism before), but she reports being sick of having to defend herself for it. She refers to crass misconceptions of the profession as a "pink collar ghetto" mainly due to its overwhelmingly female workforce and harsh generalization of the professionals as being "stupid". Although she does ask others what they think, she does come short to offering any solution. Mark Banham (2014) writing for PRWeek the same year embarks on a similar quest. Referring to entertainment media portrayals of PR practitioners as "a mixture of ruthlessness, self-centeredness, incompetence, entitlement and mendacity", Banham continues to report about the results of a PR-Week commissioned poll where more than 66% of the 1,000 respondents indicated that they believe that the UK public relations industry has a reputation problem, while more than 77% said that they believe that most PR campaigns are "spin" which he then discusses with several industry representatives.

"Obviously PR clearly does have an image problem", he concludes, the solutions being the professionalization and continuing professional development of practitioners by validating their skills, experience, and qualifications as well as by permanently changing

the way the industry talks about itself.

However, good as the suggestions are, this might seem currently even more difficult considering Bell Pottinger's recent demise (see Czarnecki, 2017 and Segal, 2018 for the New York Times) and the raising concerns about manipulative practices (see Julie Gray's 2017 post of Huffington Post) which revive old, historical, weak points of public relations: duality of role but faithfulness to the client, unethical, manipulative practices and more (see Seidenglanz, 2018). Looking at what makes PR a profession and what competences practitioners (see Global Alliance, 2015 and 2016 or Gregory et al, 2016) might need to cope with the challenges of the 21<sup>st</sup> century doesn't address (in the short term at least) PR's problem either.

What would help is a more thorough interrogation about what practitioners think about their profession as this would hold the clues as to what can be addressed and changed. As of now however, academics and practitioners are more concerned with what others say about them than about what they say about themselves. And when they do discuss about public relations, the focus is mostly on the role practitioners play or ought to play in society or in their organizations. A lot of this body of literature has been inspired by Broom and Smith's (1979) of the four dominant roles (expert prescriber, communication facilitator, problem-solving process facilitator and communication technician), later summarized by Dozier (1984) into two roles: manager and technician and into Grunig and Hunt's (1984) four models of PR where roles typical of practitioners for every models (publicity, public information, two-way asymmetrical and two-way symmetrical) are described. Indeed, recent literature exploring the role of public relations reverts to either one or the other (i.e Dozier or Grunig and Hunt) as do Lauzen (2009) when speaking about PR encroachment (1992), Diga and Kelleher (2009) when discussing decision-making or Creedon (1991) when proposing a feminist analysis.

While mass-media and entertainment do play a role in shaping perceptions of the profession, it is unrealistic to focus only their discourses. Moreover, while the models presented by Broom and Smith (1979), Dozier (1984) and Grunig and Hunt (1984) are useful, they too, as Van Ruler (2004) also points out do not permit firm conclusions about how practitioners perceive their practice. What Van Ruler's study adds, beyond her thorough review of previous research, is the analysis and clustering of PR roles into 7 typologies (town crier, steward, traffic manager, conductor, creator, facilitator, seat-of-the-pants) and her comparison between their emergence from literature and job descriptions and practitioner perceptions.

This study therefore, aims to address the lack of focus on practitioner self-perceptions. In doing so, it aims to address the following research questions:

RQ1: What do practitioners reflect/believe others describe their profession?

RQ2: How do practitioners reflect/describe what they do?

RQ3: How do practitioner depictions map out to current metaphors and images of the profession?

### 3. Methodology

Students enrolled in four programs (MBA Communication and Leadership, MA Communication and Leadership, International MBA Communication and Leadership and MBA Public Affairs and Leadership) at Quadriga University of Applied Sciences, a private university in Berlin, Germany and taking the Applied Communication Course during 2015-2018 have been asked to create their own PR meme (piece of content - whether video, image or catchphrase – generally using a similar structure that is spread by Internet users often with slight variations).

Usually "tied to linguistics, psychology, and philosophy, the contemporary meaning of

meme is much different. Its current meaning describes a genre, not a unit of cultural transmission" (Wiggins and Bowers, 2015, p. 5) and is understood mostly as "iterated messages which are rapidly spread by members of participatory digital culture for the purpose of continuing a conversation". It is particularly for its potential to spark and contribute to conversations that memes were chosen as a the medium and methodology of exploring practitioner perceptions of the profession.

Students thus have been presented with a blank 6 questions model: "What my friends think I do", "What my parents think I do", "What the other side thinks I do", "What society thinks I do", "What I think I do", and "What I really do" and asked to fill it in prior to being presented with existing online PR memes using the same model or prior to discussing PR definitions, perceptions and history or being introduced to academic and practitioner papers discussing the issue. This 6 box format is rather common online, usually associated with professional depictions.

The categories, more than any other meme structure, provided students with a framework for their reflective exercise. Moreover, the 6 questions enabled comparison with the results of previous studies exploring the perceptions and portrayals of public relations (whether media, entertainment or public) with the practitioners' own perceptions, portrayals and reflections.

The students were verbally informed that their entries could be used for research purposes, however first and foremost they were used as discussion teaser for the class.

As all the students taking the Applied Communication course are communication professionals with a minimum of two years of full-time experience in the field (PR/marketing/public affairs departments or agencies), this study is reflective of communicators' perceptions, something that the literature is consistently missing. Students completed only one meme each. The memes collected included no further details about the students. While

this is a limitation of the study (as differences for instance between traditional categories like role, specialism focus, years of experience or gender cannot be made), this is also a benefit of the study as it unites all students under the wider umbrella designated by the term "communicators".

While online memes usually present a combination of an image (or moving image – a gif) with text, for the purposes of this exercise the students were given blank sheets of paper and asked to use the blank meme structure and add their own, hand-written text. This ensured that for the purpose of this research, their identity remained anonymous while for the class discussion the focus was on what was written rather than the person writing.

Memes submitted using drawings instead of text were excluded from the analysis as they were leaving too much space for interpretation.

A total of 90 memes have been collected during 2015-2019, with 88 of them being subjected to qualitative content analysis aiming to identify common themes and associations. The researcher's notes on the class discussion following the exercise have also been included where the context needs clarification. The categories of "what I think I do" and "what I really do" have then been compared with van Ruler's (2004) 7 PR typologies (town crier, steward, traffic manager, conductor, creator, facilitator, the seat of the pants), helping thus identify the differences between declared and perceived roles. After careful reading of the entries, it was decided to allow for multiple typologies to be coded per entry. This potentially helped reduce bias: instead of leaving it up to the researcher to take a decision about which category was most and best represented, the most often referenced typology would emerge from its frequency.

As the sample is small (88 coded memes), this content analysis is qualitative and exploratory. The results therefore make no claim of

reliability, validity or replicability, elements specific to quantitative research. On the contrary, the results and discussion will focus on the richness of data and the emergence of common themes. The research however and its setup, could be applied in other contexts, with bigger samples which would enable a more structured approach.

## 4. Results and discussion

### 4.1 Practitioners believe that, in general, others have either a negative view of their work or do not understand it

The practitioners' descriptions of what their friends, families and society think they do are similar yet telling.

In the "what friends think I do" category, about a half of the memes include associations (and confusion) of communication tasks with media relations including references such as "writing press releases", "writing articles", "I'm the one staging the press conference", "getting our research output into media", "speak with journalists", "writing press releases and bossing around with my employees", "producing and selling yellow press/information", "drinking coffee and talking to good looking female journalists", "communicate with the public, especially with the media" "something with media".

Another third sees friends associating PR/Comms with events management "red carpet + confetti", "being with important people all day", "organizing parties", "talking to VIPs", "going to parties to meet celebrities", "dinner parties".

Other associations include marketing ("something with marketing"), advertising ("promotions; draw nice pictures, write claims and slogans") journalism, social media management or nothing specific "Bla Bla Bla", "colouring books", "drinking coffee all day", "sitting in meetings, chatting on events including drinking & eating, meeting interesting people" or

"things that everybody could do". Only a few mention terms like "propaganda", "manipulation" and "bribe", the latter usually encountered in the public affairs groups reference.

Ames' (2010) underscored role is evident in all these depictions as in Yoon and Black's (2011) unbearable lightness of the profession. Unlike Miller's (1999) and Ames' (2010) results, professionals believe their friends do not see much variety in their activities and roles.

A lack of understanding of the profession or confusion is most prevalent in the "family" category, where family has most often been interpreted as "parents" (most likely, in this sample's case - Baby Boomers and the Silent Generation). Here, there are two prevalent themes emerging: either parents have "no clue" (and in doing that confuse the industry the communicators activate with their work - "working as a medical doctor", "protecting the environment through recycling", "working with farmers", "ruling the country", "CEO/COO", "big stock dealer") or associate the work with media relations but in this case the emphasis is mostly on writing ("something with words", "work with the press", "write articles", "writing texts", "write stuff and create pictures/images").

While it could be argued that the entertainment media and mass-media portrayals find resonance in the practitioners' depictions of what their parents think they do, it is the "no clue" that should be of more concern. While some practitioners added endearing smileys to their "they really have no clue" messages, they tell a story of struggle (and at times inability) to explain to others what it really means to work in PR/Comms. This is perhaps why associations like "something with media", "something with marketing", "something with advertising" or "something with politics" are often encountered as these fields and their principles of practice are better known.

The association by proxy with other, arguably more specific communication areas, could also be indicative of PR/Comms perpetuating

image problem, or better said lack thereof, which an unspecialized public like family and friends allude to. In this sense, the areas that academics and professionals believe give strength to PR/Comms, advising and communicating on behalf of organizations, are what students report that most family members, and parents in particular, find the most confusing. The duality of the PR/Comms role with its loyalty directed to the organization is what is pointed out as being the crux of the problem: if one is loyal to the organization, it cannot by default serve and support others.

Additionally, discussions with various courses, prompted observations from practitioners that the term of “public relations” and for that matter “public affairs” as well did not have a direct equivalent in other languages and that at times the direct translation made them easily confused with client services and personal assistants.

Other associations related to writing are also present. These include speechwriting, attending events and networking with important people. Unlike the “friends” category however, where the relationships are assumed to be more egalitarian, the students’ entries reflect tacitly a need to clarify and justify what they do:

- high flying career in government communications. At least that’s what I’ve told them to tell their friends.

This category also displays answers that are mostly reflective of the workload of the practitioner rather its nature, students reporting that their parents think that either “work 24/7”, “do a 9 to 5 job” or even “relax at work”.

Judging from these answers, one could argue that the entertainment media portrayals of PR/Comms as being mainly about media/press relations are echoed into the practitioners’ memes and what they think others would describe their jobs in such terms as well. Equally, the practitioners’ sense that their job is misrepresented and misunderstood is also echoed here.

The “other side” category interpreted either as “my boss”, “journalists” or “politicians” reflects the contentious relationship also presented in previous studies (see Pincus et al, 1993; Sterne, 2010; Seidenglanz, 2017). The category “other side” was initially picked up from some of the existing memes that inspired the exercise but had to be amended in class, as students asked for guidance. For the purpose of the in-class exercise, students were presented with a choice of focusing on the parties that they would define as being their counterparts. This is how “my boss”, “journalists” and “politicians” emerged. Had this been a quantitative endeavor, this post-categorization would have been problematic. However, since this research is qualitative, the students demand for clarification is indicative of the variety of settings they work in as well as of the variety of actors that they perceive and define to be the “other side” and thus are at the core of their persuasive focus.

Regardless of who the other side is, the struggle of the practitioners’ double loyalty to the public and the organization emerges here as well. References thus to telling half-truths or to manipulating and putting pressure on others are often recurring: “just caring for the benefit of my company”, “a lot of shit”, “sell stuff”, “be a threat to democracy”, “hiding information”, “not saying the whole truth”, “she is a trusting source but filters messages; <<prettify>> (sometimes) ugly truths”; “talking about pros never about cons”, “hiding information/trying to create a company image/trying to force them to publish information created that they (sometimes) don’t regard so important”.

References to propaganda are present in about a quarter of the cases, highlighting the ethical dilemma that the dual loyalty to the public and the organization entail: “I lie all the time”, “covers the dirty secrets with colorful confetti”, “fascist and capitalistic propaganda”, “public service broadcaster; soul-seller”, “propaganda/soul seller”. The idea of “selling” something unwanted is also recurrent, the milder version of it being “deliver informa-

tion" or "deliver content".

Overall, "the what others think I do" is negative with two only two instances referring to journalists being appreciative of PR's work: "local journalists – thankful for providing input" and "give them information about our group and free cars to test". While emphasizing the uses practitioners have for journalists, these answers perhaps depict a different scenario – one of local and smaller scale collaboration rather than mass, national/international, global struggle for attention.

The negative connotations are even stronger in the "society" category where strong words like "bribing", "lying", "spinning" and "propaganda" are often present. Other association, more tongue-in-cheek include "money laundering", "flying around with Darth Vader", "Being evil. Abusing power", "do the work for evil forces", "Telling fairytales" or "help hippies to make policy". These account for about a half of the references.

Another theme recurrent here is that of time and money waster: "as a civil servant they think we don't work hard (enough) & spend their money on irrelevant issues" states one student while the other writes "research that the world doesn't need". "Annoy the public. Waste money", "Drinking coffee and being on Facebook 24/7". These references to a job too easy to be taken serious account for about a quarter of the references.

With regards to information (what Van Ruler, 2004) would associate with the "traffic manager" role, there are clearly two different groups: those who state it in a "matter-of-fact" manner that society thinks they "Inform the public. Contribute to transparency about the public" and the one where the professionals' taking of sides (usually the company side) is emphasized "speak or write what somebody prepares and is showing the company in the best way", "help large enterprises to realize their (dirty) interests!", "representing one side of a multisided/multi-perspective topic", "set a good light on our workers and offers for patients", or "liar; influencing

people by using illegal/dubious methods". As with the previous categories, the biggest detractor to the professional's credibility seems to stem from the duality of their allegiances, or perhaps better put, from their loyalty to their contractors (organizations/institutions) (Seidenglanz, 2018). While Miller's (1999) manipulative, cynical and money-grabbing characteristics are in part found in these statements, what strikes the most is the sense of uneasiness that stems from them, and thus the indirect questions about the role of the PR/Comms practitioners and the means and methods they use to carry out their work that they are raising.

## **4.2 Communication practitioners report a big difference between what they think they do (a more strategic role) and what they really do (focused on completing specific tasks)**

The practitioners' own depictions remain negative, however not to the levels described in the previous categories. The "what I think I do" is indeed filled with more nuance, showing the variety of the tasks undertaken, the strategic role, the stakeholder orientation: "currently convincing the CEO", "communicate science", "managing communications", "responsible for communication strategy & CEO positioning", "counselling senior management strategically", "inform internal and external audiences; consult with/advise the top management", "professionalizing communication and build up a good image for the company".

The entries on this category also show at times the practitioners' aspirations (and at times, doubts too): "working to build a better world", "making the world a better place (for my company)", "doing honest and important PR", "working hard with little success", "showing my boss the importance of PR power".

Another emergent theme is that of the communicators' power struggle either to increase credibility and legitimacy of the position or to

see their advice adopted and implemented: “helping my boss to further his pet projects; too many presentations”, “struggling with my boss about next strategy steps” or “I put together the mess made by my colleagues to create a perfect image”. Finally, another limited number of references indicate that practitioners see themselves as translators: of jargon, of stakeholder demands, of company strategy while only 3-4 references depicting a general, and underscored, profile such as “keeping the office running”, “everything all the time”.

The comparison between “what I think I do” and “what I really do” is really stark, with references in the second category moving away from the role and purpose of the profession and into the daily tasks and struggles. This is in fact something that playing with this kind of exercise enables: the reflection and interpretation of the same issue from different perspectives. In the case of “what I think I do” and “what I really do”, the interpretation of each course has been always closer to “what I’d like to do” vs “my daily reality”. The roster of activities depicted in “what I really do” is long from “representing interests + contribute to society”, “communicate with different stakeholders in the company and negotiate on how to put things into words” to “coordinate expert teams for different policy issues; try to deliver good information; meeting interesting people”, “organizing events; writing statements”.

There are plenty of references to PR/Comms as a rescue party: “trying to sort out the mess my company creates every day and especially IT”, “do the things for journalists that they should do themselves but are too lazy”, “expect the unexpected; solve other people’s problems; deal with personnel administration”, “struggling with my boss instead of doing my job”, “fixing my boss’ tie”.

The most frequent references however are to the act of managing (whether referred to as “project management” or “managing teams” or in the sense of “kind of everything”) followed by writing, research and presentation/

representation of the organization. Writing (of any sorts from internal materials to speeches) implies a more complex set of activities than just meeting with representatives of the media. Moreover, research activities (also referred often as “reading” and “monitoring”) move the practitioners more towards a strategic and planned type of activity.

This is in stark contrast to the other portrayals of practitioners captured both in mass-media and entertainment and even with those reported in the previous categories of this study. Even in these short statements, practitioners manage to encapsulate both purpose and reflection of their work (whether by expressing frustration or by expressing hopes and aspirations). The fact that aside from managing (whether projects and/or people), practitioners undertake analytical and creative tasks is encouraging.

### **4.3 Dream vs Reality? Creators vs Traffic Managers**

Going back to the interpretations of “What I think I do” and “What I really do”, entries have been compared to Van Ruler’s (2004) typologies, as her work reviews both explicit and implicit definitions of public relations, theories necessary for PR action, criteria of success in PR and typical catchwords and provides a more varied as well as updated approach compared to the other typologies available (see Broom and Smith, 1979; Dozier, 1984; Grunig and Hunt, 1984). In this case the researcher has revisited the entries and assigned them to closest typology the statement reflected. As the entries were varied and included more than one statement, sometimes more than one typology was assigned to one entry. Equally, there were entries that could not fit into any of the typologies described.

As pointed out earlier, the benefit of the “what I think I do” and “what I really do” categories in the memes used is dual: it helps capture the potential definition of the practice together with the ideal (or idealized format of the profession) while identifying daily routines, frus-

trations and potentially perceived misgiving. A comparison of the two categories encapsulated (albeit qualitatively) in a numerical form, helps provide insight into the highest discrepancies, the closest associations and the highest frequencies. Table 1 captures all these elements.

The typology recurring the most in “what I think I do” category is *Creator*, what Van Ruler (2004) describes as:

- the type of public relations professional who aim to create agreement between the organization, or its members, and its constituencies. They are responsible for creating mutually beneficial relationships. They inspire parties to look for connection potential in surfacing interdependencies. To achieve this, they set out to explore each party’s agenda. To this end, they monitor the track records and interests of publics and screen standpoints on issues, to find points of mutual interest. They will never talk about target groups, since these represent categories to be exploited. They prefer to talk about publics as “the more aware and active stakeholders” (...) Their claim to fame will be based on the productive creation of partnerships. To achieve this, influence on strategic decision-making is essential. That is why they claim a position in the dominant coalition. (p. 136).

This is followed by *Facilitator* of dialogue (managers of communications) and then by *Conductor* (“responsible for pleasing the eyes and ears of their target groups, thereby inducing positive feelings towards the organization, p. 134). No reference to “PR as art” was found.

The “what I think I do” category on the other hand shows the *Traffic Manager* as the strongest choice, typologies like *Facilitator* (12), *Conductor* (11) and *Steward* (11) following at a big distance. Van Ruler (2004) describes Traffic managers as the type of public relations professionals who see to it that messages are distributed efficiently and effectively. They are responsible for the physical transportation of information carriers to selected target

groups, much like the logistic manager in the automotive industry. The traffic managers look after the means of communication, the targeting, timing and reach. Unlike the town crier and the steward, the traffic manager’s main concern is the planning and control of the distribution process to target groups and it’s evaluation. However, a traffic manager’s gospel is “reach equals effect.” In other words, control over the transportation of information is their core business. The traffic manager’s claim to fame is based on success in bringing the right information to the right people at the right time. Their business is making the organization’s positive presence felt within selected target groups (Van Ruler, 2004, pp. 132-133).

While Van Ruler indicates that research plays a big role in the Traffic Manager’s job, this is only partly reflected in the PR memes studied here, a much greater preoccupation being given to the act of transmitting information (at the right time, to the right parties). One could, of course, argue that the research element in self-understood and therefore not directly stated but discussions about evaluation and measurement of communication following the exercise revealed that this was not necessarily the case.

The difference reported here does reflect the struggle captured and reported consistently in previous PR research and professional thinking (see the blog posts and literature reviewed earlier), the contrast between PR as a persuasive function that serves the business and PR as a business, strategic function mediating between the organization and its publics. What is perhaps more important is that this struggle reflects PR’s ethical dilemma at its best, a dilemma partly inherited from history, partly from the business relate to the practice and in part to how practitioners depict their role. This also revives the question of training and development, of who and how could one become a communicator and more importantly a professional communicator, a strong reminder of Grunig’s life-time work to promote “the excellence theory”.

Table 1: “What I think I do” and “What I really do” mapped against Van Ruler’s (2004) typologies including the original cartoons

	Typology/ Category	What I think I do	What I really do
 <p><i>Town crier: public relations is broadcasting his master's voice</i></p>	Town Crier: PR is broadcasting his master's voice	12	8
 <p><i>Steward: public relations is pampering</i></p>	Steward: PR is pampering	11	11
 <p><i>Traffic manager: public relations is transfer of information</i></p>	Traffic manager: PR is transfer of information	12	35
 <p><i>Conductor: public relations is harmonic performance</i></p>	Conductor: PR is harmonic performance	13	11
 <p><i>Creator: public relations is about creating a bond</i></p>	Creator: PR is about creating a bond	26	6
 <p><i>Facilitator: public relations is hosting the dialogue</i></p>	Facilitator: PR is hosting the dialogue	16	12

## 5. Practical and social implications, and Conclusions

This study's sample is small and therefore the study makes no claim of representation beyond the classrooms these practitioners were part of. However, the benefit of this study is in the exploration and revealing of practitioners' thinking of the perceptions they believe others have about themselves as well as facilitating reflection about the contrast between what they do (or are allowed to do) and what would like to. Moreover, this is perhaps the first study pursuing the question of professional portrayals bringing thus more structure and substance to claims and complaints practitioners have independently voicing for years.

Public relations as a profession continues to carry along its negative connotations and practitioners in the field, according to this study, are well aware of them. Despite the negative connotations, public relations continue to be an appealing, growing and lucrative field. The question thus emerges of whether these negative perceptions are going to harm in the long term the profession or stick around regardless.

Their perpetuation however points out to the need of a deeper and more meaningful discussion about the role of public relations in society as well as to the boundaries within which the professionals can operate within their organization and putting the public interest first. This points out not only to the need of universities and training centers to address the issue in a wider context (including ethics, debating history, inviting and including critical perspectives) but also to organizations and professional associations to continuously check and challenge the existing perceptions. It might be "good fun" for a class to joke and discuss in a light-hearted manner the ups and downs of the profession, but the downs in this case are a warning and telling sign as of why PR continues to struggle to be taken seriously.

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# Erasing the Limits. When Companies Impose Themselves Between State and People.

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**Purpose of the study:** The purpose of this paper is to determine the power struggle and tension between three different voices in conflict in this case study: Barrick Gold's, the Government, and the people.

**Methodology:** This study uses content analysis of online media appearances in a range of time from March 29th to April 8th, 2017 after the third toxic spill in the Veladero Mine operated by Barrick Gold in the province of San Juan, Argentina. The interpretation of the results should bring light to the way each party involved use their influence and appearances in the media. The way PR works in each case and how the access to PR practices and professionals could tip the balance between each party.

**Results:** Results show that the asymmetry between the active voices is not coincidental but often the result of active lobbying and communications strategies to avoid public dissent and a turn of heart from the local government. These differences occur mainly because of access, either to monetary resources or network, or both.

**Discussion:** Implications of this analysis are a first in communication matters referring cases of public opinion versus powerful companies in lieu with the Government. It would also provide some light to how to make the voices of the less powerful be heard when the company's lobbying get them the upper hand before the governmental officers. However, the use of PR techniques might be inferred in some stages sifting through the journalistic material.

**Limitations and the future:** This analysis could provide practitioners with a view of the professional scenario between two powerful and resourceful parties and one with less reach, leaving different courses of action for further analysis.

These study contributes to the knowledge of PR practice in asymmetric circumstances in terms of media attention and in disparity in resources. There are no previous papers about this pertaining this situation in Argentina.

**Keywords:** Journalism; Crisis Communication; Public Affairs; Public Relations; Mining; Contamination

## 1. Introduction

Publicly notorious cases such as Infrastructure contracts, fracking in Vaca Muerta or Barrick Gold Veladero mining operation echoes within the public opinion from different countries in South America. The cost seems steeper from the environmental and social point of view than from the financial side. Also, there is a growing perception of a weak State and co-opted local Governments in the hands of lobbyists and negotiators working for these mega corporations.

From all the voices participating, a question rises as a starting point for large scale discussion: What is the limit that has to be reached, in abuse of the land, resources, social environment and governmental controls, for the State to set a hard limit? What is the role of PR in these kind of conflict? Does it level the playing field or just accentuate the power imbalance towards the one who possesses more financial resources?

In every case, there is always a party that pays the higher price: The people. This occurs for several reasons. In the first place, the Government faces the company as the one who owns the country's resources and limits the inheritance to negotiate, adjudicate and, if it's necessary, admonish the company for its ill operation. Secondly, the exploitations are shown as a way to develop these secluded areas and as bringers of wealth. These notions vanish when all the photos have been taken and the news releases are out.

The research focus is set on the case of Barrick Gold's operation in the province of San Juan. During the last few years, there have been several media reports focusing on abuses over the land and other operational "problems" such pipeline leakage. Spillages, containing highly toxic materials like arsenic and other heavy metals, reached the Jáchal River, the main source of water to the mine and to the neighboring communities. But what happens in the media when a spillage occurs?

## 2. Literature Review

Much has been written about communication in crisis situations and of course they are focused on and for the organization. Many core concepts of Public Relations also have their eyes on the organization. But what would happen if the focus switches to the stakeholders? or better still on those groups that have no voice?

Public relations professionals may emerge as "social intermediaries" in a new economy (Piore, 2001), in which collaboration is the core value that guides the development of relationships between organizations and their publics (Grunig, 2000). Many public relations scholars believe that this collaborative social role is essential in societies with disproportionate rates of inequality, such as are found in most Latin American countries (Molleda & Fergusson, 2004). According to Coombs and Holladay (2014) "The role of public relations should be to facilitate participation and cooperation in order to allow the various groups to co-create meaning".

From the original definitions of public relations to the most current (including those of the critical perspective), the dialogue, the interaction with stakeholders, the social function of public relations have always been mentioned as a primordial characteristic. The question is whether this really happens in practice or how do groups that do not have PR support to make their voices heard especially in developing countries. It is impossible to talk about symmetry when the community does not have access to the media or economic means to spread their word about what is happening to them.

According to Heath:

"Society is a complex of collectivities engaged in variously constructive dialogues and power resource distribution through meeting socially constructed and shared norm-based expectations whereby individuals seek to make enlightened choice in the face of risk,

uncertainty, and reward/cost ambiguity" (mentioned in Coombs and Holladay, 2014, p. 125).

No one doubts the role of public relations in society. According to Coombs and Holladay (2014), society does not function properly if there are broken relationships among its members. "Public Relations provides valuable societal benefits; it helps to maintain the relationships necessary for the effective functioning of society" (Coombs & Holladay, 2014, p. 140)

### 3. Risk perceptions, crisis and power

There are former cases involving Barrick Gold in other countries, which were made public by local journalists denouncing in detail how these mining operations go against the right of the people living in neighboring areas of the mine. Also, there are several similar cases researched by academics in Peru, Ecuador and Australia. These cases have been taken into account in order to check if there are behavioral patterns in these kind of operation affecting each of parties involved. (Bebbington, A. *et al.*, 2008; Solomon, F., Katz, E., & Lovel, R., 2008; Hajkowicz, S., Heyenga, S., & Moffat, K., 2011 and Lust, J., 2016). Bebbington demonstrates that these exploitations significantly shake the way in which the surrounding communities live and how they are unable to find answers to their claims from the governmental authorities (Bebbington, A. *et al.*, 2008). The only viable way for them is to revolt or to raise the issue through mass media. These methods, according to Coombs & Holladay (2012) have been well established as the most harmful to public image for companies and state officials.

When this happens, the turmoil turns conflict into crisis. Elizalde (2011) establishes that there are differences between conflict and crisis processes and therefore there should also be differences in resolution methodologies. It is for this reason that Ruiz Balza & Coppola (2011) suggest being alert to trends. "A trend

is the direction towards which a thing moves or a social agent or actor behaves" (Ruiz Balza & Coppola, 2011, p.35). In this regard, the people in Argentina want to have their place in the conversation.

The political, economic and social context of Argentina at the time Barrick was established in the country (1993) has changed. The tendency in the country is to take greater care of the environment. That is why the citizens pressure the authorities so that there are laws that place limits on the organizations in terms of their impact on the environment. "Public policy is the consensus of stakeholders' attitudes towards a particular public issue" (Ruiz Balza & Coppola, 2011, p.36).

For Elizalde, (2011) dissent is the objective origin of the crisis. "The crisis is not only a situation that bothers or harms. It is a situation that will provoke as a consequence the loss of relative power. And therefore, the crisis is the result of dissent" (Elizalde, 2011, p. 34). The situation that arises in the province of San Juan is complex given that as long as there are concordant relations between the company and the provincial government (and if necessary the national government) the crisis situation will not arise. There may be situations of cooperation, accommodation and assimilation, but there will be no conflict and therefore no crisis. In order for there to be a crisis, a disjunctive balance must be struck. This "equilibrium" occurs in the consent process. "Without consent, one cannot escape from the state of instability, insecurity and uncertainty caused by the crisis" (Elizalde, 2011, p. 39).

There are several definitions for crisis. Elizalde (2011) establishes that the meaning of crisis states a social situation that passes through different levels such as personal and psychological, and it might happen either in a public or private context. It produces a state of change in the balance of power, may it be relative or absolute. He establishes that "It is a change happening in a work position, a personal relationship, or the possibility of losing a certain position in a given market. It could

involve a possible sanction from the State or an employer with the cancellation of a contract, etc.” (Elizalde, 2011, p. 17).

Moreover, Losada Díaz (2018) lists government authorities and regulators as special publics. This is due to the fundamental role they often play in crises, either because they may be involved as those responsible for the origin of the crisis or in its development. “They may be accused of failing to regulate or monitor certain actions, but, above all, of failing to act when the crisis has been triggered and, therefore, how they can contribute to reducing it” (Losada Díaz, 2018, p. 149).

## 4. License to operate

In a state of crisis certain cards appear on the table such as interdependency and relationships or the levels of consent or dissent an organization. To continue its operation in Argentina, Barrick needs an express authorization from the National and the local Governments. Also they need a “Social license to operate”. This one is given by the people, citizens residing in locations near the mine. “The level of interdependence achieved with others by cooperation opens the path to do more things.” (Elizalde, 2011, p. 26). Stating that power in reality is relative.

*“The relative positions of power are structured and organized in a process of balance, more or less stable, between those who control resources and rules to satisfy their own needs and those of others, and those who control neither resources nor rules to gratify desires, needs and interests”* (Elizalde, 2011, p. 27).

This relativity of power is clear in the confluence of parties with different positions of power and control among each of them. “The license to operate exists when stakeholders accept that an organization has a right to exist and be a part of a community or society” according to Coombs and Holladay (2014).

This “license” can also be understood as legitimacy. Where companies establish ways of communication with its surrounding com-

munities showing there is a way to resonate among them building a win-win relationship (Canel & Luoma-aho, 2019, p.148). “Those affected by a crisis situation are always the priority. They are the priority at all levels, both in the management of the facts and in their communication” (Losada Díaz, 2018, p. 151). An analysis of the facts will be carried out with the aim of contrasting theory with practice. Especially when facing a crisis, where “media relations are central to crisis communication” (Coombs & Holladay, 2012). Then, establishing clear paths of communication and statements makes the process of delivering a message not only easier but looking more responsible and reliable in the face of the media. In fact, the absence of official comments from spokespersons may present the organization as evasive, unresponsive, or unconcerned about the community. Leaving a space for others to “supply information about the crisis could be dangerous as it may create the perception that the organization is not in control of the situation and/or is concealing information. Hence, an organizational spokesperson should meet with the media in the early stages of the crisis to disseminate information and participate in framing crisis” (Coombs and Holladay, 2012, p.162).

Also the issue of defensive strategy from one of the parties involved in the case of crisis could be seen as less transparent or a tactic for self-preservation. Questions on the ethics of PR practices during a crisis might be raised. Jin, Pang and Smith (2018) proposed this while explaining the role PR plays and how it could influence on image and reputation levels.

## 5. The role of the media

Literature on the influence of PR in the working of the journalism involved in the material taken for this study raises issues about PR-ization (Jackson & Moloney, 2015) –where PR practitioners provide a closed package “deal” to the journalist saving him/her of doing most of the work. Described as “churnalism” (Davies, 2008) —the use of unchecked

PR material in news— this practice can be seen in plain sight along the sample taken for this study.

For an organization “The initial communication about the crisis is critical” according Holladay (Coombs & Holladay, 2010). It is known that public opinion is largely formed from the information they receive from the media. “Examining the contents of media reports is one method of tracking information the public receives about organizational responses to crises” (Coombs & Holladay, 2012) because “the way information is framed in news reports can affect public perceptions”.

In the last decades the perception of risk and the increase of fears in the population have increased by influence of the mass media. What you read in the newspapers, what you see on television, what you hear on the radio, and everything you get on the Internet influences how people perceive risk.

“The media are sources of social amplification of risk perceptions, whether through their commitment to negativity, dramatization, distortion or the exaggeration of themes” (Pont Sorribes, 2013). When the community discovers through the media that “something” is happening very close to them, it is logical that fear will grow. If in addition what happens has antecedents that put in risk the health of the population and they perceive that there are interests that could leave them aside before the minor suspicion of another incident the panic appears.

“Fear is an emotion, while risk is a cognitive judgment that alerts to the possibility of danger. This alert is amplified daily in today’s society by the proliferation of the number of media and by the occupation of these in public spaces” (Pont Sorribes, 2013).

In any situation perceived as risky by some of the actors, the role of the media in transmitting information is fundamental. The risk is the possibility that something will happen and leave consequences. All human activity carries a certain risk, and so do business ac-

tivities. Authors such as Hazlett (2001) suggest that those responsible for editing the media avoid social alarm, avoid politicization of information, facilitate cooperation, provide spaces for debate and opinion (quoted by Pont Sorribes, 2013).

In a research carried out in England by Murdock, Horlick-Jones and Petts (quoted by Pont Sorribes, 2013), NGOs are assigned a very important role in changing risk perception, among other factors. “In the case of risk areas or communities, it is risk communication that has to act as the vertebral centre of the discourses of the different actors and institutions involved in risk management” (Pont Sorribes, 2013, p. 30) including NGOs.

In theory, those crises that involves public health issues, such as the chemical accidents analysed by Holladay (Coombs and Holladay, 2012) demand a response from the organization. According to the author: “These crises are not insignificant for the communities affected by them”. People want to know, even if this is not news for the national media. “Community members must know how they should respond,” adds Holladay.

The purpose of this case study is to examine the media reports in order to identify the different voices reflected in the media. The aim is to find out whether the media give the same hierarchy to the information provided by the different actors involved: government, company and society. On the basis of the literature reviewed, the following research questions are posed:

- RQ1 What kind of media coverage does a local incident have?
- RQ2a What is the place of all actors in the media? And the organizations?
- RQ2b Are their voices reflected?
- RQ3 What is the intensity of each party discourse?
- RQ4 What is the tendency of media from the community standpoint?

## 6. Methodology

As a sample for this paper, a narrow scope study has been made taking media coverage of the third toxic material spill in the Veladero operated by Barrick Gold. Coverage analysis will serve to understand the dynamics in the relationship between the Government, Barrick and the people of San Juan (and the media).

### Content analysis

The data were collected and analysed from four media in their online format. Two national media: Diario Clarín and Diario La Nación and two local media: Diario Los Andes and Diario de Cuyo.

Media reports were measured and an analysis of quantitative and qualitative content was carried out (N=29).

The time span for the analysis consist of the interval between March 29th, 2017 and April, 8th, 2017. A total of 11 days were scanned from the day of the third spill until the news disappeared from the media. There are no immediate records after April 8.

### Objectives

Identify media trends in the dissemination of all the voices of the different stakeholders involved.

Secondary objectives for this research are stated as follows:

1. To identify every active voice involved in the media discussion and its levels of presence
2. To describe of the power struggle between each sector (Government, People and the Company)
3. To identify the role of the media

This objectives are directly oriented to the focus of this research. However, there is a question concerning the role of PR in these type of cases. With parties defined as a mega company, like Barrick, the government and

the people, there is a complete asymmetry in the volume of their voices – capacity to make themselves heard according to media references.

## 7. Hypothesis

The media, in addressing the issue of the third spill at the Veladero mine, stand in favor of Barrick and/or the Government, leaving the people aside.

### Measurement criteria

Each piece of news has been taken as a unit of analysis. Also each information item understood as a unit for analysis. Each item analysed has a variable length made up of several sentences, we will seek to capture as much information for the study.

### Coding categories

For QR 1 there is clearly quantitative information such as:

- Amount of news appearing in each media. National and local media were analysed.
- Section of the media in which the news appears.

In the case of qualitative information, a code is needed for content analysis. It was coded as follows:

The presence or absence of an element in a text can be important.

In this study it may be important, for example, not to mention some of the actors or organizations involved in the spill. (RQ 2a)

- Protagonists. Main actors mentioned in the news.
- Organizations. Main organizations mentioned in the news.

The importance of a recording unit grows with its frequency of occurrence. (RQ 2b)

- Frequency of appearance of the actors and organizations in the news.

The intensity of a news item could also determine an enumeration system (RQ 3).

- Intensity of the actors' discourse in the

media. To judge the degree of intensity of the coding taking into account the time of the verb (conditional, future, imperative or perfect past) will be its degree of intensity (1 less intense and 3 more intense). The following coding will be used: 1. Conditional 2. Future 3. Imperative or past perfect-Direction.

It is necessary to establish a coding system where the bi-directional sense of the text is reflected (RQ 4).

- Direction or trend of the news. In favour, neutral or contrary to the interests of the community. Thus, in an analysis of the content of a news item, it could be positive or negative. News about a spill will be considered positive when, for example, it is mentioned that work is being done to avoid a spill or its consequences (code +1) and negative when the spill occurs (code -1).

Order. The order is established according to the temporary appearance, importance, or function of the registration units, for example, if only the current spill is mentioned or if another or other previous spills are also mentioned. Previous crises. Mention (or not) of previous crises that the company had in the area.

Even though, the sample taken for this analysis may be reduced, the repercussions were mostly muffled by different participants of the story. There was, at the time, pressure on every side involved in the spillage: the Company, facing its third spillage in one year and a half. The local Government, in allowing Barrick to continue operating the mine. Some social activist like Asamblea Jáchal No Se Toca (AJNST)<sup>1</sup> demanding the closure of the mine altogether. The Assembly is composed of residents of the city of Jáchal who called themselves against mining in the region. Of course, not all of the neighbors agree with the closure of the Veladero mine because, in spite of everything, it is a source of income

<sup>1</sup> AJNST: Asamblea Jáchal No Se Toca. (Assembly Jáchal shall remain untouched)

for the community.

## 8. Results

The data were collected over 11 days from the day of the crisis 29<sup>th</sup> of March until the 8<sup>th</sup> of April. In this period they were 29 newspaper articles.

**RQ1** *What kind of media coverage does a local incident have?*

The study revealed the following data: 13 mentions in national media (44.83 percent) and 16 mentions in local media (55.17 percent). The first national newspaper to raise the issue was Clarín, but the local newspaper Diario de Cuyo published more articles than the others during the period (n=11, 37.9 percent).

As for the sections in which the news appear, the following data was recorded:

- 48.27 percent in Society/Environment (n=14)
- 13.80 percent in Economics/Business (n=4)
- 37.93 percent without section. El Diario de Cuyo is not organized in sections. (n=11)

**RQ2a** *What is the place of all actors in the media?*

**RQ2b** *Are their voices reflected?*

The main actors mentioned in the news are: Members of the provincial government: Sergio Uñac, current governor of the province of San Juan (n= 60), Alberto Hensel, Minister of Mining of San Juan (n= 23), Eduardo Machuca, Secretary of Environmental Management (n=13) total 96 mentions; members of the national government: Sergio Bergman, Minister of Environment (n= 13) and Juan José Aranguren, Minister of Energy (n=12), total 25 mentions; members of Barrick Gold: Kelvin Dushnisky, President (n=12) and John L. Thornton, Executive Chairman (n=4), total 16 mentions. Enrique Viale, lawyer of the neighbors grouped in the assembly Jáchal No Se Toca, only 1 mention (See figure 1).

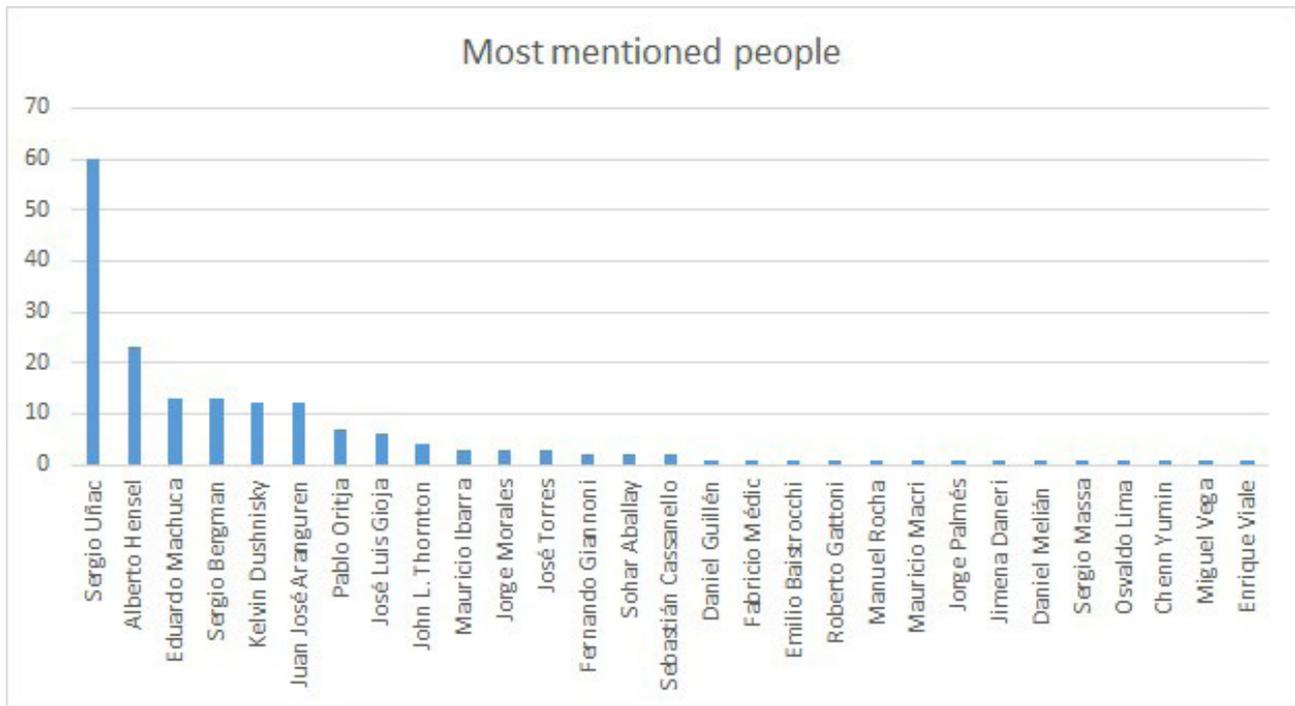


Figure 1

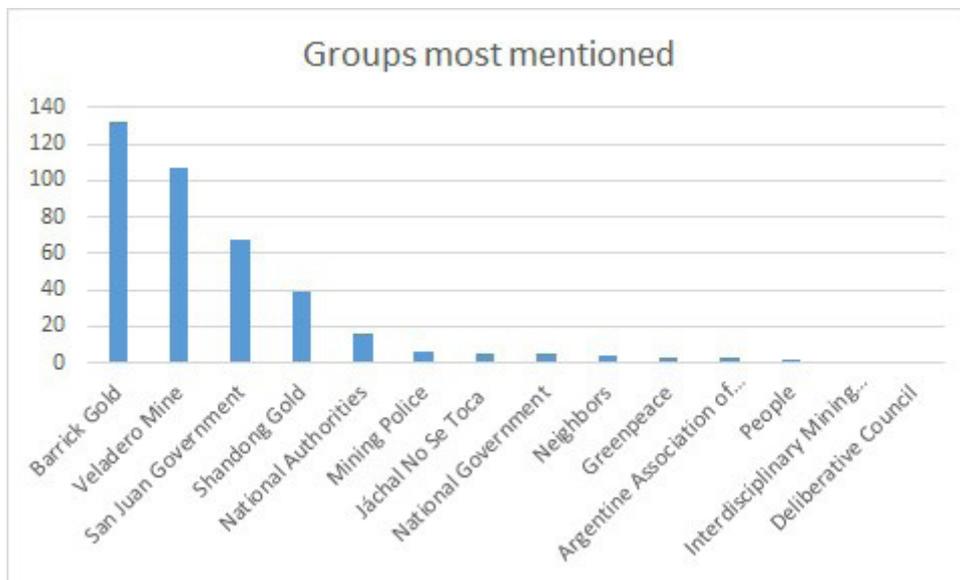


Figure 2

## Organizations and stakeholders

Barrick Gold (n=132) and Veladero Mine (n=107), total 239, were mentioned an average of 8.24 times per article, while the provincial government (n=68), the national authorities (n=16), the national government (n=5), in general they were mentioned a total of 89 times, an average of 3 times per article. The NGO Jachal No Se Toca (n=5), the word neighbors (n=4) and the word people (n=2) were mentioned in total 11 times, less than 1 mention per article (0.37 times). Greenpeace (n=3) and the Argentine Association of Environmental Lawyers (n=3) were mentioned in total 6 times, all of them when the articles talked about past spillages (See figure 2).

### RQ3 *What is the intensity of each party discourse?*

Intensity of the actors' discourse in the media from 1 (less intense) to 3 (more intense) 24.13 percent of articles found no textual phrases (n=7). In the other 22 newspaper articles the following results were found:

The greatest number of textual phrases come from the governor of San Juan, Sergio Uñac (n=14). Of these phrases 3 were categorized with level 1 (less intense), 3 with level 2 and 8 with level 3 (more intense).

Hensel, Minister of Mining of San Juan, has 5 textual phrases all of them of level 2.

Among the actors of the national government, there is Bergman with 2 textual phrases of level 3 and Aranguren with 2 textual phrases of level 2 and one of level 1.

There is a single level 2 textual phrase from Barrick in which the actor is not quoted. The paper mentions "a spokesman said in his email response."

### RQ4 *What is the tendency of media from the community standpoint?*

Most of the news is considered positive for the community in that they mention actions to repair the situation or require changes to the company to avoid new incidents (n=19,

65.52 percent). Two news items are considered negative (n=2, 6.90 percent) in which the company in one of them admits the incident and in the other it says that it did not cause any damage. Finally, there are 8 news items (n=8, 27.58 percent) that were considered neutral because they do not express an opinion on the incident.

## Other data obtained from the analysis

Of the 29 newspaper articles analysed in the scanned time period almost all articles referred to the spill (n=27, 93.1 percent), only two articles do not mention the crisis (6.9 percent). Of the 27 articles that address the crisis, 17 (62.96 percent) mention previous incidents: 14 refer superficially to them and 3 relate in detail how and when each of the previous spills occurred.

## Findings

The analysis of RQ1 provided insight of how the media presented and assigned relevance to the subject at hand. Several appearances in different media, both local and national, showed that the topic has a place in the agenda. Notwithstanding, national interest in the subject declined quicker than in their local colleagues.

Also, the news was published with divided interest, between the social/environment section and the economic/business. In the *Diario de Cuyo* (local) news spanned in the main part of the newspaper (it is not divided in sections but maintained a place in the first part of it). It is worth clarifying that in Argentina the media economy section is more relevant than the section called society. The name of the company Barrick was "moved" to the economy section when the media began to talk about the possible purchase of 50% of the Veladero mine by the Chinese mining company Shandong. Distraction strategy? In a country where foreign investment is welcome because it is necessary for its economy Barrick announces the sale of 50% of the mine just 4 days after the spill. This generated a traffic of journalistic news not only to the

Economy section but also reduced the news about the incident (RQ 1).

Clearly who dominated the public sphere of communication in the media was the current governor of the province, Sergio Uñac (as will be seen below was also the most intense in his speeches). Among the findings it is worth mentioning that in spite of the fact that he has not been in government for four years, the media mentions former governor José Luis Gioja more than Barrick's Executive Chief. For the people of San Juan, according to one of the local newspapers, the previous Governor of the province José Luis Gioja, was "controlled by Barrick" (Diario de Cuyo, 2017). This newspaper conducted a poll among its readers to corroborate their title. The results were that 77% thought it was, in fact, true and extended their suspicion to include the actual Governor Uñac. That is why José Luis Gioja is mentioned 6 times. On the other hand that the legal representative of the NGO, Enrique Viale, has only one mention is alarming.

There are three groups clearly identified in this study. Government (provincial and national), the company and the people. Also in the Government we add to all the authorities from different Offices such as Environment, Industrial Production, Energy, Public Health and up to the President's Office. Also members from the provincial and local administration. Barrick shows itself in a conglomerated front, speaking in Barrick's name without any particular name or spokesperson. Lastly, the people living in the neighboring communities to the Veladero mine. Their voice sometimes is heard through the NGO Jáchal No Se Toca.

The media do not give the names of the people involved by the company when the information is contrary to it. However, they are named when the investments that the company will make in the future are mentioned. In the period of time analysed the only journalistic articles that are mentioned with name, surname and position to officials of the Barrick are:

- Barrick's CEO is mentioned, for example, on April 4. "Veladero: Uñac met with Kel-

vin Dushnisky, Barrick highest authority worldwide" is the headline. Later in the news it is said that the meeting lasted two hours but did not transcend what they talked about.

- On April 7, John L. Thornton, CEO of the Toronto, Canada-based firm, announced that Barrick sold 50% of the Veladero mine to a Chinese company.

Other groups such as Greenpeace and the Argentine Association of Environmental Lawyers are mentioned when references were made to past spills; there are no statements in the articles of these NGOs linked to the spill analysed in that paper (RQ2).

Governor Uñac's sayings are more intense, he mentioned six times that he "Suspended the company's activities" and twice that he "Dismissed the work plan presented by Barrick". As well as those of Minister Bergman who said he "presented an action of protection". Hensel said sentences like: "We are going to suspend the company" and Minister Aranguren said: "I'm going to make a decision that is to take away Barrick's concession". These phrases written in future tense are less intense than the previous ones that were said in past tense. Barrick has a single textual phrase: "we are going to work with the authorities to understand their concerns and adjust accordingly," a spokesman said in his email response. There's no mention of the spokesman's name. It is only mentioned that this reply was received by email which implies that there was no face-to-face communication, not even telephone communication. The strongest arguments come from the current governor Uñac and national authorities, especially Minister Aranguren (RQ 3).

The position of the provincial government changed throughout the days. In September 2016 (second spill) the Governor says he will be relentless with the company next time. He says the same thing during the first 48 hours of the third spill and changes his position after the meeting he had on April 4 at the San Juan government house with Barrick's CEO. The day after the meeting, the media report-

ed on the new investments that the company will make in the next three years and the benefits that the population will have, not a word is mentioned about the spills or about the suspension that the company had from March 31 to June 16, 2017. It is worth noting that mining production grew by 2,200% between 2003 and 2013 according to an article dated July 12, 2013. It also mentions that exports from the province reached 2,036 million dollars, which implies 80% of all exports from the province. The first private employer in San Juan is Barrick (El Cronista, 2013).

The trend of the news analysed is positive insofar as it mentions actions to repair the situation and prevent future events, led these speeches especially on the part of the government. The attitude of the company is one of minimization and even denial of the facts, which has been considered as negative news for the community. In addition, news was found that did not mention the incident, which has been considered neutral (RQ 4).

It must be taken into account that when an incident occurs the press will refer almost automatically to previous incidents, whether it is simply listing the number of incidents the company has had previously or dedicating several sentences to give a detailed account of everything that happened previously. This was also observed in this study, 63 percent of the articles mention previous incident.

## 9. Conclusions

Throughout the analysis of every publication, there was a clear confrontation between the company and the Government leaving the social voice muffled.

Regarding the way in which some newspapers take position in favor or against the company, it is notorious how the majority of the countries newspapers is set against the company but when the article is based on a press release from Barrick, they turn their tendency to favor them.

Around 10,000 people live in the region of

Jáchal and 9,000 in the department of Iglesia in the surrounding areas of the mine. The Barrick Gold Company in the area currently employs more than 3,800 people, including both own and contracted personnel (20 percent of the population around the mine). The presence of the NGO or the community in the media is almost non-existent.

However, in February 2015 the activities of the Assembly Jáchal No Se Toca (AJNST) began. According to Larreta (2017): "With the passage of time, and an apparent victory, when the project was suspended, the struggle continued over other mining projects, but suffered a wear and tear until it resurfaced in September 2015 after the (first) spill in the leach valley, in the Veladero mine".

In the speech of the Assembly (AJNST) its main objective is the defense of water; "...but with a meaning not only as a natural resource but also as a source of life, as a substratum from which the territory is built and where history passes. Another point in which the territorial sense of the assembly is made visible is in its objective: closure, remediation and prohibition of the Veladero mine, not expliciting another objective" (Larreta, G. *et al.*, 2017).

This might raise an issue on transparency and ethics for the PR practise from different sides. Although transparency is not one of the vectors taken for this analysis, from a PR perspective an emergent issue on its levels would affect the company's public image and its reputation. So, in a crisis situation and applying the contingency theory standpoint, identified situational factors include the uncertainty of the timing for releasing information and the level of information, to balance being transparent and also strategic. Pre-crisis reputation is a factor as are organizational culture, support from senior management and PR leadership (Yin, Pang *et al.*, 2018), the fact that this was the fourth spill in the same province clearly does not help the company.

This study shows some limitations, especially in the temporal frame. However, in redefining it to include all four spills and even a

number of years since the mine started in Argentina, the results could be, while maintaining the same research focus, much more explicit in the way this company co-opts the public opinion with lobbying and mass media actions.

In spite of the short time frame of this study, an amplified scope will only show a wider gap in the actual discussion while leaving the social actors further behind.

In depth research of these kind of cases, along with their publication, would provide a more equitable share of voice for each interested party. More so, using PR to amplify the voice of those with fewer access and resources.

### **Practical and social implications**

Social implications may come by motivating to investigate more into these cases and to provide tools that will help to empower those communities that reside adjacent to this exploitations and that many times are not heard in their claims for justice and equality.

Situations like the one described in this case show PR practitioners with different kinds of leverage and resources. This is the case of the social actors, like NGOs and public assemblies. They work in a David against Goliath manner that leaves them in bad tactical position. However, knowledge of the working of the other parts of the equation serves them as a way to level the playing field.

Regarding the case of the use of Public Relations as a way to achieve volume of voice in the media, a case for equality could be made. Maybe following Edward Bernays writing in *Propaganda*, where he stated that PR professionals are similar to an attorney in that he defends his or her client's interests but instead of facing a court of law, will face the court of public opinion with a sentencing as harsh as any judge in the judicial system (Bernays, 2010, pp. 59-60).

On the idea of power and Discourse/Dialogue as Shared Power. A way to co-create

meaning, as a mix of relevant voices, Heath (2010) proposes that PR can work for individual advantage (as the engineering of consent) or seek a fully functioning society whereby individuals collaborate to manage risks. Is the emergence and enactment of any vocabulary driven sense of mind, self, and society best conceptualized as the empowering pursuit of one interest or the collective need for mutual benefit? Here is the rationale for a dialogic approach to Public Relations (Pearson, 1989; Kent & Taylor, 2002, Motion, 2005).

In this study, the argument of resources dedicated to PR definitely will tip the scale being an important outlet for companies to communicate to the public via PR practitioners. They are also a primary information source for citizens seeking to learn about the positions of their governments. Together, they share a critical role in co-creating an enlightened citizen (McCullough, 2014). Also, a reinforced check on the releases and other information provided by the organization or even the Government could end situations where the PR practitioner acts as a sort of "pre-reporter" for the journalist (Supa & Zoch, 2009). Taking the words from Jackson and Moloney (2015) "Churnalism" is widely spread, good PR practices need strong PR professionals and journalist with checked information and sources.

Balance is important in the relationship with the media. Just as organizations (and the public administration) should be even-handed when dealing with the press, the media should provide space for every actor involved in the incident. Public opinion wants to be addressed in the face of risks that are significant in decision making.

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# Effects of Astroturfing in Non-Profit Organizations: Two Competing Hypotheses

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This study examines the possible effects of astroturfing when this bad practice is operated by non-profit organizations. Astroturfing is a practice which seeks for organization benefit rather than a common benefit or common good. Nevertheless, non-profits normally aim to achieve goals beneficial for the common good. The image of the organization can be damaged because of the intentionality of the hoax. In this context, it is worth to question whether the effects of astroturfing for non-profits will or will not differ from the effects that astroturfing has on marked oriented organizations.

**Keywords:** astroturfing; non-profits; credibility; attitude towards the brand; megaphoning

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## 1. Introduction

Astroturfing practices damage the organization and public relations discipline's reputation and credibility (Avery, 2010). Recovering from the consequences of revealed astroturfing requires efforts to build up strategies that can restore public trust (Avery, 2010). Astroturfing is relevant since it is both more generalized because of the Internet expansion, and secondly because of its great impact in the public relations field.

Fallin (2014) defined astroturfing as the "movement that appears to be grassroots, but it is either funded, created or conceived by a corporation or industry trade association, political interest group or public relations firm" (p. 322). Although this deceptive

strategies are not new, in fact they have existed for over a century (Lee, 2010), the Internet enabled these actions.

The Internet works like a mask, hiding the organization who spreads the information (Peng *et al.*, 2016). The information arrives to the audience, but they do not know who the source of such message is. Then, spreading astroturfed information on the Internet is easier, because of the characteristics of this channel or tool and the affordability for both organizations and audiences.

Astroturfing is a practice which seeks for organization benefit rather than a common benefit or common good (Demetrious, 2008). Organizations engage in this type of practices because of the potential benefits of the

spread of their crafted message. Nevertheless, there are specific organizations that look beyond own-profit. Non-profits normally aim to achieve goals beneficial for the common good.

The image of the organization can be damaged because of the intentionality of the hoax (Cox, Martinez & Quinian, 2008). In this context, it is worth to question whether the effects of astroturfing for non-profits will or will not differ from the effects that astroturfing has on market oriented organizations.

Therefore, the aim of this study us to examine the possible effects of astroturfing when this bad practice is operated by non-profit organizations, as well as protecting the discipline of public relations by advising the organizations in the pursuit of excellent practices.

## 2. Literature review

### Astroturfing concept

As previously cited, astroturfing is the “movement that appears to be grassroots, but it is either funded, created or conceived by a corporation or industry trade association, political interest group or public relations firm” (Fallin, 2014, p. 322).

Grassroots are all of the supporters or movements that were naturally originated. As it happens with real grass, the weed has roots underground. Other followers of the movement gather around this first supporters, creating activist groups, active groups of followers or well- develop movements. However, in the case of astroturfing, such roots do not exist. The grass is visible, but it is artificially created. In fact, this metaphor gives the name to this type of tactics.

When astroturfing happens, an organization is giving the impression of the existence of an early adopter or follower of a policy, organization, product, ... where in reality, such support did not exist. It is the organization, not disclosing their identity (Boulay, 2012), providing such message, trying to “hook” real

followers.

Astroturfing techniques are utilized today using social media as a tool, however, they have been used since the early 1900s (Lee, 2010). It was 1909, when a businessman disseminated pamphlets to warn people about the health risk of using normal cups – since he identified them as a potential source of infection. The businessman did not disclose his real identity (he produced cups not made of paper) when recommending paper cup use instead of standard cups (Lee, 2010).

But astorturfing also happens in cases other than commercial products. An example of this is a lobbying related astroturfing case which happened in 1992. This case involves the use of astroturfing by two organizations involved in the issue.

Citizens for Free Kuwait was a pseudo-organization funded by the Kuwaiti Government. The organization aimed to convince the United States to join in a war against Iraq. Citizens for Free Kuwait hired a communication agency, Hill & Knowlton, to manage their public relations in the States. Both the Kuwaiti Government and Hill & Knowlton committed astroturfed actions.

The firm brought the Kuwaiti Ambassador’s daughter in the States to testify in the Congressional Human Rights Caucus. Her identity was not revealed when she told a story of Iraqi soldiers killing babies in a hospital in Kuwait, which happened to be a fake story. This testimony, was broadly displayed by media and repeated by politicians, and shaped both public opinion and polititians opinion, convincing a country to go to war.

The first astroturf action comes from the decision of Kuwait’s Government, since the Government founded and supported financially Citizens for free Kuwait, with the purpose of influencing the American public opinion (Basen, 2009).

The second astroturf action is on the side of Hill & Knowlton, since they did not disclose the identity of the lady who testified in the

caucus. As Roschwalb (1994) explains “it was not that Hill & Knowlton created Citizens of Free Kuwait as a pseudo organization to represent a questionable cause. It is the use of the Kuwaiti Ambassador’s daughter in Congressional testimony without full disclosure that comes in for censure” (p. 272).

The case was made public and heavily criticized by media, so that public relations as a profession got damaged as a result. Most of the criticism focused on Hill & Knowlton actions, rather than on the Kuwaiti Government actions. While it is true that a controversial client has right to be represented, as Hill & Knowlton alleged (Roschwalb, 1994), one sided public relations that uses a deliberated action of shading should be criticized (Basen, 2009), and the public relations agency should assume responsibility of the consequences of lying (Basen, 2009).

### 3. Transparency

Astroturfing is then almost always based on a hoax, a deception that affects the organization’s stakeholders. It is dangerous because it has the power to influence people (Mathews Hunt, 2015). People will form their opinions based on lies or hidden truths.

The development of astroturfing strategies implies an effective lack of transparency on the side of the organization. “Transparency in organizational communication is often viewed by public relations practitioners, and as well among journalists, as access to information and openness to the process through which this information has been collected, organized, and disseminated” (Vujnovic & Kruckeberg, 2016, p. 123).

While astroturfing strategies are easy to implement, because of the availability and low cost of the Internet use, transparency can use the same cheap tools to be implemented (DiStaso & Bortree, 2012). The Internet operates like a double edge sword: on the one hand, it is the organizations’ mask to hide the identity when they spread their interested messages, on the other hand it enables

conversations or two-way communicative interactions among organizations and publics (DiStaso & Bortree, 2012).

Transparency is chosen as the normative organizational behavior (Holland *et al.*, 2018). It implies not only truthful information, but also disclosure. Astroturfed content, which violates principles of transparency and disclosure, has effects for the overall organization. According to previous research astroturfing has effects in terms of credibility (Lock & Seele, 2017; Andreu Perez, 2018), attitude towards the brand and megaphoning for the organizations which develop such tactics (Andreu Perez, 2018).

Andreu Perez (2018) conducted an experimental study that differentiated among real life situations; successful astroturfing, failed astroturfing and situations in which there is disclosure. The latest of this situations implied that there was an intent of achieving transparency, while still spreading the information with the intended organizational purpose.

Disclosure statements enable transparency and avoid many of the risks posted by the use of astroturfing, although the information spread may still be biased, however, because of the transparency intent and truthfulness on the source disclosure, it can be considered an approach closer to the normative action and an approach to ethical action (Lahav & Zimand – Sheiner, 2016).

All type of organizations can develop astroturfed strategies. Market oriented organizations such as Walmart and Coca Cola (Andreu Perez, 2018), political organizations like the Government of Kuwait (Basen, 2009), and even market oriented organizations with political purposes (Fallin, 2010). But there are more types of organizations, for example, non-profits. Non-profits normally aim to achieve goals beneficial for the common good.

The own name of non-profits collides with the purpose of astroturfing. Astroturfing

purpose is to benefit the organization using this kind of practices (Demetrious, 2008), disregarding the effects of the misinformation or the fake information to the organization's publics. The influence of these practices has effects in publics attitudes and behaviors, and also posts effects for the organization (Lock & Seele, 2017; Andreu Perez, 2018) and for the public relations discipline (Boulay, 2012).

Non-profits are expected to work for the common good and not for the organization's own good. Hence, two difference possibilities arise in the case of astroturfing tactics being used by the organization. First, since non-profits purpose is the pursuit of the common good, astroturf strategies will show lesser negative effects than cases in which astroturfing was utilized by mrket-oriented organizations. Second, in contrast, since non-profits are expected to act according to higher ethical standards, publics will react more negatively to them than in instances where the organization that used astroturfing was market oriented.

Two competing hypotheses arise. To be able to understand which one of these cases correspond to reality, it is necessary to post several research questions.

*RQ1:* Will people exposed to astroturfing operated by a non-profit organization show a higher or lower credibility than those exposed to astroturfing operated by market oriented organizations?

*RQ2:* Will people exposed to astroturfing operated by a non-profit organization show a more positive or negative attitude towards the brand than those exposed to astroturfing operated by market oriented organizations?

*RQ3:* Will people exposed to astroturfing operated by a non-profit organization show variations in their megaphoning intentions compared to those exposed to astroturfing operated by market oriented organizations?

## 4. Methods

### Sample

A sample of 250 participants completed the study, but 13 cases had to be removed because of incomplete data, hence 237 cases were analyzed. Participants were 57.8% ( $N=137$ ) male, 41.8% ( $N=99$ ) female, and .4% ( $N=1$ ) did not identified with these binary categories. Ethnicity wise, 66.2% of the participants ( $N=157$ ) were White, 18.1 were Black ( $N=43$ ), .8% ( $N=2$ ) were American Indian or Alaska Native, 8.9% were Asian ( $N=21$ ), 3% were Latin American ( $N=7$ ) and 3% of them belonged to other ethnicities ( $N=7$ ).

About their education background, 11% ( $N=26$ ) participants reported to have completed up to the high school graduate, 19.8% ( $N=47$ ) did some college, 10.5% ( $N=25$ ) got a two-year degree, 43.5% ( $N=103$ ) a four-year degree, 14.3% ( $N=34$ ) a professional degree, and .8% ( $N=2$ ) a doctorate.

### Procedure

Participants were recruited through Amazon Mechanical Turk, and each were paid \$0.75 for their participation. The only restriction applied in M-Turk was country of residence. Given that all participants must be familiar with two organizations (Save the Children and Habitat for Humanity) for the experiment, this study limited the area of residency to the United States. According to Dibble et al. (2016), MTurk is more representative than United States Colleges and convenience sample, and closer to general United States population.

Participants were randomly assigned to one of the three possible conditions: astroturfing, failed astroturfing or disclosure. Since it is a 3x2 mixed experiment, each participant got assigned to one condition but to both brands in each condition. Participants had to read the text given to their condition. After reading, all participants answered questions that measured credibility, attitude towards the brand and megaphoning about both organizations they had read texts about. Partici-

pants exposed to the condition “disclosure” had to answer an extra question to verify they read the manipulated phrase.

## Design

The study uses a 3 (astroturfing conditions) x 2 (organizations) mixed design experiment. Astroturfing condition is the between-subjects factor. Every participant was assigned randomly to one of the three possible astroturfing conditions. Organizations are the within subjects factor, since all participants were exposed to messages about two organizations.

The astroturfing conditions were successful astroturfing, failed astroturfing and disclosure. The two organizations that appear on the stimuli are Save the Children and Habitat for Humanity.

## Instruments

**Credibility.** Participants answered a total of 6 items from the organization-public relationship assessment (OPRA) measures for trust (Grunig & Grunig, 2001) by assessing their agreement or disagreement in a 5-point item scale. Data was collected for both Save the Children (M= 3.45, SD=.94,  $\alpha$ =.92) and Habitat for Humanity (M=3.85, SD= .84,  $\alpha$ =.90). It included the following aspects: if participants felt they have been treated fairly, concern of the organization about people, confidence about the organization’s skills, ability of the organization to accomplish what they say they will do, and if the organization can be relied on to keep its promises.

**Attitudes towards the brand.** Participants answered whether they agreed or disagreed in a 5 point Likert scale with five items referring to attitude towards the brand retrieved from Spears and Singh (2004). They answered these questions for both brands, Save the Children (M=3.72, SD= 1.00,  $\alpha$ = .93) and Habitat for Humanity (M=3.95, SD= .84,  $\alpha$ =.81). Items include liking, finding the company appealing, considering that the organization’s actions are done for good among others, and considering if their opinions were favorable.

**Megaphoning.** Megaphoning roots are word of mouth. Megaphoning can be positive (Save the Children: M=2.97, SD=1.18,  $\alpha$  =.90; Habitat for Humanity: M=3.32, SD= 1.11,  $\alpha$  =.94), when people are willing to speak well and give positive reviews about an organization, product, person or policy. It also can be negative (Save the Children: M= 2.22, SD= 1.27,  $\alpha$  =.93; Habitat for Humanity: M=2.08, SD= 1.29,  $\alpha$ =.88), when people are likely to share their bad opinions and discourage use of a product, organization, policy or person. Both positive and negative megaphoning items come from Kim & Rhee (2011), and these items were rated through a 5-point scale that when from agreement to disagreement.

Positive megaphoning included the following items: writing positive comments on the Internet, arguing against prejudices about the organization, praising the organization to people they meet and making efforts to persuade angry publics in favor of the company. Negative megaphoning included posting negative comments on the Internet, seconding negative comments, criticizing the organization to people they know, and talking to friends about how the organization does more poorly than other companies.

## 5. Results

In order to answer the research questions, it was necessary to compare the results from Andreu Perez (2019) to the results achieved following the same experimental study design with non-profit organizations. RQ1 aimed to compare the results in terms of credibility.

An ANOVA test was conducted to compare the effects of the three astroturfing conditions on credibility, for both organizations. The main effect for credibility of Save the Children was significant ( $F(2,237)=9.15$ ,  $p<.001$ ,  $\eta^2=.073$ ). A post hoc Tukey test showed that there is a significant difference between failed astroturfing and disclosure ( $p<.001$ ) in which participants perception of credibility in the failed astroturfing condition (M= 3.11 SD=.79) was lower than the scores for credibility in the

disclosure condition ( $M= 3.58$   $SD=.83$ ). The post hoc test also showed there is a significant difference between failed astroturfing and successful astroturfing ( $p=.002$ ), with lower credibility in the case of failed astroturfing ( $M= 3.11$   $SD=.79$ ) compared to successful astroturfing ( $M= 3.69$   $SD=.79$ ). However, disclosure and successful astroturfing did not show significant differences in terms of credibility ( $p=.70$ ).

For Habitat for Humanity there was also a significant difference ( $F(2,237)=5.72$ ,  $p=.004$ ,  $\eta^2=.047$ ) when comparing the three conditions. The difference between failed astroturfing and disclosure was significant ( $p=.018$ ). Participants' credibility towards Habitat for Humanity when astroturfing failed ( $M= 3.60$   $SD=.86$ ) was lower than the credibility perceived by those in the disclosure condition ( $M= 3.94$   $SD=.81$ ). The difference between failed astroturfing and successful astroturfing was significant ( $p=.007$ ), with lower credibility in the case of failed astroturfing ( $M=3.60$   $SD=.8$ ) compared to successful astroturfing ( $M= 4.02$   $SD=.77$ ). However, disclosure and successful astroturfing did not show significant differences in terms of credibility ( $p=.87$ ).

These results coincide in significance of these three conditions and the directions with those found in Andreu Perez (2018) regarding two commercial brands. The main difference is that all of the means displayed throughout conditions for non-profits are higher than those in the market oriented organizations.

In the case of attitude towards the brand, there is significant difference for both Save the Children ( $F(2,237)=20.40$ ,  $p<.001$ ,  $\eta^2=.14$ ) and Habitat for Humanity ( $F(2,508)=9.27$ ,  $p<.001$ ,  $\eta^2=.03$ ) when considering the three conditions. In the case of Save the Children, failed astroturfing and disclosure situations showed a significant difference ( $p<.001$ ). Participants exposed to failed astroturfing reported a more negative attitude towards the brand ( $M=3.98$   $SD=1.34$ ) than those exposed to disclosure situations ( $M=3.99$   $SD=.83$ ). Also, there were significant differences between failed astroturfing and successful as-

troturfing ( $p<.001$ ), with more negative attitude towards Save the Children in the case of failed astroturfing ( $M=3.98$   $SD=1.34$ ) when compared to successful astroturfing ( $M=5.02$   $SD=.97$ ).

For Habitat for Humanity, failed astroturfing showed a difference ( $3.68$   $SD=.87$ ) in comparison with instances in which the organization disclosed the source ( $M=4.11$   $SD=.79$ ). Failed astroturfing result was different when compared to successful astroturfing in terms of attitude towards the brand ( $p=.019$ ), publics being more negative when they learn about the hoax ( $3.68$   $SD=.87$ ) in comparison with instances where astroturfing was successful ( $M=4.05$   $SD=.79$ ). Disclosure and successful astroturfing did not show significant differences ( $p=.89$ ).

These results for attitudes towards the organization coincide in significance of these three conditions and the directions with those found in Andreu Perez (2018) regarding two commercial brands. The main difference is that all of the means displayed throughout conditions for non-profits are higher than those in the market oriented organizations.

Regarding positive megaphoning, main effect of conditions on positive megaphoning for Save the Children was significant ( $F(2,237)=3.79$ ,  $p<.05$ ,  $\eta^2=.031$ ). A post hoc Tukey test showed that there is a marginal difference between failed astroturfing and disclosure ( $p=.07$ ) in which participants intent of positive megaphoning in the failed astroturfing condition ( $M=2.68$   $SD=1.24$ ) was lower than the scores for credibility in the disclosure condition ( $M=3.07$   $SD=1.17$ ). The post hoc test also showed there is a significant difference between failed astroturfing and successful astroturfing ( $p=.03$ ), with lower credibility in the case of failed astroturfing ( $M=2.68$   $SD=1.2479$ ) compared to successful astroturfing ( $M= 3.16$   $SD=1.07$ ). However, disclosure and successful astroturfing did not show significant differences in terms of credibility ( $p=.88$ ).

In the case of Habitat for Humanity, the

same result was found. There were main effects of conditions on positive megaphoning ( $F(2,237)=3.19$ ,  $p<.05$ ,  $\eta^2=.027$ ). Only the difference between failed astroturfing and disclosure was significant ( $p=.04$ ), with people less likely to participate in positive megaphoning in instances of failed astroturfing ( $M=3.07$   $SD=1.18$ ) in comparison to instances when the organization discloses the source ( $M=3.47$   $SD=1.11$ ). The differences among failed astroturfing and successful astroturfing ( $p=.13$ ) and successful astroturfing with disclosure (.94) were not significant.

RQ3 questioned the differences in the effects of megaphoning when comparing profit and non-profit organizations in astroturfing scenarios. Andreu Perez (2019) reported marginally significant main effects, in comparison with this study, in which main effects were significant. Nevertheless, the differences between conditions were more similar in both case.

Still trying to answer RQ3, ANOVA tests were conducted in regards of negative megaphoning. As a result, there were no differences found among the conditions when measuring negative megaphoning neither for Save the Children  $F(2,237)=2.56$ ,  $p=.08$ ,  $\eta^2=.021$  neither for Habitat for Humanity  $F(2,237)=.97$ ,  $p=.37$ ,  $\eta^2=.008$ .

This is different to the results achieved in Andreu Perez (2018), where there were significant differences among conditions. It is worth to mention that the means for all of the conditions for both non-profit organizations are very low, which means people are not willing to speak negatively about non-profits, despite of the kind of situation the organizations are facing.

## 6. Discussion

The results found in this experimental study support most of the findings from Andreu Perez (2018). In terms of credibility and attitude towards the brand, failed astroturfing damages the organization. Organizations do not control to what extent they fail or succeed in

hiding the source of information, hence the risk of losing credibility and the attitude becoming worse is real, both for market oriented organizations and non-profits. In all of the cases, there were not differences when comparing successful astroturfing and disclosure. Taking into account the lack of control in astroturfing situations, disclosing the source of information will not produce different outcomes that successful astroturfing, and since disclosure do not allow failed astroturfing, it becomes a safe bet for organizations.

However, differences among types of organizations were found in terms of megaphoning. First, in the case of positive megaphoning, people showed higher intent of speaking positively throughout the three conditions in comparison to market-oriented organization. In the case of the non-profit study, the differences among situations was significant, repeating a similar scheme to the effects of credibility and attitude towards the brand, with the exception that successful astroturfing did not report substantial differences with fail astroturfing, making disclosure the best option in terms of effects in positive megaphoning.

In the case of negative megaphoning, the means for all of the conditions for both non-profit organizations are very low, which means people are not willing to speak negatively about non-profits, despite of the kind of situation the organizations are facing. The differences were significant in the case of market-oriented organizations, but no differences were found among non-profits. Non-profit publics avoid negative information about the organizations.

Both attitudinal variables repeated the results, but both behavioral variables showed different results. The extent to which publics speak well or good about the organization is determined by type of organization and the expectation to such, rather than by the conditions.

Nevertheless, this research highlights in the strength of disclosure as a preferred strate-

gy to avoid the possible negative effects of failed astroturfing, while it does not impede the achievement of the results that would be achieved in cases of positive astroturfing.

## 7. Conclusion

This research contributes replicating previous research about the effects of astroturfing, achieving similar results for many of the variables used. The differences found among the two experiments comes from the nature of the organizations used in the stimuli.

This study also advances the knowledge about the behaviors of non-profits' publics, which often behave differently in the cases in which organizations work for good or for the common good, in contrast to market-oriented organizations, where the solely purpose is to benefit the organization.

All the consequences and effects described are the reflection of public's perceptions once they have been deceived, but there are other effects that go beyond the organization. The discovery of astroturfing can carry consequences for both practitioners and the discipline of public relations (Tsetsura & Kruckeberg, 2011). Therefore, developing astroturfing strategies has consequences not only harmful for the organization, but harmful to public relations as a field. It is worth mentioning that astroturfing especially affects public relations, more than other fields such as marketing, because of the extension of the application of astroturfing practices (Boulay, 2012).

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# Fake News, a Construction of Reality

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The **purpose** of this paper is to critically assess the common presupposition that fake news is

- a threat to contemporary civilization;
- something that appeared only recently or at least that recent examples of fake news present a more serious threat for civilization than those from the past.

It appears the fast and global spread of fake news widens the gap between objective reality and what is then reflected through fake news. It is thus accepted, especially by the so called liberal media, but also by the wider intellectual community, that we are living in a post truth era. The causes of such an apparently negative shift are found mainly in a strong anti-scientific movement of which one of the more important consequences is agnotology, which is then understood as one of the major causes for inefficiency of democracy.

The **Assessment** rests on the principle difference between the so called objective and subjective reality (e.g., Aristotle, Steven Pinker, Steve Austen, Ferdinand Saussure, Claude Levi Strauss, Daniel Dennett, Jacques Lacan), genetic and memetic evolution (e.g., early Richard Dawkins, Susan Blackmore, Stephen Jay Gould), and quantum and Newtonian mechanics (e.g., Stuart Kauffman, Robert W. Ulanowicz). It is also represented by opposition between the scientism of Richard Dawkins from 2002 onwards and his work from 1976 to 2002.

Not all mentioned sources are explicit in this paper, and not all implicit influences on the author can be mentioned in theory, or even in practice.

The **Methodology** of this paper rests on the only possible empirical study within memetics: thought experiments, argumentations and consistent reasoning based on neuroscience, physics and philosophy of evolution. Furthermore, the methodology underlying this paper is tacitly revealed through the paper itself as it becomes a subject of the paper: a multiple draft scenario. The result comes as an emergence of multiple drafts each lying on the top of another. Daniel Dennett as the author of the multiple draft scenario for the explanation of how consciousness emerges from the physical reality of brains (Dennett, 1991) might not have envisioned such an extrapolation, but as much as I do not possess memes created here anymore, neither does he.

**Results:** If “fake” relates to a speech act that contradicts or does not comply with reality, the nature of reality should be clarified first. Is reality as solid and predictable as defined by Newtonian mechanics, or does it follow a more quantum-like principle of uncertainty?

Human neural activity resembles quantum more than Newtonian reality. Memetic reality as one of the end results of neural physical activities does not belong to physical (genetic) reality. Memetic relates to physical reality only as a creation of its own reality. Memetic activity is poetic (constructive). Poetic reality is as strong as descriptive (explaining physical reality) is weak and imperfect since the real of physis is impenetrable for memes. We, as all living creatures, live in physical reality (it hurts if we hit a wall with our head regardless of any memetic theory), but at the same time we as human beings execute our specific human nature in memes only. Memetic reality cannot but be constructed, fake in relation to objective reality.

**Practical implications:** Since public relations (PR) targets deals with memetic reality only, it is necessary to understand ontology of that reality also for PR practitioners. Only then can truth, post truth or fake news be understood.

**Originality:** Elements of reasoning are to be found in the work of authors mentioned in citation and many others, but the merger and end result is fully original.

**Keywords:** gene; meme; truth; fake news; reality; real; objectivity; intersubjectivity

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While we generally accept evolutionary mechanisms on the biological level, level of nature (gene interaction and replication), it seems that for human nature/nurture evolution rarely comes into play. Public relations research is especially prone to avoiding cross fertilization of not only natural sciences, but also evolutionary theory and philosophy in the wider sense of the term. It is one of the aims of this paper to point to various fields of knowledge that not only could but should serve as an important mental tool for any PR practitioner, not to mention researchers. Since we are confined to a memetic world, as it is going to be proven later, there are no obstacles for researchers of any field in understanding the findings from other fields from the (necessary) perspective limited by his so far acquired discourse.

The main aim of this paper is to challenge the most widely accepted malicious nature and consequences of fake news. This paper does not limit fake news to media news, which were originally branded with that name, but to all instances of communication when some news/information is taken and defined as fake.

It is not the purpose of this paper to go deeper into the genealogy of the term, which is interesting because fake is mostly assigned to opinion leaders. When public anonymous would say something that would be defined as fake if uttered by Donald Trump, we call this a lie. Already this curious distinction points into a direction of this paper. We might not define a "lie" of an opinion maker as a lie, as we might unconsciously accept that opinion makers do not only communicate about

truth, but they primarily construct reality. Politicians serve only as the most vivid examples, but the mechanisms explained in this paper apply to all fields of human activity.

Leaving origins aside, this paper focuses on the widespread notion that fake news is bad, and as such something that we as conscious people (and especially media) should eradicate to make this world a better place to live in. Such a notion rests on the intuitive notion that reality is simple, one dimensional, and can be objectively proven or falsified. Reality is in fact complex, multidimensional and cannot be neither proven nor falsified. It can only be lived.

What is even more interesting is that the fact that the term fake news has appeared recently induces the notion that also the behaviour that it describes is something fairly recent. It is partly due to the disassociation of fake from lie, but mostly due to the global catastrophic nature of intellectuals that always see reality of today as much worse than that of yesterday. This phenomenon was precisely explained by Steven Pinker (Pinker 2018). Intellectuals tend to see the past as bright, the present as dark and the future as hell. So, if fake is bad, then one should not find it in the past as much as today, and even more so in the future "if we don't counteract".

If one wants to be a critical thinker, then it is necessary to ask what a negation of fake news is. What is non-fake news? The common sense answer would be: Non-fake news/information relates to something that really is, that really happened, to something that is reality. But if fake relates to reality, what

is the reality that the truth should be truth about?

The method used in this paper is associative. Each of the seven steps briefly unveils one of the possible (possible=actual) drafts related to memes of reality and fake news.

The thesis is: The objective world (both as physical and memetic real) is at the same time auto creative (genetic evolution, post big bang evolution...) and impenetrable. The memetic world as an emergence of mind and consciousness is auto creative as well, but such an emergence is not subjective but intersubjective, meaning it is not objective. As already said, objectivity is impenetrable regardless of fact, that it is auto created and co-constructed.

What does that mean for truth, post truth and fake news?

## **First draft: Poiesis / Plato and Aristotle**

Poiesis as a concept (meme) was widely elaborated on in Ancient Greece, especially by Plato and Aristotle. In its essence, the meaning is quite straightforward: "activity that brings something into existence, that did not exist before".

It is important to keep this simple meaning in mind, while already in the very beginning a controversy entered this apparently straightforward meme. The fact that Plato considered physis as the result of poiesis, Aristotle took poiesis as mere reflection/imitation of physis. This controversy is still alive today, though reformulated many times through different newly developed concepts. The question whether mind creates matter or matter creates mind still persists to this day. It is not the aim of this paper to dig deeper into this subject. What is of interest for this paper is only that both Plato and Aristotle accept one sort of poiesis as non-controversial.

What is also interesting is that the most influential philosopher of all time, Aristotle,

shifted the original meaning of poiesis from "creation as such" to mere poetry. Not that that would be his intention (who knows what his intention really was), but later interpretations dragged poiesis into the realm of art. What we now understand as poiesis is thus quite far from its original meaning that took poiesis as a principle related to all possible realities. Consequently, there is no surprise that a new term with almost the same meaning replaced poiesis in the midst of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and full elaboration in the 20<sup>th</sup>: emergence. Emergence is going to be put into the context of this paper later on.

What makes the legacy of Plato and Aristotle important for this purpose is the question of truth. According to Plato, truth (matter, objectivity) is created after the idea. According to Aristotle, on the other hand, poiesis reflects objectivity implying that better or worse reflections can co-exist. It is thus Aristotle that opened the option of news that is fake in relation to objective reality.

*What is the nature of such reality?*

## **Second draft: The Real / Jacques Lacan**

There are many that entered the conundrum opened by idealists, like Plato, and realists or even materialists, like Aristotle. In both cases, dualism of matter and spirit is baffling. The great German philosopher Immanuel Kant was the one that once forever (at least it seemed so until recently) fixed the duality of "thing in itself" as something unknowable in contrast to "thing for us", perceived by us.

But Kant still did not really resolve this dualism for he thought that one should not assume the existence of a thing in itself as necessary since it is unknowable. Although there are many philosophers that dug into this subject after Kant, it was perhaps Jacques Lacan who precisely differentiated "the real" from "reality".

According to his writings and lectures, all perceivable phenomena emerge from the Real

("objet petit a" in Lacan terminology) . The Real is impenetrable for humans, but at the same time real and objective. With that shift he strongly tied together the Real and reality albeit the former is inaccessible for us. The Real can only be "perceived" through symptoms, through reality; much alike to elementary particles as described by quantum mechanics, can only be perceived by traces they leave on detectors since it is impossible, in principle, to see them directly.

The conclusion that Lacan placed the agent of poiesis in physis as Aristotle, would be wrong. Physis is not the Real. Physis is already a symptom, reality. Reality according to Lacan is a result of poiesis/emergence. There is no basic difference between physical or psychical reality; both are emergencies.

*Is real really impenetrable?*

### **Third draft: quantum mechanics / by many**

It is very difficult for the common mind to accept the impenetrability of real after a painful bump into the wall. If reality is "only" a symptom of something that we cannot grasp, what is the "bumped reality" when a head hits the wall?

Contemporary physics in a way proves Lacan's philosophical thesis. In search for the smallest particle of matter/energy, physicists found that what constitutes reality evades our everyday experience of reality.

Elementary particles or fundamental particles evade common perception of physical reality very much like Jacques Lacan's philosophical interpretation did. Among many spooky features like entanglement (two particles behaving like one in cosmic distances, nonlocality), probabilistic nature of their "place" is perhaps the most interesting for our case. Since elementary particles behave both like particles and waves, we can only draw probability densities of their position. In the world of human size, that would mean that it is more or less probable that my head

bumps into the wall despite bumping into the wall. It is of course wrong to make analogies between elementary particles and human sized particles and it was not my point to speculate about quantum mechanics. The point is that the deeper we go into reality, meaning the more we dissect particles into smaller and smaller, the more they are evasive, and less they are penetrable. They can only be presented to us by abstract mathematical formulas or computer interpretations. We can never see this real behind reality in which we indulge daily. We only see emergent properties, traces on a computer screen that are results of something behind which we do not and cannot see, hear or feel. Nothing solid (behind) creates the beauty of here. Reality is literary created ex nihilo.

But even more, quantum reality is in fact created by observation. The famous Schrödinger thought experiment explains that while the quantum cat unobserved can be both death **and** alive, the observation only really makes her dead **or** alive. The observation only collapses quantum probabilities into physical reality. The real is nothing but probability until it collapses into reality.

What is also important for contemporary physics and mainstream science is that what comes out from quantum mechanics is its demise of reductionism. Although the term has many parallel meanings its basic presumption is that it is possible to single out one principle that the Universe rests on. Reductionism states that the whole of reality can be explained by knowing all its parts, for instance, our mind/consciousness can be fully deduced from neural activity of our brains.

If reductionism as a theory was valid, then its consequence would completely disprove Lacan and quantum mechanics. Then the reality would be reduced to Real. The Copenhagen interpretation of quantum mechanics, taken as the best possible interpretation for more than three quarters of a century, literary denounced the possibility of final reduction. But even for human sized bodies, reductionism poses some serious troubles. If everything

would be predestined in the moment of the Big Bang, there would be no place for poiesis, or creation. The idea that the whole is bigger than its parts would not make sense any more. Surprisingly, the results that various social entities produce, like families, companies and states, could be derived from the sum of individuals. Nothing could possibly **emerge** as a novelty from any social institution as everything produced would be pre-defined by characteristics of each individual constituting such a social entity.

But then how do we understand the fact that a majority of the scientists that, through quantum mechanics, proved the evasiveness of reality, believe in reduction? It seems that the whole scientific community is searching for a single principle, aligned forces under one rule that will clearly define all events from the Big Bang on.

Both reductionism and quantum mechanics cannot hold. Either smaller and smaller particles have to be more and more precise, or reductionism fails. But if reductionism proves itself, then we have a problem (at least) of how to explain emergencies that happen in social structures, clear and observable results of social entities that cannot be explained by the potentials.

Either quantum mechanics holds or reductionism. Both cannot be valid. So far there is much greater scientific support for the non-reductionist explanation of the Universe that at least, for the sake of this paper, this dilemma is already solved. Poiesis should not be understood on the memetic level, but on the physical level as well. The physical realm is autopoietic as much as the memetic one.

*What about memetic reality?*

## **Fourth draft: Susan Blackmore and memetics**

According to Richard Dawkins (Dawkins 1976) memes evolved as a second replicator after genes. They are co-created in replication and mutation like genes. Dawkins

concludes that memes became more and more important for human evolution and that they are even becoming more important than genes and physical reality. Consider fashion for instance: fashion trends not only spread around “mysteriously” by memes, but as such change us, sometimes even our bodies directly. Take foot binding in China or the long neck tradition in northern Thailand for instance; although it is wrong to search for fast changes in evolution, the influence of memes on genetic material is apparent taking longer periods of time into account.

With the help of Susan Blackmore (Blackmore, 1999), we can now understand memes and the mechanisms that run them much better. She made a coherent story about the second replicator: memes.

Take androgyny for instance. Androgyny was known and described many thousands of years back, but after the discovery and advancements in genetics was understood as a result of genetic mutations. While genetics certainly play a role in androgyny, its fast mutations clearly point to memetic causes. In contrast to genes, memes namely mutate much faster. The mutation of the androgyny meme, which became really fast and furious recently, is easy to see. While we still survive with two or at most three sexes on the genetic level, genders inflated to 63 or even more recently. Androgyny is one meme that prevailed so long in history that it is nowadays already old fashioned. Androgyny in relation to contemporary reality is like the Ford range of cars in 1908 in comparison to the diversity one hundred years after. Henry Ford proclaimed then that their only model should come in any colour, but only if that colour was black. Something similar is happening with genders. It will soon be possible to tailor-make your own gender as much as you can tailor-make your own car.

Memes, and their nature of being a second replicator, are crucial for the case of poetic nature of our reality. If bodies of living creatures are creation/emergence of genes, as Dawkins elaborated in many books, espe-

cially in *The Extended phenotype* (Dawkins, 1982), our culture is created by the emergence of memes. In accordance with evolutionary theory, it then follows that in relation to physical reality, all cultural reality is produced (evolved), and thus fake. Not that it comes from nothing, but it comes from the selfishness of memes to survive. It is their sustainability that produces us and our culture. We are, as Susan Blackmore claimed by the title of her book, “Meme machines” (Blackmore, 1999).

Memes do not reflect reality but produce reality; they produce that what happens in our mind. Memes put under question both Aristotelian and Platonistic ontology. Both Aristotelian objectivity producing mimesis, and the Platonistic one with a rigid copy of an idea as the only truth, gets dissolved by quantum mechanics and memetics.

But does that mean that reality is subjective? Does that mean that nothing holds true? Does this bring into play the absolute relativism in which A can equal B or C or D that Aristotle fought against so vigorously? Does this mean “whatever”?

No. But it will take us a couple of additional drafts to drag out the truth from apparent relativism coming from autopoietic nature of our memetic nature.

## **Fifth draft: Myths**

Is the burning bush seen by Moses fake news? Is Penelope pretending to weave a burial shroud for Odysseus’s fake news? Is Newton observing a falling apple fake news? Is Coca Cola fake news? Is me writing my first business plan for Radio Student on ZX Spectrum around 1985 fake news? Are 63 genders fake news?

Let’s be precise: there are not 63 genders. If genders are creations of memes (in contrast to sexes as a creation of genes) then only the sky is the limit regarding how many of them can exist in theory. If not yet existent they will evolve sooner or later. So, is it fake news if a

person was accordingly to the then valid memetic context described as gay while we now “know” that being gay denotes not much that would make sense nowadays, since now we have many modalities of being gay? Does this make E. M. Forster’s “gay novel” *Maurice* written in 1913 fake?

I deliberately went a bit too far with the novel. A novel is fiction by definition so everything in a novel is fake in relation to reality? Is it really? We will come back to this issue later.

The rest of the introduced cases in this draft are myths. Most of them were elaborated in written form as well, but they are and were spread around in oral tradition most of the time of their existence. Answers to the question of whether they are fake in relation to reality or not have to be developed by first understanding the function of a myth.

Let me address this question by using my personal case, my personal myth. I am repeating a “story” of me writing my first business plan on ZX Spectrum quite often. So far no one repeated this story, so it does not match the most important criteria for myth: self-propagation. But it has many other features of a myth. First of all, I do remember that I certainly performed writing action on ZX Spectrum, but I do not remember if I have delivered the final version as a print. If no print version was produced, does the claim that I had written something reflect reality? Do I the fake reality if I keep repeating this story? I am certainly not lying. And what is even more important: it does not really matter. No one gains or loses in either case. Some historian might investigate this story while researching computer literacy advancement in the last years of Slovenia as a socialist country; though I doubt that such an insignificant event can really draw any attention. In any case, the explained personal myth performs exactly the same function as any cattle myth of the Maasai people of Eastern Africa.

My case that opens the question of reality a bit more than 30 years ago makes all other, real myths, including Coca Cola, a bit easier. It

is not historical or physical reality that myths are related to. They are in fact related to nothing since they create their own reality each time they are repeated. The well-known blind taste test of Coca Cola known as Pepsi Challenge (<https://www.businessinsider.com/pepsi-challenge-business-insider-2013-5>) proves that physical reality of liquid called either Pepsi or Coca becomes only important as memetic reality for humans. It is a myth (a brand) that makes this or that liquid real for us. Some liquid exists for sure. So, the Coke myth cannot be subjective in a sense that it would be completely detached from physical reality. But this physical reality makes literally no sense without the brand, the story that makes that physical reality something meaningful for us, humans. Not that myths/brands would exist in no relation to their physical reality, they construct that reality. Coke is made in some specific production facility, but Coke is created each time anew as an experience of taste and myth/brand.

And as much as Coke is constructed all other mentioned myths are as well. What for? What is the purpose of myth creation and repetition: our fitness. What my personal myth is about is only about me and my actual and future fitness. I “use” this story from the past to constitute my future being.

All myths serve one purpose only: to make us fitter in the fitness landscape (Kauffmann, 1993) we are living in. The purpose is to prepare us for the future reality, not to make us sure of what happened in the past. Who cares if Newton really got his grand gravity idea while sitting under a tree seeing an apple falling. It is the story about the importance of observation in the process of scientific exploration that makes this myth important. There are other important lessons “included” in the Newton myth, but nevertheless all what is important are lessons, not reality.

*What is then the nature of truth?*

## Sixth draft: intersubjectivity

The quantum mechanics draft already ex-

plained how and why observation changes reality.

Among many implications coming from the now more than 100 years old turnaround of Newtonian predictability and the apparent objectivity produced, there is one that is particularly important for our case. If objectivity of the observed depends on subjectivity of the observer, then not only every objectivity can be changed, but it should even be changed by definition. Changed by the observer. Does that disapprove the law of identity? Does that mean that A does not equal A? If both of us observe A, your observation changes A differently than mine, so A is not only the same for both of us but is also changed for each of us.

Is such radical subjectivity necessary? This question is important not only because both philosophers, but even more scientists emerging from the Renaissance on persistently, fight against similar subjectivisms. If there exists namely even the slightest possibility of A not being A, then there is no place for science any more but for alchemy and occult only.

Can we in practice, or at least in theory, reconcile quantum uncertainty and the law of identity?

Easily: with the introduction of intersubjectivity and the peculiar nature of memes.

The theory and practice of branding, especially the standard branding model (Drapal, 2016, and before in practice), offers a fast track towards resolution. It has long been known in marketing literature that brands belong both to the brand “producer” and to the brand “consumer”. Unfortunately, brand co-ownership was taken more as a metaphor pointing to the necessity of the measurement of potential customers’ preferences and in the fact that the image of the brand in the customers’ heads can be, and in most cases is, quite different from the one imagined by the producer.

The standard branding model takes brand shared ownership totally seriously and lit-

erary. We shouldn't even talk about shared ownership since such a notion implies that there was a time in which a brand was owned by the producer only. A brand does not exist until it is co-created by a user. Surely there is a period, pre-launch period, when a brand cannot be co-created since the real users do not exist yet. But then such a brand is only brand potential. Such a brand is like a water behind a fully sealed dam. The water there only has potential energy. Only after the water is released does the potential energy transform in kinetic energy that moves and shakes. Only after a brand is released it reveals its real nature, its usable energy. Only after it is co-created by users, only after it is "changed by observation", does it receive a unique identity. Identity is created each time anew with each use. But how?

With a little help from memes.

A brand is objectively co-created with each user interaction as much as reality is objectively co-created by each human observation. This co-creation, in the realm that is usually described as human culture, happens as memetic replication and sometimes as mutation. Brand memes occupy our brains. For that reason, it would be equally right to say that we are co-created by brands. We should thus take the saying that the "clothes make the man" literally, as long as we understand that both clothing and a man is such for us only memetic entities. As much as it is true that man (the author of this paper does not obey gender political correctness by principle and by theory explained in this paper!) created smartphone, it is true that each smartphone creates its user anew.

Coming from the brand example that helped us to explain the crucial role of memes in human interactions, it is not difficult to make at least semi-final conclusions about the nature of reality that leads to resolutions about truth and fake news.

Although brand is of memetic nature, it is very much objective in the sense that after the particular meme (meme-complex) about

a particular smartphone found place among my personal sack of memes ("aufbildung"), it is very much objective regardless of not being universal. Each interaction makes a specific user experience, specific meme "shape" that is "agreed upon" between my sack of memes and the brand's sack of memes.

Such agreements occur not only when brands are involved, but in every human interaction. With each exchange of memes, with each interaction (communication) we establish agreed upon new reality. In this sense each communication is a kind of myth creation. If we disagree, no common truth is established. In such case memes fail to reinforce each other in agreement, but also each of us stay socially (memetically) disconnected at least for this particular case.

The memetic explanation of how reality is construed explains also the human need for social cohesion, social interaction and the need of memes (and humans) to develop larger social units like companies, nations and states. Selfishness of memes that use us (Dawkins 1976) literally forces us to enter all kinds of social entities, many of them fully altruistic.

But since social construction is not the main topic of this paper, let us conclude this draft with couple of points:

All memetic reality is construed (co-construed). That means that poetry has no worse relation to reality than science for instance.

If all memes would be agreed upon multilaterally (by all), only then would fake news cease to exist. Fake is everything that is not agreed upon. Fake news is thus the bread and butter of human existence. The conclusion, which has nothing to do with relativism, has already been explained and is going to be proven later in this paper.

I am here at this moment (as a memetic creature), but am also anywhere where remains of memes created or co-created by me can be found.

So much human reality is intersubjective, and nothing but intersubjective. Reality is objectively co-created with each human interaction. Such reality is not subjective (arbitrary), but objective, real. Since we co-construct reality with each interaction, no outside authority can exist that would prove or disprove such a reality. Only you and me can say: this is fake. But we cannot say that something we created is fake, since we created it. And there is no third body that can falsify our creation. Reality is poetic, unfalsifiable. Fake news as a social construct is such a co-constructed reality; but as any other social reality denotes nothing. As such, fake news exists from the very beginning of social creations and will exist as a constituent part of our identity forever.

*Conclusion?*

## **Seventh draft: No place for fake in blockchain?**

Approaching the last draft of this paper, it is perhaps time to pay some attention to multiple drafts and how to read and understand them, in this paper at least.

Daniel Dennett described his theory of how consciousness “happens” in his book *Consciousness Explained* (1991). I used the verb “happens” deliberately for I find it as the most proper entering point into the realm of multiple drafts. There are many interpretations of Dennett’s theory and even his own elaboration is not easy to understand in its full potential. Theory, as expected for any theory of any use, provoked quite some criticism. It is not the intention of this paper to provide interpretation of the multiple draft scenario theory. Dennett’s theory is not there to be understood, but to be used!

Why the author of this paper takes Dennett’s theory extremely seriously? Because it was practically proved. Where? In this very paper. How? By applying it as methodological background. Is not that circular argumentation? Yes; and for that reason, the theory is proven.

Let me explain less elliptically. Consciousness happens as an emergence on the top of multiple layers of brain activities. No single activity has any sense for us. Sense “happens” (again that verb!) as a sort of “not intended” effect of multiplicity of activities. Consciousness emerges on the top of complex physical activities of brains. No one “runs” this emergence. Consciousness happens to humans. Similarly, the message of this paper does not happen on the level of each specific draft, or even sentence, but happens as an emergence of all drafts being one on top of another as when a full colour happens when layers of monochromatic films are put one on top of another. Each draft has a certain point (meaning), but no single draft represents the message of the paper. Even if an additional draft that would try to summarize all other drafts would be put on the top of previous drafts, that additional draft would be “blind” about all other draft meanings. For instance, the draft about myths gets a completely different colour if put on top of the quantum mechanics draft and so much more if put on top of all other drafts.

But the use of the multiple draft scenario in this paper has also another tacit consequence in the support of the initial thesis about what is fake and what is reality. This methodology not only explained, but also displayed the in vitro poetic principle of reality creation through superposition of many “stupid” drafts. Reality happens by default, by autonomous memetic activity of humans. No outside authority neither produces nor interprets meaning. Meaning happens; as we have seen meaning happens between two memetic creatures sharing memes.

This method applied for the sake of this paper has its limitations, of course. Seven drafts are not enough to “produce” considerable emergence of additional meaning on the top of each draft’s meaning. But it should be illustrative enough.

Is it then possible to avoid blockchain as a final draft in respect to reality, construction of reality and truth? No.

Blockchain technology entered our lives as, at the moment, the highest intersubjective and poietic social activity. It is so blatantly intersubjective and auto creative that it is almost not worth explaining it. Each of us (those that participate in various blockchain activities) create a part of a blockchain that is then approved by another block, by another public key. Interaction of personal constructions (personal keys) with the help of a public key creates objective reality of global blockchain. Personal construction becomes real (objective) only after approved by another blockchain member. As such, blockchain is 100% intersubjective and an irrevocable objective. When approved block becomes objectively unchangeable. If no one replies to my block (approves it in this or another way), it becomes orphan.

In blockchain only orphan blocks are fake. All other blocks represent intersubjective reality. That means there exists no outside authority that would have privileged access to what is true and what is fake. Fake is all that is not approved. In such a world, fake is not even news any more. Fake in fact does not exist anymore. But from another point of view, all that information (news) that is considered as fake by any outside authority like the State, media, political organization or even individual that tries to put himself on the top of blockchain's multiple drafts, loses its fake nature.

NB that blockchain is used both as an example of intersubjectivity of memetic reality and as analogy (it is both wave and particle at the same time!). As analogy, blockchain must not be confused with memetic reality. For example, blockchain has to be understood as a memetic creation that follows the principles of memetic evolution.

One could perhaps still object this picture with the claim that it may well describe blockchain/digital reality, but that there is no guarantee that digital would not fake somehow analogue reality. Such fear rests on supposition that one should not trust individuals in their respect toward analogue physicality,

but collective organizations only. So, if certain governmental organization, agency, NGO or some supranational collective organization says that the sky is blue, then this is true by definition, but if some individual claims the same, that has to be approved by some collective authority first. But such fear should go exactly in the opposite direction. There is much higher probability that any collective organization falls into the trap of the lowest possible denominator caused by the fact that no one in such a collective has "skins in the game" (N. Taleb, 2018) than the individual who can directly suffer from misinterpretation of reality.

Saying this peer review is the method of how scientific results are approved or disproved should be mentioned as the closest to blockchain method. Science has expelled outside authority a couple of hundreds of years ago with rationalism and enlightenment. One scientist approves another scientist's block only. But one has to recognize that scientific peer review still rests on the assumption of some kind of scientific community. Only a member of that community can then serve as peers to distributed scientific memetic complexity.

This fact provokes the question whether outsiders are to be allowed to peer scientific blocks. According to the present state of affair not. The scientific community is tightly sealed. Public debate ends immediately when a certain participant is not recognized as "one of them". And due to the fact that science developed so very much that even particular scientists understand only a very particular part of total science, such a rule seems good. But then: I do not know much more about baseball than about quantum mechanics. Why would I be more allowed (by whom) to co-define baseball reality than any other reality. Even if I would dare to fake some part of quantum mechanics, my block would not be approved by enough peers as much as my fake of baseball.

Blockchain thus opened not only a new draft of reality conception, but also a new view on how and who approves any kind of reality,

even scientific.

### *Lesson for public relations and democracy?*

Yes. We will have to start to live without outside authority that would play an arbitrator of truth. There are experts in certain fields, and there are scientists that employ falsification principles to explain reality. But it was our false presumption (fortunately only in the western mechanistic world for only the last 600 years) that any kind of outside authority exists. It cannot exist in principle. No outside help thus exists for PR practice either, and even less for what is fake.

From this we can conclude that we have only entered the field of Democracy. If all participants depend on any kind of outside authority, so long they perform anything but democracy. It is only when there is no outside point of reference there is a chance to relate to one another without obstacles. Only then each individual has not only full responsibility to approve reality, but also to construct it.

It is not hard to understand blockchain technology as a prime example of a system without a fixed background, without a third party authority; completely intersubjective. But to have it does not mean that we understand it and to accept it. It is not easy to live without a godfather. It is not so easy to live without an option to blame this one or that one for transmitting fake news, for such option makes an illusion of us as not necessarily responsible.

### **Conclusion in respect to this thesis**

Apparently the fast and global spread of fake news is a result of memetic trends (ideology). Causes of the widespread fear about fake news was not addressed in this paper, but they are definitely worth a closer look. What can be concluded from this paper is that the fear about fake news as a memetic activity clearly produces a new reality (of fear). Fake news is thus not a story about the gap between objective reality and that what is then reflected through fake news, but production

of new reality of fear about fake news.

Another conclusion should then also come as trivial. It is not antisecularism that produces fake news, since fake news has been a necessary part of human existence from the very beginning. It is in fact quite the opposite. Fake news as a meme is used as a kind of protection of the scientific community against unwilling outside peers. As much as any community has all rights to use all available legal resources for its own protection, so does all other communities to understand and guard against such acts, such creation of reality.

And finally, after historical and evolutionary consequences are comprehended, it is trivial to understand that the produced memetic reality is objective and as such unavoidable within democratic or any other society. On the contrary; blockchain as a prime example of decentralized, intersubjective reality introduced an important upgrade of social mechanisms that can enforce individual freedoms and responsibility and thus upgraded democracy; as the result of created memetic reality and/or fake news.

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# Climate Change and Urban Youth Crisis Alertness

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The research provides a critical analysis of climate change awareness among urban youth of Budapest, Hungary and Hanoi, Vietnam. Understanding of attitudes can contribute to a more precise definition of clusters, sophistication of stakeholder management, and formulation of targeted communication strategies. The research design is based on a comparative analysis of actual and relevant European Social Survey (ESS 8) data with the findings of a similarly designed online research in Vietnam. Key findings indicate significant differences in climate change awareness among youth sub-segments. Age, gender, occupation and location of living are significant factors in influencing individual perceptions. A prominent cluster is composed of those demonstrating low level of climate change awareness, attributing it primarily to natural processes, and scepticism in relation to possible individual, group and government actions. Another cluster is formed by those who manifest a significant level of climate change alert, and believe that both the problem and its solution are human-related. They are ready to take their share in the change process, and believe others would do the same. Both in Budapest and Hanoi, as well as their agglomeration, women and students tend to belong to the latter cluster.

Limitations of the research include matching findings of structured interviews in Hungary with those of similarly designed, but online questionnaires in Vietnam, the need to change the scales during the research process itself, the misconceptions in relation to the basic term of climate change, and the small sample size in the Budapest agglomeration.

The research contributes to creating localised strategies based on local differences in climate change perception, attribution and the need and responsibility of actions in fighting it.

Keywords: Climate change; youth; Budapest; Hanoi; global warming; communication strategy

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## Introduction

Young people are critically exposed to urban climate change risks. They are the ones who will play an essential role in driving adaptation. It is imperative to understand clearly what their perception of climate change is,

and in what form can awareness be raised and possible future actions prompted.

Findings of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, under the umbrella of the United Nations stated that with over 95 per cent probability, human activities over the

past 50 years have warmed our planet in a significant manner (IPCC, 2014). The Panel made its claim based upon the work of 1,300 independent scientific experts globally. Consequently, it can be claimed that changing the trend is primarily in the hands of mankind. Understanding the attitudes of future generations therefore is of special significance.

The current research contributes to the understanding of the importance and level of public alertness, and support the public becoming better prepared for climate change hazards. Through sharing of best practices, this research aims to contribute to building a global body of knowledge and practice regarding urban youth adaptation. Understanding the motivations, attitudes and beliefs of young people can develop input to devise strategies and impactful campaigns to fight climate change.

The main focus of the comparative analysis was to research the differences and similarities in Vietnam and in Hungary in relation to urban youth climate change awareness.

### **Literature review**

Climate skepticism focuses on differentiating along two dimensions – problem and solution definitions (Corry and Jorgensen, 2015). However, public opinion agrees that ‘the balance of evidence suggests that there is a discernible human influence on the global climate’ (Houghton et al. 1996: 5). According to the majority of climate models, this change is accelerating. Urban populations increasingly face a number of climate change related risks, including flooding, flash floods, heat stress, water and air pollution (Wilbanks et al. 2001; Parry et al. 2007). Climate change hazards together with a range of logistical and operational issues make cities of developing countries especially vulnerable (Tanner et al, 2009). Their comparative research on 10 risk-prone Asian cities claim that due to a set of interrelated issues the resilience of these cities is tested significantly. High density of population, often further fueled by migra-

tion from agricultural to urban areas, lack of appropriate waste management structures to stop concentration of increasing waste production, inadequate drainage and sewage systems, as well as specific urban consequences of climate change test the resilience of these cities. They find that governance of local authorities is essential in building adaptability and resilience of urban populations. A combination of individual responsibility, a level of autonomy in urban planning and funding, engagement of the participation of the public in urban planning and in related decision-making, together with access to a unified information center, as well as assisting crisis prevention and risk mitigation, are all deemed essential.

Bulkeley and Betsill (2003) claim that urban local authorities have a further important role in directing energy supply and management, transport regulations and building requirements of their cities. They might also be lobbying the national legislation and government for creating an appreciation of the specific climate change related risks of the the cities.

Admittedly, Vietnam is among the most disaster-prone countries in the world (GFDRR, 2017). The World Bank has ranked Vietnam as one of five countries most likely to be affected by climate change. People from Vietnam for centuries have been used to a range of natural catastrophes, such as tropical storms, floods and droughts, landslides, forest fires and sea-water intrusions. Extremities of changing weather patterns have lead to further extremes in the field, bringing in years where droughts would significantly damage agricultural production, including rice production in the country’s agricultural powerhouse, the Mekong delta. Due to increased vulnerability and loss of security, agricultural workers and fishermen in growing numbers abandon their original jobs and move, temporarily or permanently, to urban settings. Some maintain their ‘dual identity’ and every year spend a number of months working in cities before returning to the agri-

cultural production work.

In a survey among the Hanoi population climate change and global warming, considered by many as synonym expressions, are perceived as an increasingly frequent occurrence of storms, floods, deep cold and long heat waves (Toan et al, 2014). In relation to climate change, most prominently, by 92% of the population, its negative effect on the human health was mentioned. Hot weather was most frequently connected with symptoms such as headaches, fatigue, and dizziness, while hypertension and other cardiovascular diseases were also reported significantly. In cold weather conditions cough, fever, and influenza, together with cases of pneumonia and emerging infectious diseases, such as Dengue and Japanese encephalitis were mentioned.

While 58% of the Vietnamese have heard about climate change and another 16% have heard about it but are not sure of its meaning, following an explanation as ‘change in climate that persists for decades or longer’, 74% agreed in total that climate change is taking place (Copsey et al, 2012). In this nationwide survey many of the Vietnamese people demonstrated a high level of sensitivity towards the issue, without specifically knowing what exactly they could or should do in respect to mitigating the risk and damages of climate change. Urban youth were mentioned among the 3 core target groups as priority audiences, due to their desire to participate in community initiatives, their perception of collective social actions being effective, and being themselves trusted sources of information and opinion to their parents and peers.

In cities and rural areas various models prevail for handling climate change related effects on the human environment. Communication structures and raising of public awareness are critical to prepare public adaptation practices and behavior (Filho et al, 2016). Communication plays a critical role in creating an adaptive environment and attitude.

As for Hungary, 98% of the population have already heard of climate change (Baranyai and Varjú, 2015), and 92% claim to actually know exactly what that means. The distribution of people who have heard about climate change shows correlation with the type of location they live in: people living in Budapest and other large cities know about climate change in the most significant proportions. 75% of respondents who have not heard of climate change before, belong to the age group of 15-39, a third of them are younger than 24 years old. Half of the people lacking information have finished elementary school only, or less. On the list of concerns for young people (Fazekas and Nagy, 2016) climate change does not appear. The list is dominated by existential concerns: material uncertainty, social differences, unemployment and poverty. Topics related to the physical environment (environmental concerns, transport issues), together with youth life style issues, rank among the last on the list of concerns.

## Methodology

The research is built on the comparison of the actual European Social Survey (ESS 8) data with the findings of a similarly designed piece of research in Vietnam. For the purpose of the survey, climate change related questions were selected of the ESS 8, and repeated in Vietnam, to develop data for a comparative climate change awareness research among the selected population.

The 18-39 years old inhabitants living in selected large urban areas (Hanoi, Budapest) and their surroundings were selected as the specific target group of the research.

## Hungary

In Hungary the subsample was created of the ESS 8 Round data collection, through selection of the data for the above mentioned subsample. The ESS 8 Hungarian data collection contained 1500 respondents of whom 350 were appropriate for the comparative dataset. In case of the Hungarian dataset the Census of 2011 was used for weighting. Sex,

age and the residence of the respondents was considered for this purpose through the application of a multi-criteria weighting. The Hungarian dataset contained 101 responses from Budapest and 50 from the suburban region.

In the eighth round, ESS covered 23 countries and involved strict random probability sampling, a minimum target response rate of 70% and rigorous translation protocols. The hour-long face-to-face interviews included questions on a variety of core topics were repeated from previous rounds of the survey, and also two modules developed for Round 8, covering public attitudes to climate change, energy security, and energy preferences and welfare attitudes in a changing Europe.

The objective of the ESS sampling strategy is the design and implementation of workable and equivalent sampling plans in all participating countries. Sampling on the ESS is guided by the requirements outlined in the Survey Specifications and the following key principles:

- Samples must be representative of all persons aged 15 and over (no upper age limit) resident within private households in each country, regardless of their nationality, citizenship or language
- Individuals are selected by strict random probability methods at every stage
- Sampling frames of individuals, households and addresses may be used
- All countries must aim for a minimum 'effective achieved sample size' of 1,500, or 800 in countries with ESS populations of less than 2 million, after discounting for design effects
- Quota sampling is not permitted at any stage

The field work period was in Hungary 14 May 2017 to 16 September 2017.

Following the weighting procedures, a dataset for both territories was created, representative for the population aged 18-39 by sex and residence (big cities and suburban regions).

## Vietnam

In Vietnam the data collection was organised through the involvement of Hanoi students of RMIT University Vietnam, participating in the undergraduate course of Contemporary Public Relations Research. The students, working in groups of 4, had the task to develop and execute research in Hanoi and its suburban region on the topic of climate change and its consequences. The first part of their questionnaires was identical to those of the selected questions of the ESS survey. Following the first 8 questions each of the 4 groups had the possibility to develop and add further 6-8 questions for the specific purpose of the course they attended. The 8 comparable questions and certain demographical data were applied for the analysis. The data were collected through online questionnaires. The period of the data collection was 8-17 May 2018.

The target group was young male and female urban population (18-39 years old) living in Hanoi and its suburban region. A combination of random, convenience and snowball methods was selected for doing sampling. The survey was launched on the group members' social media platforms. After having finished the survey, respondents were asked to share the questionnaire with their friends on social media to further increase the sample size. Due to the lack of sufficient responses from the age groups especially in the range of older than 25, and to further enhance the diversity of the sample, the team intentionally sent the survey to other age groups through Messenger. In total, a sample size of 495 responses was reached.

Multiple choice and checkbox questions were used to establish respondents' perception landscape on certain aspects such as climate change itself, while ranking questions addressed identification of individual priorities. Among the additional questions short text questions were added to reveal why people chose specific means of transport over others, as well as sharing insights on their decision-making process. Initially, all scales used

in the survey had been set at 1 to 10, but due to display issues (certain digital screens were not suitable to show the full scale), had to be converted to 1-5 scales.

As most of Hanoi youngsters have access to the Internet daily (Copsey et al, 2012), the online survey turned to be the most appropriate and convenient way to collect the data. Of the possible online survey tools, Qualtrics was chosen to create the questionnaire with. The survey was distributed through e-mail, Forum and several Facebook groups for youngsters. As the form could potentially be reached through social media, screening questions were created to make sure the results were from the right target group of this research. The first two questions served screening by asking about age and demographic location of the participants. Participants from the selected target group could continue responding to the survey.

For the Vietnam data base 480 questionnaires were completed. Following refinement of the databases 358 questionnaires from Hanoi and 113 from outside of Hanoi were used for the final data base. The data source of the 2009 Vietnam Population and Housing Census was used for creating weights for the database.

The research process was overseen by Gabor Sarlos, one of the authors of this article, a seasoned researcher, by supervising each element of the process: research design, elaboration of methodology, development of questionnaires, data collection and reporting.

## Findings - Hungary

There were significant differences in perception of climate change between the people in the capital and the agglomeration. For the inhabitants of the agglomeration, due to the low number of respondents, there were fewer questions about any correlation. By contrast, the opinion of the people of Budapest is diverse, allowing for the identification of special patterns. Special opinion groups

could be formed based on deviations from group averages.

Within the group of Budapest residents, 2 major groups could be identified: one sensitive and active in relation to climate change, and another one demonstrating less interest in the topic. The active group believes that the climate is definitely changing. The basis of this segmentation was that they had thought more about climate change before today than others. Members of this cluster share most dominantly the view that primarily human activities are behind climate change. In their view, the limitation of people's energy use is likely to be feasible. They are the most satisfied with government measures in taking action to reduce climate change. They are relatively optimistic by expressing that large numbers of people will actually limit their use of energy and see the most opportunities to limit their own energy use to try to reduce climate change. In this group people older than 26 years, women and students were overrepresented.

Contrary to this, there was a group of men and employed people in Budapest, thinking that the climate is probably not changing, and, if it is, then that is caused mainly by natural processes. They did not show concern for climate change. In the agglomeration a gender confrontation could be identified on certain issues. The typical thinking of men was that climate change is caused by human activities. Women seemed very much worried about climate change. The personal responsibility to try to reduce climate change could be detected at the group of employed.

The general opinion of Hungarian respondents is that climate is changing. One third of the respondents said „definitely” and more than a half believed „probably changing”. A significant difference existed between the inhabitants of the capital city and the agglomeration. 41,7% of the agglomeration residents believe the climate is definitely changing, while only 30,4% are of similar view in Budapest. One sixth of the capital city inhabitants actually believe that the climate is probably

not changing, while only 6,5% of the suburban population share this view.

In Budapest, people thinking the climate is definitely changing were overrepresented in the age group 26-30 (47,8%), among the 31-39 year olds (40,8%) and the students (45,6%). The share of those who believed that the climate was probably changing was significantly higher among young people (18-25 ages, 50%).

In terms of gender, men and women see the situation differently in and outside of Budapest. Women in Budapest are thinking in higher proportion the climate is changing (68,6%) and in the suburban region that it is definitely changing (58,3%). In contrast, men in the capital are thinking in higher proportion the climate is probably not changing (32,7%) and in suburban region that it is probably changing (64%).

In relation to occupations, 44,1% of the employed consider the climate is probably changing.

No respondent in the Hungarian subsample thought that climate was definitely not changing.

A minority of the Hungarian respondents believe that climate change is caused entirely by natural processes (1,3%). 22,8%, of the people living in Budapest share the opinion that climate change is caused mainly by natural processes, opposite to 4,2% in suburban region. In this group in Budapest, the youngest – 18-25 years old (66,7%); men (34%) and employed (58,5%) are overrepresented.

One fourth of Hungarian respondents are of the view that climate change is caused equally by natural processes and human activity. In the capital city this proportion is higher (38,6%) than in the suburbs (18,8%). Students in Budapest have the most solid opinion in this view (39,7%). The majority of the total subsample (55,7%) consider the climate change mainly (38,9%) or entirely (16,8%) due to human activities. Among those „entirely” agreeing to this statement a significant differ-

ence can be noted between Budapest (8,9%) and the suburban region (33,3%). In the capital city the opinion of students differ in a negative direction most significantly from the average (15,5%).

The majority of the Hungarian sample (54%) worried somewhat about climate change. Differences occurred between the score of Budapest (50,5%) and the agglomeration (61,7%). Women are the largest group that is somewhat worried about climate change (66%). People not being very worried about climate change have a higher proportion in Budapest (32%), where the 18-25 years old (50%) and the men (46%) are overrepresented.

People living in Budapest thought less about climate change before today (2,22) than those living in the suburban region (2,57). The general evaluation shows a negative opinion. In Budapest the less interested are in this problem the youngest, 18-25 years old, (1,67); however the elderly (26-39 years old) and the students (2,47) are overrepresented. In the suburban region the situation is the opposite: the evaluation of the youngest is the highest (2,83), and the age group of the 26-30 years old is relatively low (1,96).

Hungarian respondents especially agreed, with a mean score of 2,95 to feeling personal responsibility in trying to reduce climate change. People living in Budapest share this less (2,78); in the suburban region respondents feel this more (3,3). In Budapest, the 26-30 years old (3,21) and women (3,04) share this responsibility above the average. In the suburban region the evaluation of the youngest inhabitants (3,84) and of the employed (3,56) are above average.

Hungarians were relatively pessimistic by expressing that people would actually limit their use of energy. The evaluation is more pessimistic in Budapest (2,65) and somewhat optimistic in the agglomeration (3,42). The evaluations (2,95; 2,82) of two age groups (26-30 years old and the 31-39 years old) are higher than average in Budapest. In the sub-

urban region there are no differences based on age, but women demonstrate a more positive thinking (4,03) than men (2,9).

In relation to governments in enough countries taking action to reduce climate change, the inhabitants in the capital are more pessimistic (3,01), than those living outside of the city (3,47). The 26-30 years old respondents, sharing that governments will take action is higher (3,34) than the average; but older respondents (31-39 years old) are more critical (2,71). In the suburban region a similar view is shared but with higher evaluations. The youngest are the most optimistic (4,77) and the „oldest“ (31-39 years old) are the most pessimistic (2,83) in relation to this question. Women evaluated the governments' actions above (3,9) the average; but evaluation from students evaluation (3,29) fell behind.

Finally, as to their individual roles in limiting their own energy use, people living in Budapest foresaw it the least (2,79), while people in suburban region (3,21) saw the most opportunities to limit their own energy use. In Budapest the 31-39 years old and women, in the agglomeration both the youngest and the women expressed readiness the most to limit their own energy use.

## Findings - Vietnam

A significant difference emerges in perception of climate change between Hanoi people and the suburban population. 67% of the Hanoi agglomeration residents believe climate is definitely changing, while only 48% are of similar view in Hanoi. 27% of the Hanoians actually believe that the climate is not changing at all, while only 10% of the suburban population share this view.

Within the Hanoi population, most significantly the people of the age of 31-39 agree (56%) to the fact of climate definitely changing, while only 40% agree with this claim among the 26-30 years old. 33% of the relatively youngest population, age 18-25 see the climate definitely not changing, while only 18% agree to this among the age 31-39. The

suburban population shows a similar pattern, with 91% of the 31-39 years old confirming that the climate is definitely changing, while only 30% of the 26-30 years old agree to this, and 21% of the 18-25 years old believe it is not changing at all.

In terms of gender, men and women see the situation quite similarly both in and outside of Hanoi. In terms of professions, 63% of community and military service people, and 52% of students see the climate definitely changing, and 28% of the employed consider it probably changing. These 3 groups see climate changing definitely or probably changing in significantly higher proportions than the self-employed or housework doing Hanoians. 75% of students of the Hanoi suburban area share the view that climate is definitely changing.

Possible reasons of climate change were researched in the next stage. 71% of the Hanoians and 73% of the suburban population agree that mainly, or entirely climate change is caused by human activity, while about a further quarter in each case credits this equally to natural and human activities. In Hanoi, the 18-25 years old consider climate change mainly and 13% entirely due to human activities. The 26-30 age group is overrepresented within the group who believe entirely human activities are behind the changing climate. The 31-39 year olds tend to grant a bigger role to natural processes, with 39% of them seeing an equal weight of natural processes and human activities behind the changes. The suburban population has a similar perception, where the older target groups, age 31-39 (42%), are the main supporters of the view that nature and human activities play an equal role, while the youngest, 18-25 age (84%), identify mainly or entirely human activity behind the climate change.

In Hanoi, 75% of men and 67% of women support the view that mainly human activities are the reason for climate change. In the Hanoi agglomeration the view is opposite: 81% of women and 65% of men see it happen as a consequence of human activities.

71% of community and military service people and 66% of students see climate change happen mainly due to human activities in Hanoi, a significantly higher than average ratio of the employed people see a balanced set of causes of both natural and human processes behind the changes (37%). In the Hanoi agglomeration, community and military service people, together with students share most dominantly the view that mainly human activities are behind the climate change (100% and 81%, respectively), while here again, the employed, with 38% agreement, have a more balanced view in perceiving what is behind the changing climate.

Across all segments, support to the view that climate change is entirely or mainly due to natural processes, is minimal.

36% of the suburb population, and 28% of the Hanoi population are extremely worried about climate change. Among Hanoians, people age 31-39 are most worried, with 41% of them expressing this in the research, while the generation of 26-30 year olds seem the least concerned, by only 21% of them agreeing to being extremely worried. In the suburbs, 65% of the 31-39 year olds are extremely worried, while 72% of the 26-30 year olds express being somewhat worried only. Both in Hanoi and in its agglomeration females are significantly more worried about climate change than males. An especially large split exists in the agglomeration, where 53% of women and only 21% of men agree to the statement of being extremely worried.

As to occupation, employees in Hanoi demonstrate the biggest concern: 39% of them are very worried and 35% of them are extremely worried. Students dominantly reflect a certain level of concern only: both in the categories of being very worried and extremely worried they are present in significantly lower proportions only (28% against 32% among the very worried, and 22% against the 27% among the extremely worried). Data shows a similar situation in the agglomeration, with employees being the most concerned about climate change and students showing less

concern. 43% of employees and 32% of students agreed to being extremely worried about climate change.

Hanoians seem to demonstrate a higher than average awareness in seeing their own role in the possible steps to fight climate change. On a scale of 1-5, with a mean score of 3,83 they especially agreed to being personally responsible to try to reduce climate change. In Hanoi, community and military service people almost unanimously agreed (4,08) to have personal responsibility in reducing effects of climate change, while those in the households expressed the least personal responsibility (3,25) In the agglomeration, self employed people (with a 4,3 score), shared most concern about having personal responsibility in changing the current situation. Men and women in Hanoi both feel the role of personal responsibility, while in the agglomeration, women demonstrate a higher level of own responsibility (4,25) than men do (3,42). Both in Hanoi and the agglomeration the age group of 26-30 identifies least, and the 31-39 years old the most with their responsibility of reducing climate change.

Hanoians were relatively optimistic that large numbers of people will actually limit their use of energy (3,42). Also, an equally significant part of them would be ready to limit their own use of energy, both in Hanoi and in the agglomeration. Of the Hanoians, employed people shared the optimism the most, while people doing housework and the self-employed were the least optimistic. In the suburbs there was a more even spread of views across all the categories of occupation. Females were more optimistic in Hanoi as well as in the agglomeration about a large number of people changing their pattern of energy use. In Hanoi, the target group age 18-25 was the most sceptical and the 31-39 year olds the most optimistic in terms of envisaging change, while in the agglomeration this was just the opposite: least optimistic were the 31-39 years olds (2,75).

In Hanoi, as to their individual roles in limiting their own energy use, the people in com-

munity and military service saw the least (mean score 2,83), while the employed people (mean score 3,67) saw the most opportunities to limit their own energy use. Hanoians of 31-39 years old and agglomeration people of 26-30 years old expressed least readiness to limit their own energy use, while the suburbans of the age bracket 31-39 were ready for action the most (3,75).

Hanoian men and women shared a similar view on whether governments in enough countries would take action to reduce climate change. Outside of the city, women were significantly more optimistic: their mean score of 4,08 significantly surpassed the views of men (2,75). The distribution among the age brackets was again quite even in Hanoi, while in the agglomeration, the generation of the 26-30 years old was significantly more sceptic (2,92) about the role governments would take. Data analysing the split according to professions did not show any distinct pattern of distribution in Hanoi or in the agglomeration.

In overall terms in Vietnam the self employed and the housework people believe most that the climate is not changing. However, those who do, attribute this solely to human activities. They do not seem concerned about climate change and have shared little thought on the topic of climate change until now.

The employed believe in significant numbers that the climate is probably changing, it is caused by both natural processes and human activity, and are very worried about this.

The youngest generation, the 18-25 year olds believe the most that climate is not changing, that it is the result of human activities and are somewhat worried about this. The 26-30 year olds attribute climate change clearly to human activities, however they do not express concern about this. Until now, they have spent the least amount of time on dealing with the issue, and they feel their personal responsibility the least.

Students attribute climate change primari-

ly to human causes and are somewhat concerned about that. Those doing military and community service have dealt with climate change above the average and express feeling of personal responsibility in its reduction.

## Discussion

Comparison of the findings demonstrate significant differences climate change perceptions between the various sub-segments of the Budapest and the Hanoi population.

For Budapest, in case of the evaluation questions (using the 5 degree scale) all of the results remained below the average in general.

It is primarily the Hanoi agglomeration population that agrees the climate is definitely changing (49,4% of all Hanoians). The categories of probably changing and probably not changing were most frequently chosen by the Budapest respondents (52,5% and 14,1%, respectively). Notably, Hanoi respondents (25%) were in agreement the most that the climate was definitely not changing.

To the question about to what extent they had thought about climate change, Budapest respondents showed the lowest level of awareness (2,27)

In relation to the cause of climate change, 19% of the Budapest population attributed it mainly to natural processes. The Hanoi population identified a much stronger causal relation to human activities: 48,3% credited it mainly, and 20,1% entirely to human activities.

Personal responsibility was shared higher than average by the Hanoi (3,85) and lower than average by the Budapest respondents (2,78).

Budapest habitants expressed lower than average concern: 31,3% were not very worried, 50,5% were somewhat worried. Interestingly, both among the least worried (9,8%), as well as the very worried (33%) and the extremely worried (30,2%) the Hanoi population was represented in outstanding proportions.

Hanoi population manifested an overall more positive perception regarding possible actions. They expressed agreement (3,45) about large numbers of people likely to limit their energy use, while Budapest respondents viewed this more skeptically (2,69). In Hanoi, government actions were perceived significantly above the average (3,52), while all other groups considered them less likely (2,98). The Hanoi respondents agreed the most that limiting their own energy use would help reduce climate change (3,37), while Budapest respondents were the least in agreement with this statement (2,81).

In overall terms geographical differences are significant. In the case of Budapest, 5 out of the 8 questions significant negative differences emerged, and Budapest responses did not show any positive deviation to any of the questions. The Hanoi case is exactly the opposite: answers to 5 questions showed a positive deviation, and in only 2 questions showed negative deviations. In the Hanoi agglomeration the higher than average, positive responses dominated, and only 1 negative deviation was noted.

As for the sub-segments, in Hungary the negative relations primarily occur in the case of the employed and the men. Positive correlations were noted in the case of women, students, the 26-30 and and the 31-39 year olds. Especially women and the 26-30 year olds demonstrated significant positive attitude.

In Vietnam, responses of the self-employed and the household people demonstrate negative correlations. The employed, the military and community service people as well as the students manifested the most positive correlations. Both the 18-25 and the 26-30 year olds appeared in negative as well as positive correlations.

## Conclusions and implications

Analysis of the findings indicate significant differences in the various sub-segments. Breakdown of findings by age, gender and occupation of respondents help creation of

clusters, which is then important for the formulation of possible communication strategies.

1. Personal identification with climate change remains a challenge

For a significant part of the respondents, connecting changes in their personal life with the concept of climate change is difficult. Identifying a range of issues related to extreme weather or personal health issues seems easy, however, fitting that into the broader context of climate change is difficult. The difference in terms between global warming and climate change is not widely understood, and relating these phenomena with for example environmental pollution or extensive forestry practices proves difficult. People identify with climate change the most if it directly influences their personal life parameters, including for example the place where they live, how they commute to work or the changing difficulties in making their living.

2. Sub-segmentation is critically important to create clusters

The significant differences in climate change perceptions indicate that in order to raise awareness, even within the group of urban youth, differentiated strategies need to be followed. Age, gender and occupation, in combination with place of living create variations of individual life situations. In overall terms it can nevertheless be claimed that women and students are the two major groups with relatively high awareness of the issue, are sensitive to its affects and share that a responsible approach should be followed by individuals, groups and governments alike. Most of the respondents of the age groups 26-30 and 31-39 indicated similar sensitivity to climate change. Hypothetically it can be stated that families with small children form a further important cluster. A detailed analysis of the sub-segments can lead to the creation of clusters, that can then provide input to the development of differentiated strategies.

3. Ideals, health and family are the main trigger to climate change alertness

The first step of clusterization show that certain patterns exist that contribute to higher level of alertness and responsibility. Indicatively, it might be claimed that 3 driving forces can be identified: the following of strong ideals, most notably being the case with students; personal health considerations, where respondents create a direct link between their personal situation with the information and experience on climate change; and family considerations, where especially mothers with small children develop a further level of sensitivity and alertness to external issues that can possibly effect the life prospects of their children. In the current stage these are hypotheses that need to be looked into further.

4. Viable communication strategies are needed

To garner identification with the issue and joining in with individual strategies, effective awareness raising strategies are needed. These need to be strongly differentiated, bearing in mind the above mentioned differences. Most notably, two major directions need to be taken. One is in the case of that cluster where a low level of climate change awareness is demonstrated, it is primarily attributed to natural processes, and scepticism prevails in relation to possible individual, group and government actions. In this case awareness raising communication can contribute to people realising the validity of the issue. The other possible direction is aiming at those who have manifested a significant level of climate change alert, believe that it is primarily caused by human activities, and individuals, groups and the governments all have a role to play in handling the problem. In their case communication can focus on call to action and provide practical support in what each individual can do.

Lacking knowledge and awareness, inactivity and missing guidance can all contribute to the worsening of climate change perception.

This mental climate change, meaning change of the imprint of this phenomena people have in their mind, can play an important role in shaping future attitudes and actions. The current study can contribute to the formulation of such future strategies.

## Limitations of the research

Limitations of the research include matching the findings of the structured ESS interviews in Hungary with those of similarly designed, but online questionnaires in Vietnam, the need to change the scales during the research process itself, the misconceptions in relation to the basic term of climate change, and the small sample size in the Budapest agglomeration.

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# The Fit To Partner Test: Practical Considerations for Establishing Corporate and NGO Partnerships in an Uncertain World

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The range of corporate-charity partnership types are becoming increasingly diverse. Whilst there are benefits associated with partnerships to both parties, there are also risks.

To assist practitioners working in the Non-Governmental Organisation (NGO) and in the Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) spheres, Read and Diehl (2018) devised a 'Fit to Partner' test for strategic partnerships of 3-5 years. This five-step model was created to help NGOs and corporates explore such partnership fits.

The 'Fit To Partner' test was put out to consultation with nine experts with experience of developing partnerships in the UK. Through in-depth qualitative interviews the relevance, or not, of each of the five principles was explored; together with the overall usefulness, or not, of the test, and the eliciting of further considerations.

Findings. Each element was considered relevant. The overall test was considered not only a potentially useful tool for strategic partnerships but also for on-going planning. A stronger emphasis on the relationship between the NGO and corporate teams managing the partnerships and the need for trust, honesty and expectation management, was recommended by the interviewees. Challenges to working through test were also identified which included time and resource; and the power gaps between some corporates and NGOs.

## 1. Introduction

The importance of corporate and Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) partnerships was declared by Kofi Annan in 1999 (UN 1999). “Markets are global whilst governments remain local”, he said. There is a rising number of strategic partnerships to solve problems (Cooney 2017; Barrell 2018).

Charities are investing more money in partnership arrangements (Cooney 2017). Nevertheless, the amount of money raised through corporate donations is relatively limited in the UK. According to recent National Council of Voluntary Organisations data (NCVO 2017) the voluntary sector has a collective income of £45.5 billion, of which £1.9 billion comes from the private sector.

Hence, the motivations for partnerships remain strong. Nevertheless, there are associated risks and critiques about such alliances.

### 1.1 Motivations for Partnerships

There are myriad reasons why corporate-NGO partnerships continue to grow. The view of Friedman (2007), who argued that businesses have no role in supporting society or the work charities, has been robustly challenged. The foundations of the critique lie with Porter and Kramer (2002). They argue that competition and a commitment to bettering society can go hand-in-hand in providing NGOs and corporations with the opportunity to consider collaborative perspectives.

During the first decade of the 21st century the number of NGOs continued to grow worldwide. Concomitant with growth was the relentless need to fundraise, often in challenging economic circumstances, with less state resourcing available. This backdrop also propelled many charities to reconsider a rethink around partnerships. Pattberg (2005) not only argued that NGOs had to cope with lower levels of state support but that NGO-corporate partnerships should focus more on

aligning brand values and delivering mutual benefit. Furthermore, he suggests that whilst businesses can cause problems for society, they can also help deliver solutions to solve them.

Conservation specialists Jessica Dempsey and Daniel Suaraz (2016:667) go further suggesting, NGOs, ‘must now court, rather than confront, entrenched power structures, established regimes of capital accumulation, and private capital itself.’ As more partnerships are formed, the NGO-Corporate collaborative world is becoming more complex. Anselm Schneider, Christopher Wickert and Emilio Marti (2017:186) submit, ‘To create collaborative complexity, organizations may, for instance, form strategic alliances or set up initiatives to create new industry norms and standards.’

### 1.2 Partnership Critiques

Differing cultures and values have been at the centre of studies (Seitandini and Ryan, 2007; Adams 2017) on the effectiveness and desirability of NGO-corporate partnerships. A major worry is that both sides develop relations that are too close (Muthuri, 2008) and run the risk of making unplanned cultural and behavioural changes. Compromises can run the risk of diluting, especially for the NGO, established principles and practices. The issues of authority and accountability can also prove difficult (Rivera-Santos, Ruffin and Wassmer, 2017; Shumate, Atouba, Cooper and Pliny, 2017).

Concerns also arise about the NGO being the subordinate partner (Kelly, 1991). NGO’s involvement with commercial partnerships and agreements has also led to the UK’s Charity Commission being explicit about its expectations. In recent guidance they require trustees to review “any current arrangements to satisfy themselves they remain in the charity’s best interest” (Charity Commission, 2017). Previous advice also makes clear that charities should not endorse commercial products. It can become a major issue for

a corporate or NGO if either party is accused, or is shown to have behaved, in an unethical or insensitive manner. Negative PR can have far reaching consequences. For example, Age UK's partnership with E.ON led to long-running and mutually damaging PR (Landen 2017).

There is also a concern that powerful, high-funding corporates may pressurize NGOs directly, or otherwise, to ensure that projects continue to fit with their agenda. Delivering a new programme, especially with a fresh partner can lead to challenging cultural or values issues but can come to represent a difficulty for an NGO if the corporate resources of know-how are making a difference to the beneficiary of a campaign. Equally, when funds are donated by corporates for specific purposes the corporate may also seek to influence the delivery of the programme and seek public acknowledgement for their involvement (Kelly, 1993).

NGO campaigns, and the values that underpin them, can be comprised if the organisation find themselves taking on the corporate's outlook and mindset (Baur and Schmitz 2012; Shiller 2005). There is also the risk that NGO employees and volunteers may struggle to work with corporates who see and understand the world in different ways from themselves. Schiller (2005: part 1) adds, 'NGOs having for years campaigned against companies, find it difficult now to trust their motives.' Neubaum and Zahra (2006) suggest that direct and vocal, confrontational activism (Aminzade and McAdam, 2002) previously directed at corporates has diminished with the growing number of partnerships. A wider concern is that corporations may gain special access to discuss sensitive issues or may apply pressure to an NGO to take a lighter or more neutral stance on issues that might be business critical.

Hence, the balance of power in relationships is an issue. It is argued that the corporate rather than the NGO is often the winner (Kasland, 2016). According to Adams (2017),

in the conservationist world, relationships between NGOs and Corporates are not equitable. He argues, "Businesses are able to carry forward their work with only marginal changes to corporate strategies" (Adams 2017:252).

In addition, there are many reasons, occurring either separately or in combinations, why partnerships fail. Ida Berger, Peggy Cunningham and Minette Drumwright (2004) characterize these failings as 'a series of misses'. These include: a breakdown of trust, misunderstandings, the misalignment of costs and benefits, and the mismatch of power.

## 2. Fit to Partner Test

Jan Jonker and Andre Nihoff (2006); John Peloza and Loren Falkenberg (2009) look at a range of criteria that could help or hinder the development of partnerships. Kevin Read and Caroline Diehl (2018), build on this to develop a five part 'Fit to Partner' checklist to aid NGOs, and corporates, decide whether a partnership should be pursued. The test is not designed for short term partnerships nor is it aimed at corporate link-ups that are primarily fundraising focused.

There may be an imbalance between how a corporate, rather than an NGO, uses these tests because as Noel Hyndman (2017) states a charity's work will be consistently subject to higher levels of scrutiny when it comes to accountability, legitimacy and transparency. NGOs face, (Hyndeman, 2017:5). 'higher ethical standards than that expected from business.' The authors also note the increased scrutiny by the media of charity activity, including charity-corporate partnerships.

The five areas covered in the test are outlined below as they were originally published (Read and Diehl, 2018). The authors of the test recognise that is the first iteration of the model.

## Fit to Partner Test (Read and Diehl 2018:75-76)

### 1. Need and Understanding

NGOs and Corporates to identify why the partnership is needed and whether mutual understanding can be established and sustained. Both parties need to explore and respect each other's vision and values. Commitment from both senior teams is vital. Both parties must acknowledge the potential social and commercial value. The integrity and independence of both parties needs to be sustained.

### 2. Cultural Fit

There is a need to establish whether there can be a strong cultural and working fit. Agreements need to be established around common working practices, the style of working and how learning can be shared, and where relevant, knowledge transferred in both directions. This is especially important among sub-groups working together on delivery. Consideration should be given to the personalities associated with the partnership, such as the faces, known or unknown, of the corporate's advertising campaigns, or the leadership team and board, alongside the charity's celebrity supporters, or royal patrons, or more disadvantaged beneficiaries.

### 3. Scope and Benefits

The tangible benefits, outputs, timings and outcomes of the partnership need to be understood. Financial dealings, including tax arrangements, need to be transparent. Resourcing must be mutually agreed for the whole period of the partnership. Potential access to new stakeholders, for either party, must be mapped out and mutually agreed, including clarity on data acquisition.

### 4) Reputational Risks

Reputational impact, for both parties, needs to be considered, alongside an in-depth analysis of brand fit with stakeholders. The right levels of governance, and accountability, needs to be put into place by both parties. Charity Commission regulations need to be

adhered to, and consideration given to any other regulatory areas.

### 5) Commitment on Communications

A final decision needs to be taken about whether and how details of, and progress on, the project can be confidently and transparently communicated to internal and external audiences. Throughout a partnership there will be the need to explain, educate, illustrate and evidence the benefits arising. Both parties therefore need to be committed to effective communications, both internally and externally. Advance planning for the communications journey across the length of the proposed partnership, both proactive and reactive, is imperative, and should be mapped out before the partnership is committed to."

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## 3. Methodology

### 3.1 Overall Approach

The potential usefulness of the Fit for Partnership test in assessing potential partnerships was explored through exploratory, qualitative research with expert practitioners.

### 3.2 Research Questions

Research questions rather than hypotheses were used. This was because the research was exploratory. The Research Questions were:

- RQ1 How relevant, or not, are each of the five elements of the Fit to Partner test, to assessing new partnerships?
- RQ2 How helpful, or not, is the Test overall in assessing new partnerships?
- RQ3 Are there any other considerations?

### 3.3 The sample

There were eight interviews conducted with nine highly experienced leaders, brokers and executors of corporate-NGO partnerships. Consultants and industry body figures were identified through the networks of the re-

searchers. In addition, the Charity Business Awards, run by *Third Sector Magazine*, were used to identify some leading corporate and charity partnership managers.

### 3.4 Data collection and analysis

Each interviewee was given the Fit for Partner test to read just before the interview so that their immediate response was captured. Ev-

ery main principle of the test was explored in turn with all interviewees in semi-structured interviews. After the first two interviews, the questioning became increasingly detailed about each aspect of the five elements. There was also one question focused on the overall usefulness, or not, of the test. The interviewees were also asked to identify other considerations. The interviews were conducted face-to-face or over the telephone.

Table 1: Interviewees' roles and relevant experience to NGO-Corporate Partnerships  
*\*One interview was conducted with two corporate fundraisers from the same charity (interview 6)*

Participant Interviewee Number	Type of organization	Role	Relevant Other experience	Primarily corporate or charity experience brought to interview	
P1	Fundraising Consultancy, UK	Director	Formerly headed fundraising a large charity with an income of over £250m	Charity	30
P2	National Regulator	Senior Executive	Relevant board experience from a corporate perspective	Charity	25+
P3	PR Consultancy, UK	Business Head of NGO unit	Honorary position on industry body NGO communications expertise	Brokering NGO-Corp partnerships for FTSE 100 corporates	5+
P4	Charity, UK with income between £5m-£10m	Deputy Director of Fundraising	Charity Business Award Winner. Previous fundraising experience at national charities.	Charity	10
P5	Corporate (FTSE 100) HQ in US	Manager based in US	Charity Business Award Winner.	Corporate	3+
P6	Charity with income over £5m	Manager	Charity Business Award Winner. Previous fundraising experience at other charities	Charity	5+
P7	Charity with income of over £5m	Officer	Charity Business Award Winner. Fundraising experience in other charities	Charity	5
P8	Corporate (small)	Director	Charity Business Award Winner.	Corporate	10+
P9	Consultancy specializing in NGO-Corporate partnerships	MD	Previous relevant consultancy experience. NGO communications expertise	Corporate. Brokering NGO-Corp partnerships for corporates	25

### **3.5 Limitations**

There were interviews with nine experts. Nevertheless, all the interviews were in-depth and were conducted with expert interviewees who collectively had nearly 100 years of experience. All the interviewees had either been recognized with national awards or worked in a leadership role in consultancies operating at national and/or international levels. There were no fundraisers of small charities that were interviewed. Nevertheless, interviewees did come from NGOs of varying sizes. One interviewee had worked for a charity with an income over £250m and others represented charities with incomes over £5m. Other interviewees had also worked for FTSE 100 firms, and in one case, for a small family business. The latter had partnered with small local charities.

Two of the authors of this paper (Read and Diehl) had devised the Fit to Partner test. The

other was a co-editor of the book (Garsten and Bruce 2018) in which the test was published. Nevertheless, this author had played no part in the creation of the test. Hence, she conducted the interviews and analysed the data.

## **4. Findings**

### **4.1 Introduction**

Participants related their experience to setting up new partnerships to each area of the Fit to Partner Test and then to the Test overall. Their responses were categorised into three themes. Firstly, where they identified relevance with the Test. Secondly, where they critiqued the Test or indicated that further specification was needed. Thirdly, where they offered other comments or suggestions. In the anonymised the research, each of the nine participants is given a number. For instance, Participant 1 is referred to as P1.

### 4.2 Fit to Partner Test Relevance and Critique: Needs and Understanding

Needs and Understanding: Dimensions	Relevance	Critiques/Further specifications
i) Need for partnership identified	Establishing the overall need for a partnership is crucial (P1, P6, P7, P9); especially as there is a move away from just financial giving (P1, P3, P4, P6, P7, P8, P9). Yet, "Charities often don't think enough about what they want" (P2).	Agreeing partnership goals takes time (P9). Whilst an aim is needed at the start, goals can later become more detailed (P7) or even broader (P5).
<b>ii) Establishing mutual understanding</b>	P2 stated it was crucial that understanding is mutual and is not too weighted to the corporate. Whilst P5 and P6 commended that NGOs needed to understand what corporates prioritized. Charities could have overly high financial expectations of corporates, observed P1 and P9.	Specification that partnership goals need to be shared, but that partners' objectives can be different (P6, P9) Specific references made to the importance of honesty P7 Specific references made for the need to understand expectations P1, P7, P9
iii) Check mutual fit between vision and values	The importance of understanding (P2, P7) and sharing (P3, P4, P9) each other's values was widely agreed. P2 pointed out that charities can assume that their values are obvious and therefore not articulate them clearly enough.	Shared values may not always be there, especially if NGO is trying to change corporate behaviour P7. Not all NGO have identified their values (P3) Only one participant spoke about shared mission (P5) Brand fit also considered (P4)
iv) Senior team commitment	Some participants stated that senior support was present in highly successful partnerships (P1, P5). Others felt that senior support essential. P4, said, "Without commitment from senior teams, [a partnership] won't go anywhere."	The senior leadership fit was mentioned
<b>v) Ensure integrity and independence</b>	This was key (P2, P5, P6, P9).	Power gaps felt by some NGOs. There is often a lack of corporate understanding of the independence of NGOS observed P2.

### 4.3 Fit to Partner Test Relevance and Critique: Cultural Fit

Cultural Dimensions	Fit:	Relevance	Critique/ Further Specifications
<b>i) Culture fit</b>		Partnerships are more likely to be successful with a strong cultural fit, (P6) Potential partners can be identified through a perceived culture fit. P4 said, "Cultural fit is very important with our dream partner list".	Assessing a cultural fit takes time (P9) and is hard to assess pre-working together, (P1, P4, P5). P3 observed that many corporates work on their culture but many NGOs haven't done this which means that "alignment can be difficult".
ii) Working styles and practices		A sense of how the two parties would work together was important (P5, P8, P9). Working practices mentioned by participants included campaigning, social media communications (P3) and volunteering models (P5).	Difficult to assess pre-working together. The style of partnership meetings can be determined by corporates (P7)
<b>iii) Scope for mutual learning</b>		The importance of sharing learning about was and wasn't working was highlighted by P2 and P5.	Important but this is something that evolves, P7 Honesty facilitated shared learning.
<b>iv) Opportunity for knowledge transfer in both directions</b>		Not discussed by most participants	This was rarely discussed in early stages, reflected P3, yet there was potential for two-way knowledge transfer.
<b>v) Fit of personalities associated with both parties</b>		The only fit that was considered was senior management fit (not celebrities or faces associated with advertising campaigns).	Participants did not always initially understand this question.
<b>Other Considerations</b>		The importance of trust between teams emphasized (P1, P2, P3, P4, P5, P9). Honesty was essential in relationship building (P4, P5, P7) Team members needed to like each other and respect each other (P1, P2, P5). "Do we like each other? Do we get on?" asked P2. "Never forget that people buy people, people that they like, that they think will deliver", stated P1. Participant 6 highlighted the importance of putting the 'right person on the right account'. The competence of team members was key. Both parties "have to be really good at what they do and hard working", observed P5 The skills and knowledge of those working on the partnership to be relevant to the delivery of the partnership's goals (P9). There's a need "to get the right people together" to solve a problem which "does not happen very often". P9	

#### 4.4 Fit to Partner Test Relevance and Critique: Scope and Benefits

Scope and Benefits: Dimensions	Relevance	Critiques/ Further Specifications
<b>i) Define mutual benefits</b>	The mutuality of benefits to the two partners important (P4). Two NGO participant stated that the benefits to the corporate partner had to be clear (P4, P7). In P4's charity, the amount of benefits given to corporates were linked with different levels of donations.	'Value' of the partnership rather than the benefits to either partner was discussed by P9. Not always easy to quantify all benefits, (P6)
ii) Clarity on timings, outputs and outcomes	All were considered important (P2, P3, P6, P9). P3 felt this was the most important element of the framework. Timings. "It's critical to think of timing", said P9. These were phased around beginnings, middles and end (P9). Participant 5 observed that timings were put into legal partnerships agreements in the US. Charities need to be clear about what they want delivered because they are 'very often not as specific as [they] might be", P2.	'Impact' important and should be added (P3, P8 and P9) Exit strategies important to include because they "saved lots of future problems" P9.
iii) Commercial and financial transparency	The amount of money to be donated needs to be clear (P5, P6 and P9). P5 and P9 said that financial commitments were specified in legal agreements. Issues arose about changes. P6 reported that companies could reduce projected donations if their financial positions changed. P5 said that legal documents should outline what should happen if changes were needed. P9 observed that partnerships could suffer if charities ask for "more and more".	
iv) Mutual agreements over resources	Having a detailed understanding of the commitments on both sides for different activities was considered important (P4, P6). This was covered in Partnership Agreements (P6).	Some NGO participants found it difficult to resource partnerships because often they had so many partnerships.
<b>v) Clarity over access to stakeholders and data</b>	Importance raised with vulnerable stakeholder groups Data sharing is, "top of mind ... because of reputational risks" and is part of legal agreements, according to P5, who works in the US.	

### 4.5 Fit to Partner Test Relevance and Critique: Reputation Risk

Reputation Risk: Dimensions	Relevance	Critique/ Further Specifications
<b>i) Clarity over brand fit</b>	Brand fit was considered (P4, P5) and sometimes, more specifically in relation to beneficiaries' interests (P6).	
ii) Assessment of reputation impact	Risk assessment crucial (P1, P2, P3, P5, P6, P9). Some considered this the most important element of the Test (P5, P6). Participants reported that ways they investigated reputational risk included looking at: previous negative media coverage (P3) and the reputation of the potential partner's leaders (P6). NGOs had ethical policies, procedures or rules about whether a potential commercial partnership should be accepted or declined.	
iii) Relevant governance and accountability put in place	P2 recommended: a record should be kept of decision-making process for taking on a partner or not. all partnership agreements should include a complaints process, as this was, "good process and governance". Companies were interested in charity governance observed P3, P4. Trustees of charities were checked (P4). Charities needed to do due diligence of corporates, warned P2. Partners' finance needed to be checked. Directors should be checked at Companies House to see if they have been disqualified (P2). NGOs' lack of systematic checking of corporate partners was observed by, P4.	Relevant governance and accountability procedures could be specified.
<b>iv) Regulatory frameworks adhered to</b>	From the NGOs perspectives, internal policies concerning trustees' involvement in declining potential partnerships was discussed. Work with vulnerable stakeholders and stakeholder risks was considered in light of safeguarding.	The relevant regulatory frameworks could be specified.
<b>Other considerations</b>	Taking risks was also associated with successful, ambitious partnerships although this was not discussed in the context of reputation (P5, P9). Trust and honesty important in reputation management (P2, P3). 'Will they tell us if something has happened? Would we tell them if something has happened?' asked P2.	

### 4.6 Fit to Partner Test Relevance and Critique: Commitment to Communications

Commitment to Communications: Dimensions	Relevance	Critique
<p><b>i) Decisions about how internal and external communication can be transparently and confidently conducted</b></p>	<p>Clarity was needed about what is and what isn't public (P6) This included in Memorandum of Understanding. What was communicated externally was in part determined by the company's sustainability report (P5).</p>	
<p>ii) On going explanation, education about, illustration and evidencing of partnership benefits</p>	<p>Right message was needed about what was being achieved (P2). The importance of on-going internal communications, particularly for corporate partners was raised (P4, P6, P7). "A lot of the motivation for a partnership is going to rely on communications to achieve its goals" observed P9</p>	<p>Importance of conducting issues management for partnership itself highlighted, P3 Communications should reflect the charity's values raised by P2.</p>
<p>iii) Advance planning of communications across the partnership journey</p>	<p>Good to plan communications for length of the partnership (P6) with the milestones (P2). "Quite often people do not consider communications enough", said P9. Often communications not well enough thought through, P3</p>	<p>It takes confidence to plan communications over 2-3 year period, P6 There was on-going learning about communications.</p>
<p>Other considerations</p>	<p>The issue of how communications was resourced was raised by some participants. Some felt it should be managed by the corporate, others felt it should be shared, and other felt it should be managed by the charity. Important that internal communications looked like they came from host organization and not the partner (P6) The issue of which party spoke on behalf of the partnership also raised. P2 felt it should be the NGO. Use of NGO's brand, and other aspects of communications, covered in Memorandum of Understanding documents (P4) Agreement was needed about vocabulary used to describe the charity's values and beneficiaries (P2).</p>	

### 4.7 Fit to Partner Test Relevance and Critique: Overall

Helpful	Limitations	Other Considerations
<p>Helpful for longer term, strategic partnerships (P1, P2, P3, P4, P6, P8, P9)</p> <p>The test could help prevent partnership problems P6</p>	<p>“Not always possible for this framework to be applied at the beginning because sometimes partnerships evolve” P4</p> <p>The test would not be useful for shorter term partnerships – not all the elements of the test are relevant to short term partnerships (like cultural fit) P4, P6 as it would take too many resources for short-term partnerships.</p>	<p>Length of partnership at not always clear at the start. Sometimes short-term partnerships can evolve into longer term ones, P6; the best partnerships grow organically, P5.</p>
<p>All parts of the model important (P4, P8, P9)</p> <p>“All elements are important; if you did all [the partnership] would be perfect. Any on their own wouldn’t work.” P4</p>	<p>Time limitations. ‘This [test] is a detailed conversation. You could spend a year on these stages’ This didn’t negate the need for the stages, but the shortlisting would need to be considered carefully. P9.</p>	<p>‘One word that sits behind [the different elements of the model] is trust. These elements are critical for trust to evolve.’ P9</p> <p>“At first I was a bit scared by the document” P8</p>
<p>The test could aid NGO decision making about resource allocation to partnerships, P6</p>		

## 5. Discussion

### 5.1 Relevance, or not, of five elements of test

All five main elements of the test were considered important. There were some aspects dimensions of each of the five elements that could be enhanced, that could benefit from greater specificity, that could be enhanced with guidelines or that did not seem immediately relevant to the participants.

Some elements of the test could be expanded accorded to the participants. For instance, the ‘Scope and benefits’ section could have a stronger emphasis on ‘impact’ and also the planned ending of partnerships. In the ‘Reputation’ section the reputational issues associated with partnership could be as pronounced as the reputational risks for each

partner.

Furthermore, some criteria could be more specific about whether the interests of the partners, or the partnership itself, need consideration. For instance, in the ‘Needs and Understanding’ Section, participants commonly associated the ‘need for partnership’ criterion with the partnership goals, and the ‘mutual understanding’ criterion with the NGOs’ and corporates’ separate objectives.

There are aspects of the test where additional guidance might be provided. For instance, in the identification of values.

In addition, there were some criteria that participants did not discuss. This may be because the criteria did not seem relevant or because the meaning of them could have been assisted with further explanation.

## 5.2 The Overall Response to the Usefulness, or not, of the Test

Participants considered the test would help NGOs and corporates establish solid foundations for strategic partnerships. However, there were substantive challenges to implementing the full test.

### *Usefulness of the Test*

The respondents stated that the Test would be helpful in assessing new long-term strategic partnerships. The thoroughness of the test could help partnerships to succeed, said Participant 2, as it would help parties know “why” and “what” they would get out of the partnership. The respondents confirmed that the test is not suitable for short-term partnerships stating explicitly that they only saw its value in longer-term strategic partnerships.

### *Barriers*

There were challenges though that included power relations and resources. A power gap, between corporates and non-large charities was raised in relation to different elements of the Test. Notably, several criteria in the Test have the word ‘mutual’ in them either explicitly, as for instance with ‘mutual understanding’ or implicitly. Whilst such mutuality is crucial it may also be challenging. Participant 2 stated, “I don’t think corporates understand what a charity or foundation is.... That is a sovereign body. The responsibility for a charity lies with the trustees. The corporate’s mindset is transactional. ...Charities are not furry, cuddly things. Charities do ...difficult things that [corporates] wouldn’t touch.” Some charities could feel pressurised to comply with corporates’ objectives. Participant 6 observed, “Some NGOs are too scared to say ‘no’ to corporates that wanted to involve staff in volunteering tasks that were not particularly helpful to charities. When developing the scope of partnerships, Participant 2 observed charities needed to be clear about what they want delivered because they are “very often not as specific as [they] might be”. Another interviewee said that they felt had to

fit in with their corporate partners in terms of ‘working styles’. Specifically, they had “to mirror what the corporate wants” when it came to meeting formats. This resonates with the critiques of partnerships discussed in this paper’s Introduction and with Bruce’s observation that corporates often have more negotiations experience. However, this power gap was less relevant to large NGOs with strong brands, noted Participant 1.

There was an issue with the length of time such a test would take to complete. One participant estimated that the test could take about a year to conduct. Such aspects included ‘cultural fit’ which was considered hard to be assess prior to working together and ‘working styles and practices’.

Resourcing was also an issue in terms of preparedness for different elements of the test and the need to prioritise which partnerships warranted the investment of time in the test. Several participants observed that more corporates were likely to have some criteria of the Test in place than some NGOs. For instance, several participants stated that corporates were more likely to have identified their values and to have formally worked on their culture. Further, the NGO participants spoke about the number of corporate partners they had. For instance, Participant 4 was at a charity that had three and half team members working on a portfolio of 40 company partners. This effected the amount of time they could dedicate to each. Bruce (2011) has observed that corporate partnerships take considerable resource for charities to service.

## 5.3 Other considerations for the Test

The participants highlighted the importance of the relationships between the people involved in the partnerships and the skills of team members. They primarily focussed on the personnel who would potentially deliver the programmes. They also included the senior managers who sometimes helped set

up partnerships. Further, some considered different aspects of the test of varying importance.

There was consensus that the partnership teams potentially executing projects had to trust and like each other. Participant 9 said a potential partner would assess the shared commitment to a cause when establishing whether or not to trust a potential partner. "Looking at the whites of your eyes is it [the societal/environmental problem] something you really want solved?" Considerable scholarship exists on measurement variables for trust (Ki and Shin 2015). Nevertheless, given the context of Test, trust is at a very early stage when partners are considering establishing partnerships.

The honesty of partnership team members was seen as crucial, for example in the 'Needs and Understanding' and 'Reputation' dimensions. Notably this value helps build trust.

Highly competent team members were needed. The creation of bespoke teams to achieve partnership goals could be helpful. Participant 9 observed that sometimes employees who had relevant knowledge skills to work on specific issues related to partnership goals, were not necessarily from corporate partnership teams.

Some participants referred to some aspects of the Test being 'ideal' which implies that they are not essential. This opens the question of whether every element of the Test is equally important or not. In addition, different participants volunteered views about which of the five elements was the most important. For example, Participant 6 argued that the 'Reputation' principle was a "deal breaker", whereas Participant 3 considered the 'Scope' of the partnership terms to be the most important.

## 5.4 Next steps in the development of the Test

Overall, the test was found to be useful by the participants in the survey. Application of the test through consultation with industry bodies will be considered. Before this, the next step in the development of the test is to expand the number of interviewees so that decisions can be made about potential adaptations to the test.

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# Teflon Reputations and Glass Jaws: Managing Reputations in the Public Sphere

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There is a paucity of existing literature and research on management of individuals' reputations, perhaps because no two cases of reputation attacks are similar. Further complicating the landscape is the observation that some reputations seem to endure attacks while others succumb to attacks easily. The Internet has provided new platforms that make ordinary individuals more relevant in the public sphere. The author contends that declarative public support (DPS), a concept that describes sharing support in the public sphere, has gone unrecognized; DPS has become more prominent and observable on social media. To explicate the concept of DPS, the author provides evidence that it can be observed, fills some gaps in what is known through the literature in and our understanding of other closely related support concepts, and maybe provide useful research on individual reputation management. Finally, the author discusses the antecedents and consequences of DPS. The author hypothesizes that individuals are influenced to increase acts of DPS when they observe others and especially those in their social networks exhibiting DPS for an embattled person. The author expounds on this in the context of scandals, for example, when an individual is targeted with character assassination attempts and posits that a better understanding of this concept will better equip reputation management teams to manage and repair reputations of their clients.

**Keywords:** reputation management, character assassination attacks, declarative public support (DPS), public censure (PC), social media, social support, public opinion, social movements

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*Character is like a tree and reputation like a shadow. The shadow is what we think of it; the tree is the real thing. —Abraham Lincoln*

Reputation management expert Eric Dezenhall compares one's reputation to a glass jaw, a boxing term that explains that a well-executed punch to the jaw can drop even the largest and most formidable opponent. While it might often be the case that reputations are fragile and difficult to repair, a puzzling phenomenon is that some reputations

appear indestructible. For example, amid the #MeToo movement that has brought down influential American celebrities such as Harvey Weinstein and Russell Simmons, others such as Roy Moore and Donald Trump have been less affected by character attacks.

While corporate reputations are studied extensively in economics, marketing, organizational communication, and business studies, individual reputation is a much-neglected field of study and often only discussed as

case studies. Often practitioners address individual reputation cases non-strategically, which Robinson (1969) called a gut feeling approach to PR. A quick Internet search or a look in the self-help section of the bookstore will show that the paucity of literature in personal reputation management has resulted in an overreliance on unproven methods of personal reputation management and advice from the so-called reputation gurus.

Reputations earned by individuals are considered intangible but still valuable assets that speak to their credibility as perceived by others. Reputations of celebrities and politicians are commercially valuable thus these are bolstered on the media to predict the news value of the stories on the media (Galtung & Ruge, 1965). However, reputations are always at risk of damage and require active management. However, more importantly, when a crisis strikes, the reputation of individuals involved in it becomes particularly vulnerable; the degree to which the public supports these individuals will influence the likelihood that their reputation will remain intact or swiftly recover.

This paper discusses the resilience of reputations that might be under attack, like Teflon, while other reputations maybe like glass jaws that may be shattered with one well-executed blow. The author contends that during a personal reputation crisis when people declare support for an embattled person on social media, other people in their networks are more likely to do the same, thereby increasing the odds of the public support. Thus, support increases the likelihood that the embattled person's reputation will remain intact despite the crisis.

Also, the paper introduces and explicates a novel social media concept, declarative public support (DPS) – a formal or an informal act of non-relational and non-reciprocal public act of support of a perceived protagonist during a public debacle who may lie outside of their social support systems and social network. The current paper is interested in DPS at the

individual level – one person's tendencies to issue a DPS. The author contends that when one notices others inside or outside of their social networks model DPS for a person involved in a reputation crisis, they are more likely to show DPS for them.

The author will identify the characteristics of DPS that may be observed during a scandal, the role of subjective norms, and the role DPS may play in forming and changing social norms.

### **Theoretical Argument**

Reputations serve as financial assets for corporations, which influences their ability to attract employees, investors, customers, and business partners (Bouchikhi & Kimberly, 2008). Similarly, a well-known individual's good reputation speaks to their credibility and, thus, also acts as a relational and a financial asset. An opponents' deliberate effort to damage a good reputation puts them at risk of character assassination (Icks & Shiraev, 2014), and thus, at risk of losing an asset.

Personal reputation management often arises as conflicts that involve two or more parties. During these situations, two types of dichotomies immediately emerge. First, there is a public perception of a protagonist and an antagonist; second, the dichotomy of a simultaneous public approval and disapproval of the protagonist and the antagonist. Individuals often make a public gesture to show approval or disapproval. These declarations of approval or disapproval are expressed in words, attending town hall meetings, demonstrations, writing editorials, making comments on social media, liking and sharing social media comments, and other forms of public displays.

In many ways, the public show of approval (public show of support) and the public show of disapproval (public censure) are similar and occur simultaneously. Therefore, the discussion of one concept cannot be complete without the other, but in this paper, public

censure will be introduced only when necessary.

## **Support in the Public Sphere**

In this section, I will first introduce several types of expressions of support that exist in the public sphere that are closely related to DPS. However, each type of support differs in the level of formality/organization, the level of emotions involved in providing support (relational or non-relational), and whether they are reciprocal or non-reciprocal in nature.

## **Elections, referendums, and the public opinion polls**

These are formal and systematically gathered snapshots of the level of public support of a time and a place. Democracies hold elections and referendums, and corporations and governments rely on public opinion to measure the pulse of popular sentiments (Key, 1961). For decades, scholars of public opinion research have realized a gap in the research that described and explained actions such as letter-writing campaigns, rallies, and demonstrations (Ginsberg, 1986, Glasser & Salmon, 1995; Herbst, 1993). Lee (2002) noticed that the “alternative modes” in the political environment that are often linked “more directly to actions and, as a consequence, can be often more politically salient and influential,” (p. 7). Mutz (1998) termed these actions “impersonal influences.... [which are] brought about by information about the attitudes, beliefs or experiences of collectives outside of an individual’s personal life space,” (p. 4).

## **Collective action**

These are formal or informal organized actions of groups. These have existed in different forms in different eras and different social and political environments. Social movements can be defined as collective action triggered by the need for improved treatment of or defense of a group (Becker, 2012a) or their identification (Iyer & Ryan, 2009) in the pub-

lic sphere. Collective action is driven by high emotions, efficacy beliefs, and perceptions of threats to the group’s identification (Becker, 2012b).

## **Social support**

“The exchange of verbal and non-verbal messages conveying emotion, information, or referral, to help reduce one’s uncertainty or stress” (Walther & Boyd, 2002, p. 154). Social support involves individuals’ intimate interactions in one-on-one and small group interactions to maintain and develop relationships, cope with illness and stress, reduce community crime, and overcome individual and social issues (Sarason, Sarason, & Pierce, 1990). Will and Cohen (1985) contended that when individuals have more social contacts with other individuals, they are mentally happier and healthier than those individuals with limited social contacts. More researchers have studied the role of social support in psychological distress, size and structure of a social network, and individual differences such as attachment, motivation, and relationship commitment (Vaux, 1988).

## **Social networks**

One’s social networks play an essential role in receiving social support. Gross et al., (2002) and Turner et al., (2001) discuss strong ties (family and friends) and weak ties (others such as listserv, chat room, and discussion group acquaintances). Despite the possibility of some ties being loose, scholars such as Cutrona and Russell (1990), Goldsmith (1994), and House (1981) agreed that social networks are inherently a relational approach. Therefore, it is plausible that one provides social support with the expectation of reciprocity. Moreover, social support exists in physical and online spheres with a higher possibility of anonymity in the online sphere.

## **Online social support systems**

Mounting evidence suggests that individuals often extend their intimate relational sup-

port systems to online forums to cope with physical, emotional, and psychological ailments or aid the behavioral changes. Eastin and LaRose (2005) suggest that increasingly, individuals are seeking online social support and, indeed, finding it in online forums. Furthermore, White and Dorman (2001) suggest that individuals often seek online support to remain anonymous; equally observable is that often, support-givers can also remain anonymous. Thus, the Internet is a dependable avenue to seek out and give emotional and relational social support, both openly and anonymously. However, when individuals seek and provide support in online forums, for example, anonymously or to those outside of their networks, this does not fall into the conceptual understanding established by the concept of social support.

### **Declarative Public Support (DPS)**

Declarative public support (DPS) is a formal or an informal act of non-relational and non-reciprocal public support of a perceived protagonist during a public debacle, and who often lies outside of each other's social support systems and social networks. A similar act of public censure (PC) can occur when the public expresses disdain for a perceived antagonist who is outside of their social network or relational contact, so there is no expectation of reciprocity. For example, when Roy Moore, the Republican nominee for Alabama Senate seat, was accused of sexual misconduct, social media blew up with support for him from his constituents and non-constituents, while at the same time, he received public censure from others.

Digital and social media platforms have given the public the ability to quickly share their opinions. For example, the term alternative facts became a searchable hashtag mere seconds after it was uttered by Kellyanne Conway, the counselor to President Trump. Collective opinions in the form of public opinion polls, referendums, or elections are considerably impactful, and increasingly, individuals' opinions are considered relevant since

the more declarations of public support one receives, the more likely they are to survive a reputational crisis with their reputation unharmed. Thus, if a public opinion poll captures the "pulse" of the popular sentiment (Key, 1961), then DPS is the echo of the public's prevailing sentiments.

### **Empirical evidence of DPS**

The evidence of DPS exists throughout history and across nations and cultures, which has resulted in significant historical events. People go to great lengths to support an ideology, mission, ideas, persons, or a combination of some of these. Greeks gathered in the Agora to publicly show support regarding religious, political, judicial, social, and commercial affairs. Similarly, the Internet has proved to be a befitting pulpit for DPS, and social media has provided convenient platforms for quick and easy acts such as liking, sharing, commenting, and so on. Such open displays of support may often initiate with one's social support network and are eventually followed by individuals outside of that network in higher numbers. Thus, the author contends that when one notices those whose opinions they highly regard model DPS for a person involved in a scandal and others even outside of their social networks, they are more likely to show DPS for that person.

### **Characteristics of DPS**

Unlike social support, DPS is one-sided support from others in the public sphere; therefore, DPS is not relational, and even if one's social networks partake in DPS, it is not reciprocal. Interestingly, DPS may be solicited or unsolicited by those looking for support. Moreover, those who provide DPS usually act out of non-threatening situations; unlike in social movements, supporters usually have a relatively low level of emotional attachment to the issues and loose beliefs around the issues.

DPS is a unique concept as it explains an observable phenomenon in society. For ex-

ample, DPS helps understand the motivation behind supporting protagonists whose ordeals affect the supporters in insignificant ways, such as supporting an individual during a scandal. Another interesting aspect of DPS, which is more observable on social media, is that sentiments reverberate through one's social networks and will influence them. For example, a story that is shared in support of a public figure will influence other's opinions in one's network.

An essential characteristic of DPS is that it explains the supportive environment where social movements can thrive. For example, increased DPS for women who come forward with allegations of sexual misconduct against powerful perpetrators is motivating more women to come forward with allegations against other perpetrators.

### **Characteristics of Declarative Public Support (DPS) in Reputation Management**

A central characteristic of DPS in the context of reputation management is that it addresses a widely-known scandal or a character assassination attack concerning a public figure who possesses some celebrity capital. The public declares support for the public figure often by comparing them to a rival. Because so much of the discussion surrounds public figures, it is essential to review what constitutes a public figure who has celebrity capital. Celebrity capital and public figures. Public figures can be of two types: a traditional public figure or a new-age public figure. The libel and slander cases, the United States law uses the Gertz public figure doctrine to define a public figure as: One, did the individual willingly engage in activities that advanced their public profiles? Second, does the individual have "significantly greater access to the channels of effective communication" (Lafferman, 2012, p. 199). This is a dated test and understanding of one's celebrity capital and the idea of what a public figure is. Aside from their immediate physical sphere, public figures can garner support in the digital sphere. Sometimes, individuals who are not traditional celebrities, such as politicians or

celebrities, maybe thrust into celebrity status by online communities when a post or a video go viral or when individuals are well-known only among pocket communities or 'niches' or only for temporary periods. Such individuals also possess "celebrity capital," a concept that describes the Gertz public figure doctrine in colloquialism (Barrie, 2014). Thus, the new-age celebrity is formed, and when a person's celebrity capital helps them get support in the public sphere. It is essential to clarify that United States law is grappling with how to limit or delimit the concept of a public figure, but there seems no plausible reason to put these limits on the definition of a public figure, which vastly increases the boundary of who is considered a public figure. DPS can be expressed for both traditional and non-traditional public figures.

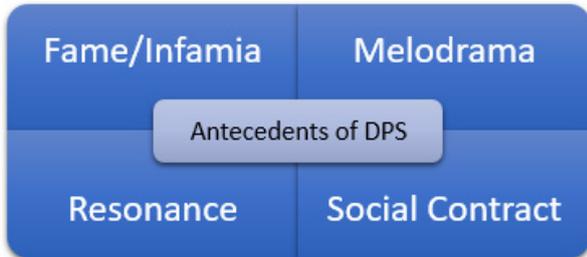
Distinguishing the two types of public figures helps us understand why some non-celebrity individuals can garner DPS in public, for example, through one's LinkedIn connections or Twitter followers who are often nonsocial networks.

The author now discusses the DPS in the context of reputation management.

### **Antecedents of DPS**

There are four situational social drivers or antecedents that determine the degree of DPS or public censure that an individual will receive. These are fame or infamia, perceived melodrama, the resonance of the character attack, and finally, the expectations surrounding the social contract with those involved in a scandal.

Figure 1. Antecedents of Declarative Public Support



### Perceived fame/infamia of the attacked

An individual whose name, image, livelihood, pastimes, or other activities elicit public scrutiny is generally considered famous. Therefore, in this context, fame and infamia are synonymous terms, as “infamia of course has the connotation of ‘negative fame,’ rather than non-fame or ‘obscurity,’” (Hollander, 2003, p. 1063). The more famous or infamous an individual is, the more humanized they are in the context of a character attack; whereas, an obscure individual may not be readily humanized and may receive negative DPS in public. Sometimes, an obscure individual who is thrust into fame after a scandal, may not immediately receive DPS until they are recognizable.

### Perceived melodrama of the issue

The more extraordinary, interesting, and intriguing the individual, their wrongdoing, or the accusation, a more emotional response can be expected in public. This social driver is highly contextual. For example, some scandals that may be considered outrageous, may not be out of the norm in another time, context, and culture. For example, extramarital affairs of a religious leaders may be scandalous but may not be considered extraordinary in political leaders.

### Resonance of the issue

Resonance refers to an individual’s experiences and their networks’ experiences. When a scandal or a character attack triggers a

memory of an experience from the past, the more likely it is that the attack will resonate with the public to prompt a reaction. Isolated incidents outside of the context of one’s surroundings, no matter how outrageous or melodramatic, will not induce a reaction because they fail to resonate with the public. Similarly, in an online setting, the more information about a scandal is liked, shared, and retweeted, the more the scandal will resonate deeply with the public. In other words, repeated exposure to

### The perceived expectations of social contract

Jean-Jacques Rousseau’s famous opening in *The Social Contract*, “Man is born free, but everywhere he is in chains,” explains the implicit agreement man has with his social surroundings. Thus, the social contract refers to the moral obligations or the social expectations that one is expected to fulfill and unspoken rules by which to abide. These obligations and rules may or may not be mutually agreed on by individuals. For example, mutually-understood rules may be those based on culture, matters of guilt and shame according to the law, and generosity and charity, and are often mutually agreed upon; whereas, rules around gender, religion, and biases are those that are not mutually agreed upon. Public figures are held responsible for the social contract that they are perceived to have, to determine whether they defied expectations of the cultural, political, and religious norms of the society. For instance, an accusation of sexual deviance in the Duggar family elicits a high degree of disapproval because of the family’s claims around moral high grounds; whereas, Charlie Sheen, who was open about his sexual deviance following a scandal involving drugs and “moral turpitude,” now thrives in the public eye as the brand ambassador for Lelo Hex, a London-based condom brand (O’Reilly, 2016). Social contract also describes the cultural and religious norms that often affect the nature of public discourse in these situations. In a country of Confucian influence such as China, an attacker in a scandal might

expect to receive more public censure and be harshly criticized for disrupting the social order. Similarly, in South Asian countries where an attack on an opponent's sexuality can seriously backfire because of different cultural norms.

The existence of a phenomenon is only relevant if it has some impact or effect. Now the paper provides a theoretical framework that supports DPS and reviews some individual and social consequences.

### **Theoretical Framework**

Scholars have frequently used the theory of planned behavior (TPB) to explain and predict an individual's intentions to act. TPB suggests that one's behavior is influenced by the following: subjective norms, the social pressure to act or not act in a particular manner; attitude, a positive or negative evaluation of the act; and perceived behavior control, the potential to perform a behavior (Armitage & Conner, 1999).

When one shows support for the target of a scandal on social media by sharing, liking, or commenting on posts, there is an enduring effect of doing so on others in their networks. That effect can spill over to the networks' networks. DPS creates a presence of subjective norms that may influence other's behaviors formed by the attitude of those significant others, the normative referents, whose opinions are highly regarded (Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975). Often, we rely on different normative referents based on the behavior in question. For example, one's motivation to join a parent-teacher association (PTA) may be prompted by neighbors and friends, and teachers and family might influence one's decision to join the military. Thus, all things being equal, one will increase DPS for a person when the normative referents model a similar DPS. For example, individuals often follow the religion or the political parties of the families in which they are born.

DPS may be an even more prevalent and effi-

cient phenomenon in collectivistic cultures where individuals have a greater desire to conform to norms. Cho and Lee (2015) find in their study of individuals' intentions regarding the H1N1 flu pandemic that subjective norms in a Korean sample (a collectivistic culture) are a far stronger predictor than in a U.S. sample. Therefore, it is safe to suggest that subjective norms may even be predictors of long-term behavior maintenance, as seen in Cho and Lee's study.

Similarly, the social norms theory suggests that the more we perceive a behavior as normative, the more likely we are to perform the behavior ourselves.

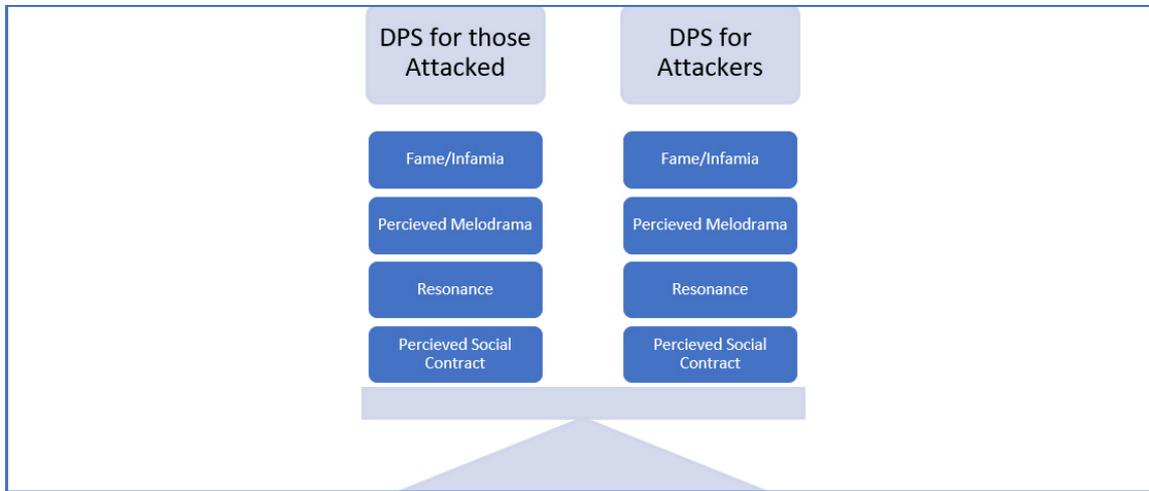
### **Operationalizing DPS**

Individuals show DPS by making their opinions known through speeches, writing an op-ed, signing a petition, having a public debate, and attending gatherings such as conferences. Public censure can be expressed similarly. An individual act of DPS can measure collective DPS or public censure. In the net sphere, these behaviors are easy to exhibit because they are less constrained by time and space. For example, one can easily and quickly like a comment on Facebook and reply to a comment; therefore, conducting two distinct acts of DPS.

Like public opinion polls, DPS measures the collective sentiment of a group, community, demographic, or a nation. Behavior that comprises DPS is observable both at the individual and the societal level. However, it is most efficacious at a group level. The collective DPS of a physical or digital community can be measured at the individual level.

The author also argues that DPS is driven by the simultaneous evaluation of the opponents in a scandal. Therefore, support can come in the form of DPS or censure, compared to the support received by the opponent.

Figure 2. The Model of Net DPS or Public Censure



**Endorsement**

An endorsement occurs when a high-profile person provides DPS, which may lead to more significant effects than an ordinary person’s DPS. For example, when individuals with high celebrity capital exhibit DPS, this, in turn, influences the melodrama, the fame or the infamy of the situation, and resonates with the public to a higher degree. An important effect of endorsements is that they may even change the unspoken rules of the social contract, gathering more support or censure. For example, the Black Lives Matter campaign gathered more fame and infamy, melodrama, and resonance when pro football player Colin Kaepernick demonstrated DPS by taking a knee during the singing of the National Anthem. As a result, more athletes are expected to show support for the Black Lives Matter campaign. Moreover, it also has a significantly higher impact on the perception of DPS because of the increased melodrama associated with it. Such endorsements tend to change the antecedents of the DPS and its consequences.

**Consequences of DPS**

The consequences of DPS exist on two planes, at the individual level and the societal level.

**Individual-level consequences for receivers of DPS**

It is helpful to review the literature on social support to understand the individual-level consequences of DPS. House (1981) classified social support into four main dimensions. These are: Emotional support such as empathy, trust, and love; instrumental support, which is tangible support such as equipment, transportation, and money; informational support such as advice or suggestion, and lastly appraisal support such as information to help increase self-evaluation and social comparison. In essence, DPS works similarly as the appraisal support with which individuals use to gauge their social-evaluation and social comparison to their opponents (Berkman et al., 2000). During a scandal, the sentiments expressed through DPS allows individuals to address these concerns through more strategic crisis responses. Moreover, receiving social appraisal through DPS helps the targets of a scandal manage their image and take steps toward damage control.

**Individual-level consequences for contributors of DPS**

Expressing DPS for a person or an idea can make one vulnerable to becoming a target themselves. For example, Colin Kaepernick’s

support of the Black Lives Matter campaign sparked a controversy about whether his actions are unpatriotic, and he eventually received a great deal of DPS and censure. The controversy over Colin Kaepernick's kneeling during the national anthem no longer has much to do with the Black Lives Matter campaign.

### **Societal consequences**

On a societal level, DPS can have an impact in three significant ways. One, DPS can drive a change of social norms. How a person perceives norms about DPS for an individual will impact the person's motivation accordingly. Therefore, over time, DPS can change social norms. For example, in 1929, women's cigarette smoking was promoted by Edward Bernays, the father of public relations, despite the social taboos at the time. Over time, cigarette smoking in women became popular after the slogan *Torches of Freedom* helped change societal norms about how women who smoke are perceived. Second, social movements comprise individuals who are connected by sheer virtue of collective action, and if that collective action is a sense of self-preservation, DPS can initiate social movements. Third, DPS represents the ideals of a democracy where every citizen's opinion matters, an ideal valued by many online communities. In fact, in many societies that do not have freedom of speech, DPS in online communities may be the only way to express support or censure. Therefore, DPS can arguably be a manifestation of a free and democratic society.

Interestingly, the relative ease of DPS on the Internet can also be attributed to how quickly social movements can begin. Arab Spring, the anti-dictatorship revolution that first emerged in Tunisia in 2010, was perpetuated through Facebook and is a prime example of how efficacious DPS can be when the public is vulnerable and how quickly social movements and even revolutions can begin.

### **Conclusion**

Reputation management practitioners often rely on gut feelings or intuition to perform their job. There is a need for more active research on how reputations may be created and maintained. This paper provides a conceptualizing DPS to fill present gaps in the literature as a step toward solving the mystery surrounding Teflon reputations and glass-jaw reputations. Explicating a concept that has not been recognized or measured before may take some time. Therefore, qualitative and quantitative studies are needed to test the antecedents and consequences of DPS and to capture all possible dimensions of the concept thoroughly. The dichotomous relationship between DPS and public censure should also be explored further and measured simultaneously as linking for one person is sometimes relative to present alternatives. Further, exploring the non-reaction of those who remain unaffected during a scandal can also help understand how individuals manage and garner public support.

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# Evaluating Crisis Responses on Twitter: Perspectives from Situational Crisis Communication Theory and Person-Centered Messages

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The goal of this study is to understand the types of crises that U.S. airlines experienced with stakeholders and their responses on Twitter. We applied situational crisis communication theory (SCCT; Coombs, 2007) and person-centered messages (constructivism; Delia, O'Keefe, & O'Keefe, 1982) in our analysis. We examined 318 Tweet responses from 18 different crisis issues using content analysis. Findings suggest that contemporary U.S. airlines experience a variety of crisis types (accidental, victim, and preventable), but medium-person centered messages are most frequently used in online settings. Collectively, these findings suggest that airlines should tailor their responses to crisis events with attention to crisis type and perceived responsibility.

**Keywords:** social media, crisis communication, person-centered messages

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## **A Person-Centered Approach to Crisis Responses on Twitter**

An increasing number of organizations are currently facing crisis threats on social media (Coombs & Holladay, 2012). These issues are often further exacerbated because few guidelines exist for how crisis managers

should respond to online crises (Roshan, Warren, & Carr, 2016). We posit that how the public perceives an organization's crisis response stems from message quality.

As such, we consider these issues in light of a theoretical concept that was introduced in interpersonal communication: person-centered messages (PCMs). Part of constructiv-

ism (Delia et al., 1982), *person-centered messages* “reflect an awareness of and adaptation to the subjective, affective, and relational aspects of communicative contexts” (Burleson, 1987, p. 305). These messages are personalized to the receiver’s experiences and emotions (High & Dillard, 2012; Jones, 2004). Consequently, highly personalized messages are most often evaluated as providing support to recipients (Burleson & MacGeorge, 2002). Using person-centered messages can also have implications for the relationship between the support provider and recipient. For example, Samter, Burleson, and Murphy (1987) found that support message quality, (i.e., level of person-centeredness), predicted recipient liking and attraction toward the support provider.

We argue that this theoretical framework can be applied to crisis communication. That is, corporations should pay attention to publics who have been affected by the crisis and generate messages that are tailored to their experiences. The case for PCMs in crisis communication is gaining more importance with the emergence of social media. This is especially salient given that public relations in the digital age is becoming increasingly two-way and symmetrical (Grunig, 2009). In other words, the affected publics have become direct receivers of communication, somewhat resembling the structure and format of interpersonal dialogue.

In the field of crisis communication, situational crisis communication theory (SCCT) (Coombs, 2007) is often used to understand the organization’s crisis management. This study integrates SCCT with PCMs to investigate how airlines use PCMs when responding to different crisis types. In so doing, this study brings together two theoretical frameworks that have traditionally been in distinct areas of communication. We believe this merger will provide both theoretical and practical benefits for organizations that are responding to crisis.

## Literature Review

### Service industry crisis

Any organization can face a crisis. Organizations within the service sector are especially vulnerable to potential crisis issues because of the nature of the service sector (Smith, 2005): 1) Service organizations are highly engaged with consumers and are active in the production process as co-producers; 2) Services are often intangible and abstract which makes them difficult for the service providers to explain and for the customer to assess; 3) Many non-standardized services are closely related to the individual service providers’ ability like knowledge, behavior, and commitment; 4) Service quality depends on how the customer perceives the whole.

Due to these features, service providers cannot control service quality. Consequently, consumers are often an integral part of the service system and help to shape the organization’s reputation (Edvardsson, 1992). This, in turn, increases the potential for an organizational crisis because of the variable and changing nature of consumers’ perceptions (Smith, 2005).

The advent of social media has added another challenge for service organizations. The service encounter, the moment when the company’s employees meet and interact with customers, has occurred increasingly online. How customers perceive these encounters are critical factors in how service quality is evaluated (Czepiel, Solomon, Surprenant, & Gutman, 1985). Service encounters on social media highlight interactions between employees and customers but can also be displayed to external stakeholders. If the service provider fails to meet the customer’s service expectations, the customer can easily challenge the organization on social media and other stakeholders can potentially view the challenge. This increased visibility raises new strategic and tactical concerns for crisis managers (Coombs & Holladay, 2012).

Given this situation, understanding social

media crisis management is critical for service sector organizations. Although there is considerable research attention in the crisis management area, previous research has focused on two larger areas. First, most research on this topic has examined offline crisis settings. Second, these studies have predominately examined service recovery rather than the processes through which each crisis is generated (Smith, 2005). Coombs (2004) explains that crisis management is comprised of four interrelated factors: prevention, preparation, response, and revision. Smith (2005) argues that service organizations need to consider both prevention and response within their crisis management strategies. Crisis communication is especially critical during the response phase as it marks the beginning of the crisis and when organization managers should enact appropriate action (Coombs, 2004).

### **Crisis communication: Situational crisis communication theory (SCCT)**

Situational crisis communication theory (SCCT; Coombs, 2007) provides one way to better understand the organization's crisis response. SCCT advances that an organization's reputation can be protected during crisis if appropriate communicative crisis response strategies are selected (Coombs, 2007; Kiambi & Shafer, 2016). This process occurs in two-steps. First, the organization should identify the crisis type and determine the initial crisis responsibility. SCCT posits that crisis types can be grouped into three clusters (*victim*, *accidental*, and *preventable*) which are based upon attributions of crisis responsibility (Coombs, 2007; 2011). In the *victim* cluster, the organization has low crisis responsibility because stakeholders view the organization as a victim of the event. Crises in the *accidental* cluster occur when events are viewed as unintentional or uncontrollable. Stakeholders expect the organization to take minimal crisis responsibility for events in these settings. The *preventable* cluster contains very strong attributions of crisis responsibility.

Following this, the organization should then select appropriate crisis response strategies that correspond to the identified crisis cluster. Previous crisis history and relationship reputation should also be considered with response strategy. More accommodative crisis response strategies should be used when reputational threat increases, as these strategies demonstrate greater concern for victims (Coombs, 2007). Stakeholders are also more likely to perceive the organization is taking greater responsibility when these strategies are selected (Coombs & Holladay, 2004; 2005). Taking responsibility is especially important for accidental and preventable crisis categories. These crisis types often generate strong feelings of anger and decreased sympathy toward the organization (Coombs & Holladay, 2005). These negative emotions can cause stakeholders to negatively evaluate the organization in public settings, which can affect an organization's reputation (Coombs & Holladay, 2004).

Social media has now transformed how stakeholders and organizations communicate during crisis. For example, it is now much easier for stakeholders to challenge organizations that are engaged in crisis situations (Oh, Agrawal, & Rao, 2013). On the other hand, social media also enables organizations to directly respond to stakeholders during crisis (Schultz, Utz, & Goritz, 2011). However, many studies show that organizations still need guidelines when responding to these challenges via social media (Eriksson, 2012; Veil, Buehner, & Palenchar, 2011). SCCT provides guidance for understanding how organizations can respond to crisis through social media (Roshan et al., 2016), but additional insight is needed for understanding how other factors, such as message quality, can influence crisis response.

### **Person-centered messages**

Message quality is particularly relevant to two areas in public relations: crisis communication and social media communication. Communicating in ways tailored to the receiver's situation(s), experiences, and needs holds

value for successful outcomes (e.g., service evaluations). Person-centered messages provide one avenue for assessing message quality. Burleson (1982) includes a nine-level hierarchy for differentiating messages across their level of person-centeredness. These nine-levels are further split into three larger areas based on how customized the emotional support message is. The first level, low person-centered messages (LPC), often deny the recipient an opportunity to express feelings. LPCs might also indicate how the recipient should react in response to the distressing event. The second level, moderate levels of person-centered messages (MPCs), recognize emotional distress, but offer distraction as a solution. These messages might also offer an explanation about why the distressing event has occurred and express sympathy. The third level, high person-centered messages (HPCs), demonstrate involvement and are listener centered. These messages encourage the recipient to elaborate on their feelings (Burleson, 1994) and consider how their emotions fit in a larger context (High & Dillard, 2012).

Message quality, specifically, person-centered messages, holds potential for how corporations could better communicate with key publics. Crisis requires a focus on problem resolution, credibility management, and appropriate public communication (High & Dillard, 2012). With this in mind, Sellnow and colleagues (2015) emphasize a receiver-based approach, even though many current studies focus on senders. Such approaches should be considered with person-centered messages because highly person-centered messages can illustrate a sense of understanding and support for key publics. This could yield increased liking, as the PCM literature suggests (e.g., Burleson, 2007). Therefore, from an organizational perspective, crisis communication in its reactive (message formation and distribution) and recovery (evaluation of the success of crisis communication) phases can benefit from adding a receiver- or person-centered focus.

In the age of social media, it is increasingly important to consider PCMs when examining communication strategies. As social media empowers individuals with more speed, accessibility, and interactivity (Wei, Lo, Lu, & Hou, 2015), audiences have become more easily and directly reachable. Especially with abbreviated, high-speed platforms such as Twitter, communication between a corporation and its key publics have also become more dialogue-based (Wei et al., 2015). In other words, this provides a more up-close, personal, and direct level of communication that introduces new means of branding and relating to audiences (Wojdyski, 2011).

We suggest that these characteristics can be approached from an interpersonal communication perspective, as well. Social media conversations are often manifested in constant two-way dialogue, so characteristics of interpersonal communication receive more spotlight (Greer & Ferguson, 2011; Holt, 2016). In this regard, PCMs could be an important concept for online discourse (Ham & Lee, 2015; St. John, 2014), and useful in evaluating the nature and effects of public relations efforts. With this in mind, we pose the following research questions:

- RQ1: What types of crises do service industry organizations, in particular U.S. airlines, encounter on Twitter?
- RQ2: How do U.S. airlines use person-centered messages when responding to crises on Twitter?
- RQ3: Do the airlines use accommodating person-centered messages when responding to different crisis types?

## **Method**

This study conducted quantitative content analyses to examine three research questions. Data were collected from five major U.S. airlines' Twitter accounts in May 2017. The detailed data collection process is discussed below.

## Sample

To understand the airlines' crisis communication on Twitter, we selected five airlines that had the highest number of followers as of May 2017. The airlines included Southwest (2.12 million Twitter followers), JetBlue (2.09 million Twitter followers), American (1.45 million Twitter followers), Delta (1.34 million Twitter followers), and United (923,000 Twitter followers). From these airlines' Twitter accounts, we collected a total of 421 tweets involved in crisis issues. After data cleaning, the final sample included a total of 318 tweet responses across 18 different crisis issues.

Twitter was selected for this study because of its instant and fast-paced nature (Bastos, Raimundo, & Travitzki, 2013). Twitter is also the key communication channel that organizations have used to respond to crises today (Schultz et al., 2011). Using Twitter is helpful because it highlights the communication approaches taken by the airlines immediately following each issue's occurrence (Chen, 2011).

## Coding instrument and measurement

We developed a codebook to assess crisis type, qualities of person-centered messages, and person-centered message strategy. For crisis type, we adapted the crisis type categories suggested by Coombs (2007; 2011). While Coombs's studies identified 12 (2007) and 10 specific crisis types (2011), our study combined the similar types of crisis (e.g. technical-error product harm and technical-error accident) into one crisis type (e.g. technical-error). This resulted in 8 crisis types: natural disaster, rumor, hacking, workplace issue, challenges, technical-error, human-error, and organizational-misdeed.

To measure the qualities of person-centered messages, we assessed how person-centered each Tweet is based on Burleson's (1982) 9-category typology. Coders were trained to evaluate the degree of person-centeredness using Burleson's (1982) guidelines. Coders

then assigned a level to each tweet from 1 (lowest) to 9 (highest). The PCM levels were further categorized into three larger groups (*low*: level 1 – 3; *medium*: 4 – 6; *high*: 7 – 9) after data collection was complete.

For person-centered message strategies, we adopted works of Burleson (1982) and Sellnow and colleagues (2015). Our six-category typology included mention of other, sympathy/apologetic, responsibility, explanatory, blame, and support/solutions. Coders again evaluated the content quality to identify the PCM strategies used in the messages. Some tweets used more than one strategy and coders identified all strategies used in the tweets (Gurman & Ellenberger, 2015; Kim, Miller, & Chon, 2016).

## Data collection

We first conducted an exhaustive search of all issues that occurred for each of the five airlines between January 2016 and May 2017. We began by reviewing the airlines' corporate newsrooms and searching news stories. We then extracted the airlines' tweets that responded to each issue over a one-week timeframe. This duration was selected with the goal of thoroughly identifying all responses from the airlines. In most cases, relevant tweets could only be found within three days of issue occurrence. Thereafter, we selected issues based on the order of the number of associated tweets and selected random tweets from a list of the top tweets until we reached 60 tweets per airline (for the random sampling objective of  $N = 300$ ).

## Intercoder reliability

Prior to data collection, we trained two independent coders. Once we established coding consensus, the two coders independently analyzed 70 common tweets (22% of dataset). Comparison of the two coders' agreement yielded a Krippendorff's Alpha of .806, which suggests high agreement. An additional coder training session was then held for coders to compare their results, discuss discrepan-

cies, and reach an agreement future coding decisions. Each coder then independently analyzed half of the remaining 248 Twitter posts.

## Data analysis

Descriptive analyses were used to examine the crisis types the airlines encounter on Twitter (RQ1) and if person-centered messages were implemented (RQ2). Descriptive and chi-squared analyses were employed to test the associations between the crisis types and how airlines used person-centered messages when responding to crises on Twitter (RQ3).

Results

### Crisis types on Twitter

Our first research question (RQ1) assessed the crisis types that U.S. airlines encounter on Twitter. Our sample included 18 issues that airlines encountered on Twitter between January 2016 and May 2017. Of the 18 issues, our results indicated that *accidental* ( $n = 8$ ; 44%) was the most frequent, followed by equal numbers of *victim* ( $n = 5$ ; 28%) and *preventable* ( $n = 5$ ; 28%) crisis types. All but American experienced accidental crises. Victim-type crises were found with only American and JetBlue. Finally, preventable crises were found only for three of the six airlines: American, United, and Delta.

### Airlines' use of person-centered messages

We also examined how these airlines use person-centered messages when responding to crises on Twitter (RQ2). To examine this, we analyzed Tweets across message quality (degree of person-centeredness) and PCM strategy.

The airlines most frequently used medium person-centered messages ( $n = 232$ ; 73%) across all crisis types. United ( $n = 60$ ) provided the most MPC messages, followed by JetBlue ( $n = 56$ ), Southwest ( $n = 48$ ), American ( $n = 36$ ), and Delta ( $n = 32$ ). Low person-centered messages ( $n = 77$ , 24.2%) were also lo-

cated in our data. Delta ( $n = 28$ ) shared the highest frequency of LPC messages, followed by United ( $n = 23$ ), American ( $n = 17$ ), and Southwest ( $n = 9$ ). Highly person-centered messages were fairly infrequent ( $n = 9$ ; 2.8%). JetBlue ( $n = 4$ ) created the most HPC messages. Southwest ( $n = 3$ ) and United ( $n = 2$ ) also provided HPCs, while Delta and American did not provide any.

The PCM strategies (mention of other, sympathy/apologetic, responsibility, explanatory, blame, and support/solutions) that airlines used when responding to crisis were also explored. Some tweets used more than one strategy. For the tweets, we identified all strategies. All five airlines included at least one example of each strategy across their tweets. For example, *mention of other* was implemented with United ( $n = 63$ ), Delta ( $n = 51$ ), American ( $n = 38$ ), JetBlue ( $n = 38$ ), and Southwest ( $n = 33$ ). In comparison, *sympathy/apologetic* was used with Delta ( $n = 35$ ), American ( $n = 33$ ), United ( $n = 26$ ), Southwest ( $n = 13$ ), and JetBlue ( $n = 11$ ). *Explanatory* was adopted frequently for Southwest ( $n = 50$ ), United ( $n = 49$ ), and JetBlue ( $n = 39$ ), but not for American ( $n = 15$ ) or Delta ( $n = 11$ ). *Support/solutions* was not frequently used with any of airlines, including Delta ( $n = 33$ ), JetBlue ( $n = 30$ ), American ( $n = 27$ ), and United ( $n = 22$ ). *Responsibility* was also a less frequently applied strategy for Southwest ( $n = 26$ ), United ( $n = 16$ ), JetBlue ( $n = 13$ ), American ( $n = 7$ ), and Delta ( $n = 6$ ). *Blame* was used the least frequently for all airlines including JetBlue ( $n = 15$ ), United ( $n = 10$ ), American ( $n = 4$ ) and Delta ( $n = 1$ ) (See Table 1).

### Crisis type and person-centered messages

Our third research question (RQ3) examined whether person-centered messages varied across different crisis types. Similar to our previous findings, medium-person centered messages (MPCs;  $n = 232$ ; 73%) were used the most frequently across all three crisis clusters (accidental,  $n = 108$ ; victim,  $n = 60$ ; preventable,  $n = 64$ ). Low person-centered messages (LPCs;  $n = 77$ ; 24.2%) were also im-

Table 1. Use of PCM strategy in crisis responses on Twitter by airlines  
 Note: values are in frequencies (% within airlines)

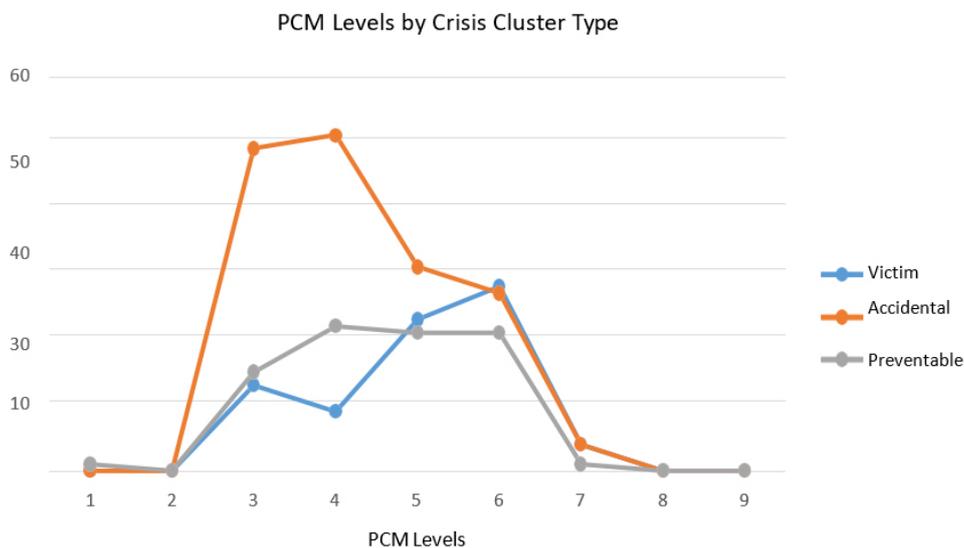
	Airlines				
	American	Delta	JetBlue	South-west	United
Mention of Other	38 (71.7%)	51 (85.0%)	38 (63.3%)	33 (55.0%)	63 (74.1%)
Sympathy/Apologetic	33 (62.5%)	35 (58.3%)	11 (18.3%)	13 (21.7%)	26 (30.6%)
Responsibility	7 (13.2%)	6 (10.0%)	13 (21.7%)	26 (43.3%)	16 (18.8%)
Explanatory	15 (28.3%)	11 (18.3%)	39 (65.0%)	50 (83.3%)	49 (57.6%)
Blame	4 (7.5%)	1 (1.7%)	15 (25.0%)	0 (0.0%)	10 (11.8%)
Support/Solutions	27(50.9%)	33 (55%)	30 (50.0%)	10 (16.7%)	22 (25.9%)

plemented (accidental,  $n = 48$ ; preventable,  $n = 16$ ; victim,  $n = 13$ ), but high person-centered messages (HPCs;  $n = 9$ ; 2.8%) were not often used (victim,  $n = 4$ ; accidental,  $n = 4$ ; preventable,  $n = 1$ ). Figure 1 illustrates that the MPC (4 – 6) level contained a majority of the Tweets, regardless of crisis cluster type. Furthermore, a chi-square analysis did not yield any significant results. These findings suggest that the airlines did not modify the person-centeredness of messages in light of differing crisis clusters.

We further analyzed the airlines’ crisis response tweets in terms of PCM strategies to see whether the airlines used different mes-

sage strategies to respond to three different crisis clusters. The results showed significant associations between crisis cluster type and PCM strategies for the following: *sympathy/apologetic* ( $\chi^2 (1, n = 318) = 8.022, p = .018, V = .16$ ), *responsibility* ( $\chi^2 (1, n = 318) = 7.239, p = .027, V = .15$ ), *explanatory* ( $\chi^2 (1, n = 318) = 35.7, p = .000, V = .34$ ), *blame* ( $\chi^2 (1, n = 318) = 25.119, p = .000, V = .28$ ), and *support/solutions* ( $\chi^2 (1, n = 318) = 19.291, p = .000, V = .25$ ). The *sympathy/apologetic* strategy was more frequently used in victim and preventable crisis situations than accidental, while there was no significant difference between victim and preventable. *Responsibility* was used more often in accidental crises in comparison to

Figure 1. PCM levels by crisis cluster type



victim and preventable crises. No significant difference was found between victim and preventable crises. As for *explanatory* strategies, they were used more often in victim and accidental cases, with no significant difference between the two types. Significant differences were found across the three crisis cluster types for adoption of *blame* strategies, while *support/solution* strategies were used more often in victim and preventable crisis situations.

The findings also show that *mention of other*, *explanatory*, and *support/solutions* were the most frequently used PCM strategies. When the *victim* crisis cluster type was experienced, tweets from airlines frequently displayed *mention of other* (71.4%), *explanatory* (55.8%), and *support/solutions* (54.5%) characteristics. In cases of *accidental* crises, *mention of other* (65.6%) and *explanatory* (63.8%) characteristics were used most often. Finally, in *preventable-type* crises, *mention of other* (77.8%), *sympathy/apologetic* (48.1%) and *support/solutions* (45.7%) strategies were used most frequently. This is especially noteworthy because *sympathy/apologetic* was among the frequently used strategy in this crisis cluster type (See Table 2).

Additional chi-square tests were conducted to analyze how the airlines varied the person-centeredness of tweets when responding to specific crisis types. Since no rumor, hacking, and workplace issues were identified in our dataset, only five crisis types were analyzed. The crosstab results showed that the airlines generally used medium person-centered (MPC) or low person-centered (LPC) messages when they responded to crises on Twitter, regardless of crisis type. However, significant differences were found in the airlines' responses to the *challenges* ( $\chi^2 (1, n = 318) = 26.822, p = .000, V = .29$ ), *technical-error* ( $\chi^2 (1, n = 318) = 6.253, p = .044, V = .14$ ) and *organizational-misdeed* ( $\chi^2 (1, n = 318) = 6.976, p = .031, V = .15$ ) crisis types. When the airlines responded to *challenges*, only low person-centered (45%) or medium person-centered (55%) messages were used. When responding to *technical-error* and *organizational-misdeed* issues, the airlines provided some high person-centered tweets, but the total percentage was only 5 percent for *technical-error* and 2.2 percent for *organizational-misdeed*. For both situations, more than 95% of responses were low or medium-centered messages. (See Table 3).

Table 2. Cross-tabulation of PCM strategies in relation to crisis cluster types

Note: values are in frequencies (% within crisis cluster type); \* = p < .05, \*\* = p < .01, \*\*\* = p < .001

PCM Strategy	Crisis Cluster Type			$\chi^2$	df
	Victim (n = 77)	Accidental (n = 160)	Preventable (n = 81)		
Mention of Other	55 (71.4%)	105 (65.6%)	63 (77.8%)	3.873	2
Sympathy/Apologetic	31 (40.3%)	48 (30.0%)	39 (48.1%)	8.022*	2
Responsibility	11 (14.3%)	44 (27.5%)	13 (16.0%)	7.239*	2
Explanatory	43 (55.8%)	102 (63.8%)	19 (23.5%)	35.700***	2
Blame	18 (23.4%)	11 (6.9%)	1 (1.2%)	25.119***	2
Support/Solutions	42 (54.5%)	43 (26.9%)	37 (45.7%)	19.291***	2

Table 3. Cross-tabulation of PCM Level Category in relation to Crisis Types  
 Note: values are in frequencies (% within crisis type); \* =  $p < .05$ , \*\* =  $p < .01$ , \*\*\* =  $p < .001$

PCM Level Category					
Crisis Type	LPC (n = 78)	MPC (n = 233)	HPC (n = 9)	$\chi^2$	df
Natural Disaster	13 (16.9%)	60 (77.9%)	4 (5.2%)	4.606	2
Challenges	36 (45.0%)	44 (55.0%)	0 (0.0%)	26.822***	2
Technical-error	12 (15.0%)	64 (80.0%)	4 (5.0%)	6.253*	2
Human-error	12 (33.3%)	24 (66.7%)	0 (0.0%)	2.763	2
Organizational-misdeed	4 (8.9%)	40 (88.9%)	1 (2.2%)	6.976*	2

**Discussion**

Our results illustrate three valuable findings regarding how stakeholders and organizations interact on Twitter during crisis. First, we found that U.S. airlines encounter a variety of crisis types (victim, accidental, and preventable) (RQ1). The majority of the analyzed Tweets contained accidental crisis types, but preventable and victim were also represented. These findings indicate that airlines often encounter accidental and preventable crisis types on Twitter, which stakeholders expect organizations to take moderate and high levels of responsibility. How organizations respond to these crises is increasingly important as these levels of perceived responsibility also elicit moderate and severe reputational threats (Coombs & Holladay 2004; 2005). Consequently, organizations should be aware of different crisis types they could encounter on social media and prepare a crisis communication plan accordingly.

Many of the airlines that we analyzed included person-centered messages and strategies. Interestingly, most of the crisis response messages contained medium person-centered messages qualities (RQ2). Prior research that has examined person-centered messages in interpersonal contexts would suggest that competent communicators provide attention to the contexts in which the

communication is occurring (Burluson, 2007). It is valuable to note that while medium person-centered messages can be helpful, they are not appropriate for every interaction. The strategies also offered unique insights. For example, our analyses indicate that relatively few tweets contained *sympathy* and *responsibility*. The airlines in our sample instead provided relatively high numbers of *explanatory* messages. While the airlines did not attempt to use *blame* as a strategy, they could have modified their crisis response messages so that they were more in line with stakeholders' needs. For instance, while an explanatory approach might appear to be a factual and informative strategy, this does not necessarily provide comfort for stakeholders. Given that emotional support is also considered an ethical responsibility for organizations during a crisis (Coombs, 2007), we suggest that organizations go beyond explaining a situation and instead provide support to the negatively affected publics.

Our final set of analyses considered how crisis type influenced the use of airlines' person-centered messages. Interestingly, we found that the majority of our airlines' responses did not vary by cluster type (RQ3). *Victim*, *accidental*, and *preventable* crisis types all included high frequencies for medium person-centered messages. Overall, these findings suggest that airlines are not cur-

rently implementing a range of person-centered messages that correspond to issue type. SCCT (Coombs & Holladay, 2004; 2005) would suggest that these airlines should vary their crisis response messages based on levels of responsibility. Our findings (see Fig. 1 and Table 3) showcase that message quality (e.g., person-centered messages) is often under-emphasized in current applications of crisis communication. For example, highly person-centered messages were found relatively infrequently across the three crisis types. SCCT could potentially benefit from including message quality as part of the model. While speculative, we suggest that perhaps some of the negative outcomes that are associated with ongoing crises (e.g., David Dao) could be lessened with increasingly person-centered responses.

Moreover, several points can be raised from the airlines' use of PCM strategies. First, relatively few tweets showed sympathy and responsibility in response to crisis situations. Compared to the higher number of explanatory messages, perhaps our findings indicate that airlines chose to explain themselves in order to emphasize responsibility and an apologetic stance toward the affected public. Less than a majority of the tweets had support/solutions as a PCM strategy. Since support is a significant factor in PCMs (Jones, 2004; Spottswood, Walther, Holmstrom, & Ellison, 2013), we emphasize the importance of incorporating more supportive messages when responding to crisis.

### **Limitations and future directions**

Future examinations that investigate how airlines and other service organizations respond to crisis can be guided by our study's limitations. First, our analyses only included publicly available Tweets from January 2016 to May 2017. This data collection process did not allow us to view private conversations between consumers and the airlines. In several instances, airlines provided feedback that requested that the poster please follow up with the organization using private messages. It

is possible that the private conversations included more person-centered message qualities than the openly posted information. We are hopeful that more of the crisis events that we identified in our data were able to be resolved in private, rather than through the large-scale discussions that often took place on Twitter. Second, we selected Twitter as our sole platform for understanding how message quality varies during organizational crises. Notably, Twitter limits the length of posts. Other platforms, such as Facebook, hold potential for users and organizations to interact without these constraints. In other contexts, social media users might be able to implement more of the person-centered strategies that we advance in our analyses. For example, Facebook might provide a different domain that could encourage more "mention of other" or "sympathy/apologetic" responses for preventable crises than on Twitter. Additional research could examine how different social media platforms can influence how person-centered messages are provided in response to crisis.

Lastly, our data only reflects the crisis events that were discussed on social media. Each of the organizations that we examined provided responses using a variety of formats (e.g., press releases, press conferences, blogs). Our analyses were specifically attuned to the mediated support messages (i.e., Tweets) that these organizations provided. Future studies can examine the ways in which consumers and organizations make decisions about when and how they respond to crisis on social media.

We are hopeful that organizations and relevant stakeholders will strongly consider how they interact with each other on social media. Social media provide a valuable platform for organizations and stakeholders to communicate about crisis, but should be completed with care. As previously noted, message quality can play an important role in how the public evaluates crisis management.

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# Activist groups and Public Relations: examples from two Portuguese collapsed banks and their clients

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Activists seek to build sources of legitimacy, power and advocacy that increase their likelihood of being heard by whomever may decide in their favor. These actions allow them to restore the power imbalance of unequal access to resources. PR may be critical in this process as shown in previous research (e.g. Smith & Fergusson, 2001, 2010).

This study aims to understand how activist groups have turned to media in order to gain legitimacy and public visibility, as well as to the government as the authority that could listen to the problem and take decisions to solve it. We have used clipping and a simplified content analysis and interviewed six intermediaries, including journalists, activists' spokespersons and government representatives on negotiations.

Our main conclusion shows that the creation of activist associations involved a significant number of people. Also, several actions were taken to solve a problem - situation of the defrauded clients - including ensuring communication with the media and negotiating with the government in order to resolve the situation. This publicly active organization has made defrauded clients newsworthy and relevant to the negotiation process and therefore empowered them.

**Keywords:** critical public relations theory; activism; intermediaries; financial crisis; Portugal

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## Introduction

The banking system collapsed in the United States in 2008, with the bankruptcy of Lehman Brothers Bank. However, as we live in a globalized world, the crisis quickly spread to other countries, including Portugal. The

country began to be fragile, with the need for external aid from the International Monetary Fund (IMF) in 2011, which resulted in a financial bailout for the country. The crisis that affected the entire country brought consequences for the reputation of financial institutions, leading to a general disbelief and de-

crease of confidence in the banking system. This can also be tied to banks malpractices, embezzlement, corruption and ultimately to bank insolvency, as exemplified by the cases of the two institutions under study: Banco Português de Negócios (BPN) and Banco Espírito Santo (BES).

The communication of these bank institutions with their clients was considered non-existent. There was no attempt at all to negotiate, which forced the defrauded clients to find alternative solutions. Having invested their money in high-risk bank products with the promise of high profit, bank clients lost their savings when the bank's insolvency occurred. This strain has led to their mobilization in activist associations. These associations were created to promote conflict to attract media attention; gain legitimacy among public opinion; negotiate with authorities and ultimately, resolve the issue by recovering the invested money.

Activism studies tend to focus on public affairs and corporate practices, shared responsibilities amongst public and private sectors regarding the government, regulators and companies (e.g. Smith & Fergusson, 2001, 2010). Our approach moves away from a corporate-centric view of PR. The banks under study bankrupted and could not act to correct malpractices. A critical media and information studies approach, emphasizing "the dialectics of media and society, opportunities and risks, dominant groups and dominated groups", outline this study (Fuchs, 2011, p. 323).

Moreover, the problem occurred from a poor choice of bank clients who did not have enough knowledge about the high-risk financial product they purchased. In this sense, the way in which activist groups framed the issue with the support of the media, undermining legitimacy and the performance of the failed organization, eventually became a determining factor for the existence of negotiations with authorities and their outcome.

In this article, public engagement is at the

center of a financial problem and victims' visibility in the media seems enforced by PR. Therefore, we try to understand how activists (victims of BPN and BES malpractices) are organized to attempt to recover from power imbalance; highlighting the relationship established with the media, representatives of the government and supervising authorities and defrauded clients movements (intermediaries), pinpointing the role of public relations in the claims of these activist groups. Both activists and the government have used intermediaries for the negotiation and the activists have used media to gain access to the public arenas.

Mainly, our intention is to focus on the actions regarding activist groups and their use of the media to frame the issue, in the perceptions of the actors involved (journalists, intermediaries and journalists) and in the process that led to the resolution of the conflict.

The article is organized according to three main subjects. We start with a theoretical framework about activism and public relations; secondly, the interrelation between the concepts of citizenship, civic engagement and activism are analyzed and related to the research model; and finally, the empirical study is presented and discussed.

## 1. Activism and Public Relations Theory

In a world flooded with means, messages and images, visibility is a central resource. Traditionally, those who possess resources such as money, influence, power and reputation, gain and accumulate visibility in the media, including the internet (Fuchs, 2011). Although everyone may produce and diffuse information, not all information is visible to the same degree. Dominant figures, such as corporations or governments, tend to have more control and therefore receive more attention regarding their side of the story. As such, there is a 'resource imbalance' as the media usually tend to highlight the corporate interests and convey with external pressures

derived from those interests. But does this critical view stand when we look at social activism phenomenon? Or can differences and diverse patterns of power control be accommodated in the public arena, as postmodern public relations scholars argue?

The studies on activism have been approached in public relations, mainly, from a functionalist point of view centered in the organizations. Activist groups are considered undesirable in the relation between organizations and the public. Public relations is usually used to appease their demands or to create discourses to legitimize the organizations' performance in order to maximize profits (Demetrious, 2013). By legitimizing organizational actions and discourses, public relations have contributed to lessening the influence and power of activist groups.

The theory about public relations develops with social change and conditions of thought. Critical and postmodern currents emerge associated with the emancipation of publics and the complexity of the communicative needs of the markets. The functionalist approach, linear in its nature, does not follow the understanding needs of a postmodern, fragmented, relative, complex and chaotic society (e.g. Baudrillard, 2007; Bauman, 1992, 2000; Lash, 1990). The theoretical models do not allow the explanation of the social transformations provoked, to a certain extent, by the acceleration and technological evolution of the communication channels, by the exacerbation of risks and problems, by an increasing sharing of information and knowledge (e.g. Castells, 2009/2013).

Dialogue has to be developed in order to promote the co-creation of meanings (e.g. Smith & Fergusson, 2010), that is, to search for a new solution through the perspectives of the different parts in the negotiation (authorities and activist associations). This makes us challenge the dominant public relations theory of excellence and approach activism from the grassroots point of view (Demetrious, 2013; Wolf, 2018). Grassroots activism is seen as "a strand characterized by a commu-

nity-based response, and holistic, strategic campaigns conducted with the minimum of resources" (Demetrious, 2013, p. 2). The theoretical approach to this movement tends to be co-creational, seeking to understand the communicative and relational processes in the creation of meanings for the legitimation of activists' action in limiting the power of dominant groups (e.g. Coombs & Holladay, 2012; Smith & Fergusson, 2010). Those, usually single-issue groups, tend to disappear with the resolution of the matter. They have limited resources to go through with their campaign.

Therefore, activism research involves the functional and co-creative perspectives of PR studies, and both approaches are not irreconcilable (Taylor, 2010). Interaction between activists and organizations helps to create and frame issues. Focusing on their tactics assumes communication as having an instrumental function in supporting organizations in pursuit of their goals, regardless of whether they are prevaricating organizations or activists groups. In a co-creational approach, groups are co-creators of meaning and PR makes it possible to agree upon shared meanings, interpretations and goals. As stated by Taylor (2010) "public relations uses communication to help groups to negotiate meaning and build relationships" (p. 6).

Studies about activism tend to focus three interrelated concepts: issues, legitimacy and power. Besides the contribution of these concepts on the understanding of activism, research also contributes to the public relations (PR) theory development and provides some guidance for understanding "public relations role in shaping civil society" (Smith & Fergusson, 2010, p. 400).

The critical view of activism challenges the normative view of the PR discipline (e.g. Coombs & Holladay, 2012; Ciszek, 2015; Benecke & Oksiutycz, 2015; Wolf, 2018). According to critical theory (e.g. L'Étang, 2005), PR use communication to gain power and it is through this power that organizations manage to dominate publics. However, activists

with the help of an activist PR (postmodern design) can use power to transform their relationship with the organization. Considering power as “sociopolitical influence that evolve from interests expressed in competing vocabularies” (Heath, Motion & Leitch, 2010, p. 191), it is up to the public relations practitioner (and other professional communicators) to use communication to allow individuals, groups and organizations to earn leverage in a complex web of issues and events.

Critical scholars argue that this advantage tends to be earned by dominant groups through the use of media agendas as well as silencing less powerful voices, in order to maintain their privileged position in society (Edwards, 2009). As such, PR tends to favor those who use it in a professional approach, since earning advantage may require competencies acquired in academic education and practice (e.g. Demetrious, 2013).

The issues defended by the activist groups are in the interest of civil society and can be seen as legitimate by citizens. Activist issues tend to contradict installed political and economic powers. When properly framed by the media and by communicative actions that clarify and denounce the issues that cause disagreement, activist groups’ causes can win the sympathy of the public opinion. With the development of mass-self communication and personal media channels (Castells, 2009/2013) activist groups find other ways to “tell their story”, gain media relevance and create discourses that legitimize their causes. In addition, these groups also realize that they can use communication and public relations as tools for framing issues and gaining advocacy power.

As other types of organizations and publics, activist groups make media choices to develop their communicative action and draw the attention of the public opinion. These choices are crucial to the success of their cause and are made considering a practical perspective, associated with the volume of audiences, the credibility of the medium and the affinity with

the cause. As Hallahan (2010, p. 624) points out, “major public media help create broad public awareness of topics” and setting the public agenda of discussion. Following Hallahan’s proposal of an Integrated Public Relations Media Model (2010, p. 626), we consider that activist groups tend to use:

- Public Media to build awareness and enhance credibility; helps competing for public attention and includes media interview. Selection criteria includes: reach, audience expectation, salience, frequency and credibility
- Events to motivate participants (victims) reinforce existing beliefs and attitudes. It includes demonstrations, protests and selection criteria includes: salience, media attention and agenda-setting capability
- One-to-one to obtain commitment, frame negotiation and the resolution of problems. Selection criteria includes: personalization and attention-setting ability

Media social representation of activist groups is paramount for meaning making and “helps to understand how public relations affects the agency of activists to act independently of social constrains” (Demetrious, 2013, p. 32). In this research we intent to pinpoint how activist groups have used public media (mainstream Portuguese media) and events to gain legitimacy and public visibility. We also focus how they negotiate with the government as the authority that could listen to the problem and take decisions to solve it (one-to-one media).

Our research question is: *How did publicly active organizations make defrauded clients newsworthy and relevant to the negotiation process, therefore empowering them?*

## 2. Citizenship, civic engagement, and activism

Societies co-create and share their meanings taking into account the structures of power, the fundamental systems, and the communication flows that enable and impede the common good. “Activism, as a process of so-

cial change, remains grounded in individual and groups identifying conditions in society as problematic and then organizing to rectify them" (Hallahan, 2010, p. 638).

The ability to engage in social movements - to get organized in interest, dissension and vindicating movements - is tied to a political environment of citizenship (Kalu, 2017, p. 13). The possibility to struggle for individual rights, justice, and compensation for damages caused is related to a contingent dimension of citizenship and to citizenship-in-action with the intention of promoting social change, check the power of the state and build a social structure (Hauser, 1998). For most people, participation - in order to affect decision-making, promote justice and fairness - is choice-driven, and the extent of this participation depends on how they feel that addressing a particular issue will make a difference in their lives.

The average citizen has limited knowledge about the issues and the political-administrative context that informs them: "citizens lack 'inside' knowledge of how most bureaucracies work, the internal challenges they face or the political imperatives they have to secure" (Kalu, 2017, p. 90). As a consequence, citizens suffer from information asymmetry and their participation tends to be superficial. Asymmetrical communication patterns may lead to distortions, so it is important to remove restrictions on communication as well as creating communication opportunities. As argued by Habermas (1979), there is the need for "publicly, unrestricted discussion and communication" because it is "such communication at all levels of political and repoliticized decision-making processes" that allows a rational action (pp. 118-119).

Civic engagement desirably embraces discussions of legitimacy, access and communication. When people engaged in communicative action, while decision-making processes are taking place, they tend to acquire an intuitive grasp of reciprocity and moral consciousness about the discussed problems. As a consequence, political and administrative leaders

will spend their time "managing information, meaning and content, as well as perception" (Kalu, 2017, p. 82).

In the last decade, we have witnessed an increasing number of activist movements. These groups organize and plan strategies to pressure the dominant groups to solve issues they consider problematic. To achieve their purpose, they tend to engage in scenarios of crisis and conflict, promoting dissension, protest actions and discourses. The main claims are associated with rights and change of unfair policies or situations. Therefore activism is about the strategic use of the tools of change: "person-to-person organizing, employment of mass media, economic pressuring, public actions, skillful oratory, legal weaponry, quiet persuasion, education, steady vigilance, and even prayer" (Cieri & Peeps, 2000, p. 10).

Activist movements are social networks, gathering individuals with shared problems and purposes. Using Wasserman and Faust's (1994) conception, Sommerfeldt and Kent (2015) support that these organizations "comprised of discrete actors or nodes that are tied together by specific relations. Relational ties are the connections among actors that describe an activity (time spent together, collaboration), a form of affection (affinity/liking), bonding (trust), or type of exchange (resources/information)" (p. 239).

By analyzing the relational ties it is possible to identify individuals that manage to connect others that otherwise would not be able to have an active voice regarding their issues, "providing leverage and access to information and resources that the individual parties being connected do not have" (Sommerfeldt & Kent, 2015, p. 240). As such, these individuals, whom may also be called intermediaries, help to promote a well-developed network that will be able to accomplish tasks not easily (or impossible) attained alone. Frandsen and Johansen (2014) proposed a general theory of intermediaries in strategic communication defining the intermediary as an actor

whose primary function or mission is to mediate, that is, to represent an organization and/or a specific stakeholder group, and/or to intervene in the relationship between them either by furthering or by impeding the interests and activities of the organization in question and/or its stakeholders in a specific situation or over time (p. 320).

Activism includes civic engagement that may go beyond organization, having macro, mezo and micro level consequences. Although, according to Jelen-Sanchez (2017), there is a lack of attention from academia to the web of publics, participatory culture and publics' engagement. In the same vein, Sommerfeldt and Kent (2015) argue for the need of extending strategic communication and public relations theories from business and management to civil society organizations. It is, therefore, necessary to understand activism, identify activist publics, as well as to highlight the actions they develop to be heard in the public spheres.

Activist groups use media to call attention in order to frame and advocate their issue. In this process, public relations is essential for three purposes:

1. To convince that the activists' claim has legitimacy. That is, to persuade public opinion that BPN and BES victims have the right to recover their invested money despite the fact that they freely subscribed the high-risk bank products with the promise of higher profit;
2. To maintain cohesion of the activist group and sustain mobilization un public gatherings;
3. In the negotiations and advocacy efforts towards government intermediaries, being them the ones with the power and resources to help resolve the issue, meaning, to recover the invested money.

Considering Smith and Fergusson's model (2010), these purposes were achieved using informational activities to educate publics about issues (mostly media relations and

demonstrations) and legalistic activities to seek solutions to the issues (negotiations with government intermediaries).

In short, the defrauded clients who lost their savings have come together forming associations to claim their rights and participate in the negotiation with the dominant groups in order to change policy, force the recognition of an injustice and recover their money. Defrauded clients' organizations can be seen as activist movements, a network of organized and institutionalized people gathered by a common issue, competing for attention in public arenas (Sommerfeldt & Yang, 2017) and opposing the dominant groups (government and supervising authorities). How can we characterize the activist movements? What kind of PR actions they develop in order to be heard in the public spheres? These are both complementary questions we wish to answer.

### 3. Method

Critical public relations theory and a strategic communication general theory of intermediaries frame the theoretical model of analysis used in this study. The research question is: *How did publicly active organizations make defrauded clients newsworthy and relevant to the negotiation process, therefore empowering them?*

Using a mixed approach, this study aims to:

1. identify and characterize the defrauded clients of the banking institutions under study (BPN and BES)
2. understand what motivates the media coverage of the actions developed by those activist groups;
3. highlight how the activist groups relied on PR (played by representatives - intermediaries) to accomplish their goals

Data collection and analysis were done using clipping and in-depth interviews, as well as following the procedure explained below:

a) Clipping (collection, systematization, quantification and analysis of news): the clipping technique is carried out on the digital platforms of the Portuguese newspapers: *Público*, *Jornal de Notícias* and *Correio da Manhã*, since they were the most visited platforms in February of 2016 as demonstrated by Marktest (2016). News search was made using the terms “BPN” and “BES” in combination with the terms “defrauded”, “protests” and “manifestations”. This option has allowed the collection of purposeful news avoiding reports only focused on the bank crisis. Also, all the news found about the defrauded publics mentioned the collapsed bank institutions.

The period of analysis is variable since the institutions under study have collapsed at different periods. Thus, in the case of BPN, the data collection period runs between November 2008 and November 2009; in the case of BES, the data collection takes place between July 2014 and September 2015. The period of analysis last for about a year in the case of BPN, as the defrauded victims only integrated the media agenda in September 2009 and little attention was given to them. In relation to BES, the case made the media agenda more intensely in July 2014, but it was not until August 2014 that the defrauded public began to be mentioned in the news, having suffered a more intense coverage between February 2015 and September 2015.

Date, publication, title, author, source, journalistic genre, mentioned actors and institutions, newsworthiness criteria and tone (positive, negative or neutral) classify the collected news. The news framework follows a deductive approach because it is intended to verify the frequency of presence of certain categories in the news. The news is also analyzed according to the newsworthiness criteria in order to understand which criteria were used in the selection of events to permeate the media agenda. A selection of news criteria was made considering the works of Galtung and Ruge (1965): the moment of the event (breaking news is more likely to be disclosed); the negativity (that we have tied to

conflict); the intensity or magnitude of the event; the clarity of the event; personalization (public figures; economic and political elites); proximity; the consonance (with the prejudices); the surprise; continuity (“novels”); composition (balance of news); and the sociocultural values; and Harcup and O’Neill (2016): coverage of power elite stories (similar to personalization); celebrities (similar to personalization); entertainment; surprise; bad news (similar to negativity that can be tied to conflict); good news; magnitude (involving large numbers or extreme behaviors or occurrences); relevance perceived by audiences; follow-up (similar to continuity) and newspaper agenda (usually constrained by sociocultural values and external pressures).

The clipping data are subject to partial content analysis fulfilling the pre-analysis phases, which includes the exploration and treatment of the material; coding and categorization. Categories definition follows the criteria of mutual exclusion, homogeneity, pertinence, objectivity, fidelity, and productivity (Bardin, 1977). The inferences phase was not done since statistical analysis of the information was not carried out. Nevertheless, a simple categorization and the frequency of occurrences are presented.

b) In-depth semi-structured interview with the purpose of looking for quality information studied in depth. By analyzing the news collected, journalists’ contacts and names of the intervenient in the cases under study were identified and contacted via email. Snowball procedure was also possible after a first positive interview with Lusa’s journalist. She provided access to key contacts in order to reach a positive interview outcome. Consequently, six interviews were conducted with the following qualified informants (table 1):

The choice of informants has followed the five-part model of intermediaries (Frandsen & Johansen, 2014) – figure 1.

We have transcribed the interviews in full and to comply with the ethical interview protocol, we have sent the transcriptions to all inter-

Table 1. Interviewee and rationale of choice

Interviewee	Justification
Isabel Vicente	Expresso journalist who covered the BPN case.
António Henriques	President of BPN's national customer rights association (ANDDCB-PN).
Irina Melo	Lusa journalist who covered the BES case.
Ricardo Ângelo	President of the association of the defrauded clients of BES (AIEPC).
Nuno Vieira	Legal strategist of the defrauded clients of BES (AIEPC).
Diogo Lacerda Machado	Negotiator of the government for the case BES.

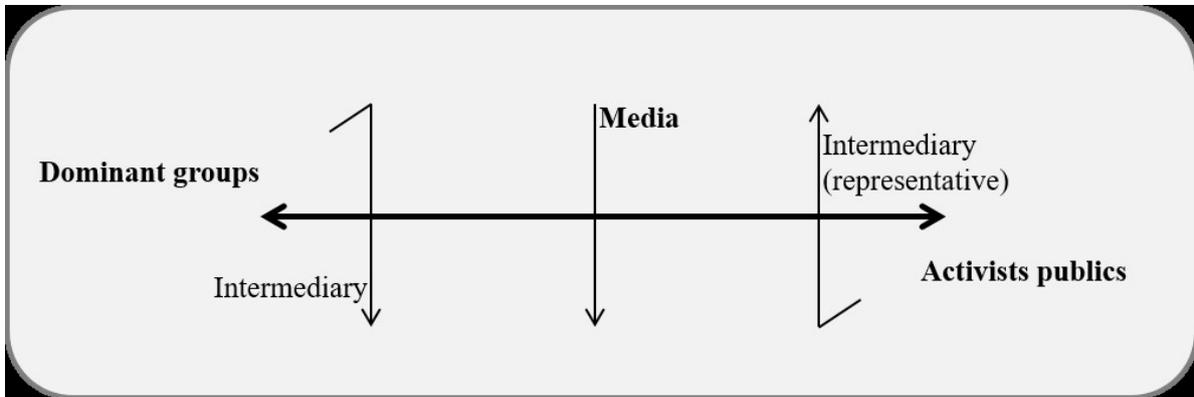


Figure 1. Five-part model of intermediaries in Strategic Communication. Adapted from Frandsen & Johansen (2014, p. 319)

viewees. Isabel Vicente, Irina Melo and Diogo Machado made minor corrections to the transcript; António Henriques agreed with all the transcribed text; Ricardo Ângelo and Nuno Vieira did not respond to the emails sent with the transcript.

The interviews were subject to an interpretive analysis, in order to understand the reality around the groups of activists resorting to extracts considered important to exemplify the results of the investigation.

## 4. Results Analysis and Discussion

This point is divided into three sub-points considering the study's objectives. In each sub-point, the results are presented considering the reading of the news collected and the in-depth interviews. Nevertheless 4.1. and 4.3. are mainly based on the interviews since there was little information about the topics in the analyzed news.

### 4.1 The activist movements from BPN and BES

The defrauded clients are a group of citizens who have somehow been harmed by the actions or goals of the banks under study. In this context, BPN and BES left a number of defrauded clients due to an alleged non-correct sale of commercial paper. Activist groups have framed the issue stating that the commercial paper was introduced to the bank customers as if it was a long time deposit, that is, a very safe investment. With the insolvency of the two banking institutions, the clients lost their invested money.

The defrauded clients of the BPN are represented by ANDDCBPN (National Association for the Defense of the Rights of Customers of BPN), an association chaired by António Henriques. According to the president of the association, the defrauded people of the BPN "are from a middle-low class" aged between 55 and 85 years of age.

The clients that consider their selves defrauded by BES are represented by the AIEPC (Association of the Indignant and Deluded of Commercial Paper) chaired by Ricardo Ângelo, who's also a victim. According to the interviewee, "a group was created, initially, with about 8 people who did not know each other... after about 15 days we had about 70 people". Taking into account the proportions of the case and the number of people involved, it was decided to create an association that could defend them.

Both Diogo Machado (Government intermediary in the BES negotiations) and Irina Melo (journalist) support that the creation of the association was an added value (figure 2).

The intermediaries of AIEPC are the president Ricardo Ângelo and the lawyers Nuno Vieira and Luís Miguel Henrique (figure 3). Nuno Vieira appears in the association because of the existing need to hire "a litigation lawyer, to protect the deadlines of the people and the legal actions that have to enter in court" and Luís Miguel Henrique, for his experience since he had already been involved in previous bank insolvencies.

AIEPC currently has 1200 anonymous members, mostly aged over 65 and belonging to a middle-low social class. As said by Ricardo Ângelo, "the biggest fringe of associates is people with less money because those with more money do not expose themselves this easily". With regard to the invested amount, he adds that "about 95% of people have less than 500,000 euros invested". Nuno Vieira also points out that the victims have a particularity in common: "they subscribed products that were not suitable to their investor profiles, they are people characterized by being unskilled investors".

According to the testimonies received in both cases, it is possible to summarize that: the defrauded bank clients have low financial literacy and belong to a middle-low aged social class. Despite the different impact of the two associations, the characterization of their members is quite similar.

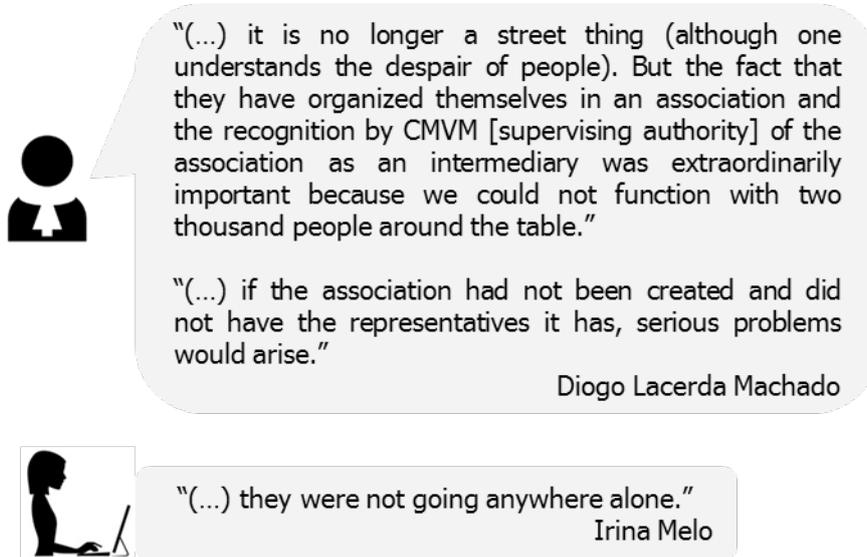


Figure 2. Declarations about the Associations' importance

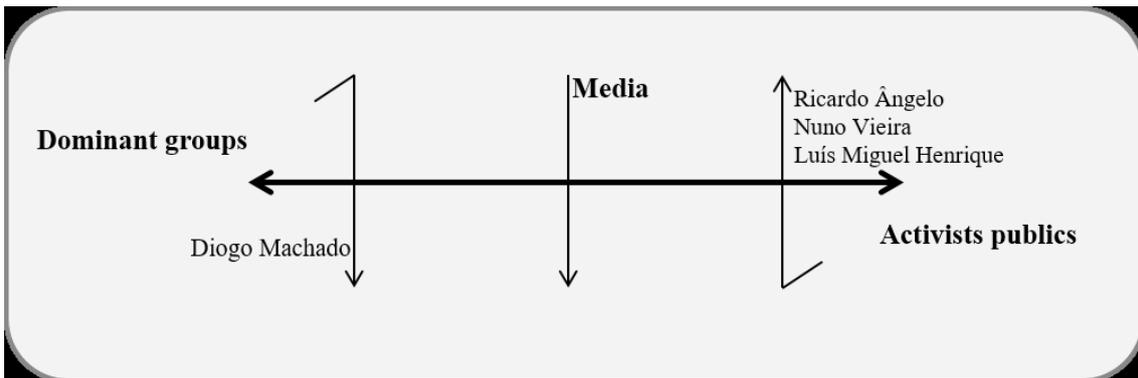


Figure 3. Intermediaries in BES case



Figure 4. Number of news by considered publication

The profile of the victims reinforces the way the issue is framed by the associations and promoted by media coverage. Bank defrauded clients are presented as having low financial knowledge and being vulnerable to less ethical persuasion for high-risk investment products. The reality of the victims undermines the discourse of banks, authorities and even the real fact that they willingly adhere to the investments. If the global financial crisis had not worsened and the institutions had not failed, these clients would benefit from high gains from the investments.

#### 4.2 The news coverage of the activist movements

As illustrated in figure 4, the BPN defrauded clients movements barely integrated the media agenda (13 news items).

Considering the critical theory of PR, there may have been economic and political interests pressuring for a more “silenced” media coverage, regarding the BPN case. News reading shows focus on financial and political issues, bank crisis and collapse, as well as the absence of attention to the defrauded clients.

Amongst the reasons for low media coverage of the BPN defrauded clients situation, the interviewees have outlined the existence of a strong political class and organizational focus of journalists attracted by the bank managers malpractices (figure 5). The actions of the activist groups did not reach a high media profile, therefore they have not considered newsworthy. Besides, there was the belief amongst public opinion that the state itself and the European supervising authorities would be able to solve the problem.

In the BES case, the activist association of defrauded clients was able to make its voice heard in the public arena thanks to a strong media coverage (177 news items) - figure 4 - resulting of the use of events and mainstream public media (Hallahan, 2010). The interviewees stated that the media presence in the BES case was justified by the proportions of the situation itself (figure 6). This ev-

idence highlights the possibility to use PR to equalize power control and to co-create new meanings in the public sphere.

The newsworthiness criteria guided the selection of events that should compose the media agenda (table 2). In the BPN case, the criterion that stands out the most is related to conflict (11), which refers to events that induce the practice of acts related to physical or symbolic violence. In the analyzed pieces of news, there were expressions such as “confrontation” and “conflict” that referred to a direct association with violence. This climate of tension was generated mainly in the demonstrations. In addition, relevance (8) and personalization (7) constituted values that directed the media coverage.

Concerning the BES case, the criterion that most oriented the media coverage was also related to conflict (132), while the second most commonly found criterion was personalization (116). Another present criterion was relevance (56), making it important to cover the events related to the BES victims because there was a need to explain to people the crisis in BES as well as its implications.

The tone was judged against the text of the news. News pieces defined as negative the use of expressions such as confrontation, conflict, protest, invasion, police intervention, threat and aggression, while on the other hand they considered as positive the referral to the rights of the defrauded clients and the whole scenario involving the negotiation towards a solution of the situation. Finally, news with a neutral tone tend to use a denotative language, which does not reflect any position, being irrelevant in this case. Taking this into account, it is understood that both cases represented in this article were faced mostly with news of a negative tone (BPN: 11; BES: 132). In each case, only one news item can be classified as having a positive tone.

Isabel Vicente reveals that interest in covering the events related to the BPN wrongdoers arose because it was necessary to “explain what had been done wrong, giving voice to

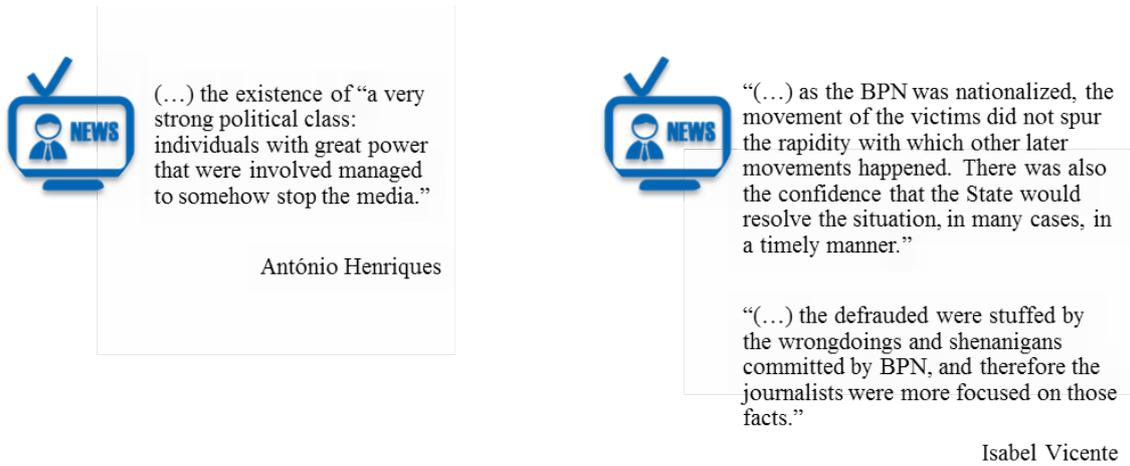


Figure 5. Motives for low media coverage of the BPN defrauded clients

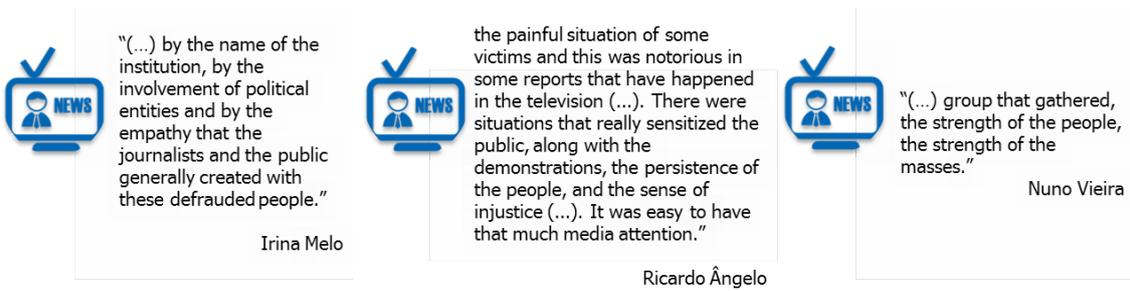


Figure 6. Motives for the high media coverage of the BES defrauded clients

Table 2. News values found in the analysis

Galtung and Ruge (1965)	Harcup and O’Neill (2016)	Found in the analysis
Moment of the event		
Negativity	Bad News	Conflict
Magnitude	Magnitude	Magnitude
Clarity		
Personalization	Power elite stories Celebrities	Personalization (power elite and intermediaries)
Proximity		
Consonance		
Surprise	Surprise	
Continuity	Follow-up	Follow-up
Composition		
Sociocultural values	Newspaper agenda Entertainment Good news	Sociocultural values and external pressures
	Relevance perceived by audiences	Relevance perceived by audiences

the people who had been deceived". Regarding the tone used by the news, the journalist says that it is important to look at the context of the events in order to see if they are negative or positive. Isabel Vicente believes that the image was positive, however "in all cases there are immoderations. The context in which the defrauded public was protesting was a context of whom had lost everything or almost everything, so it was enough to exalt themselves for others to be exalted". However, António Henriques says that the political power also had an influence on the coverage and on the victims' media image. According to the president of the BPN victims association, "we bothered the instituted power; we must not forget that the former President of the Republic had advisers that were involved in the scheme that brought prejudice to the clients of the bank". Isabel Vicente corroborates this view by saying that she has never felt any embarrassment in publishing any news about the BPN case.

In the case of BES, Ricardo Ângelo said that it was the conflict that brought to the victims the media attention they needed. According to the president of the association "what was important was to make some noise and hit hard at 12:58 (...) to be in the news" Nuno Vieira points out that the conflict did not exist, it was mostly created by the media. Nevertheless, the presence of defrauded clients in demonstrations was already considered to be conflicting due to their degree of activism. Irina Melo said that the importance of covering the events related to the defrauded public of BES arose because "it is the defrauded ones that demonstrate the impact that the fall of a bank with the size of BES has in personal lives."

Nuno Vieira also said that there were some inaccuracies in the news that may have contributed to a misleading image of the victims. Opinion makers often expressed misguided and misleading opinions about BES's wrongdoers. Diogo Machado, referring to what happened in the working group, revealed that "there is some malicious journalism (...) we

release notes that have useful and substantive information but then many times... what seems more interesting is the worst side, the so called perspective from the next door".

Irina Melo believes that the media image of the victims was essentially positive because the dominant group has tried to blame the defrauded for their misfortune, regarding the bad investment in risky financial products. For the journalist, "what contributed positively was the fact that politicians and governors came out to say that the problem had nothing to do with BES, but with the group of defrauded clients". These actions created an effect that may have been of empathy with the defrauded clients. In the journalist's words, the general public may react with: "Poor ones, it could have been me investing my money there". She also notes that there are some constraints to reporting events related to BES: "until almost the eve of the BES clash, it was one of the largest banks; BES was an historical enterprise with economic and political power and journalists are people, it is a deadlock".

BES, as evidenced by Marktest's report on Portuguese advertising investment in July 2009, was one of the largest advertisers (Marktest, 2009) and this leads to a constrain on the journalistic activity that relies on advertising to stay in the market. In the case of Lusa (Portuguese news agency), the pressure is not so evident because it has no advertisers. However, there was a close relationship between the bank's administrator (Ricardo Salgado) and some journalists, which made it difficult to publish some news due to external pressures. As Irina Melo points out, "the more reputation and more political and business strength companies have, the harder it is to do this work".

From our analysis, news appear to have a non-corporate bias despite the power and influence of BES as an advertiser. On one hand, this may be due to the sympathy about the way the issue was framed by the activist group. On the other hand, the corporation collapsed and its owner was charged for

fraud and corruption. As such, information about malpractices and the lack of legitimacy of the corporation behavior seem to favor the “victims” claim.

As evidenced previously, the media are vehicles used by the defrauded clients to frame their claim within public opinion. The media agenda is composed of a set of events selected considering newsworthiness criteria (Galtung & Ruge, 1965; Harcup & O’Neill, 2016). The spokespeople of the associations (intermediary) acknowledge, to some extent, the criteria that guides the selection of news. By acknowledging this, it allows them to promote themselves within the media space (intermediary type II). At the same time, the objectives of the activists with promotion in the media space are aimed at drawing public attention and pressing some dominant groups (McCombs, 2005; McQuail, 2000). By conquering media space, defrauded clients could gain symbolic power and raise awareness about the relevance of their issue (Edwards, 2009b).

It is important, however, to remember that media coverage is significant while the issue is new. When the issue reaches a dormant stage and appears resolved - or there is clearly no solution - resources and media attention diminish. In this sense, the activist associations and their visibility tend to have a short duration.

### 4.3 Activist groups and PR

External to business and state, activist groups have a “bottom up” positioning, since their power arises from it and from their capacity for protest. The mission of the activist associations in this case was representation and access to the negotiation table. As underdogs, they needed to create a particular view for society built with the journalists help, because their cause would certainly gain visibility by going mainstream.

In this point, we analyze how activists use communication and PR to frame their issue and gain legitimacy; the role of media in tell-

ing the activists story and serving as an intermediary type II in the process.

Regarding the role of a PR or spokesperson representing the victims, Isabel Vicente states that in the BPN case, the existence of a PR to handle the communication was not needed. In her words: “is not worth it because there are a lot of PR people wanting to communicate product for example, and we do not write, although they stay very professional but still, we do not write ... So I think it does not make any difference”. For António Henriques, the spokesperson does not have the power alone, as he says, “I am a spokesperson but behind me, there was an association and we always had the associates who accompanied us in the demonstrations”. António Henriques was responsible for organizing the actions taken by the victims and for establishing the relationship with the media. He said that the support of the media is an added value since it gives a voice to the group.

As he had no training in public relations, the president of ANDDCBPN contacted communication agencies to assist him in handling the communication. However, these required large costs that were simply not bearable for the association.

There were some constraints that António Henriques had to overcome. To deal with the difficulties of mobilization, the representative of the victims of the BPN adopted a simple strategy. In addition to creating the association that gave the defrauded more power and mobilization force, he organized several demonstrations. António Henriques at a general assembly of the ANDDCBPN told the victims

we do not go to the villages, we go to the district capitals. As we did a demonstration in Leiria, we understood that we could have a lot of people there because of the proximity... eight days later I staged another demonstration in the same place and... this the second time, I was able to speak with the Secretary of State.

For the president of ANDDCBPN, the resolution of the case was achievable by the negotiation issue tied to the willingness of the government to negotiate.

Irina Melo states that the fact that the movement's spokesperson was not a PR had no impact on the media coverage of the BES victims. According to the journalist, "it was a very strong movement by itself; it represented many people".

The magnitude and relevance perceived from the activists' claims was enough to assure media coverage. Still, notable individuals (e.g. political party leaders) and institutions (e.g. supervising authorities, government) were also involved, increasing the relevance and adding the personalization news value. Institutions such as the Bank of Portugal (14), the political party CDS-PP (11) and political party leaders like Pedro Passos Coelho (10) and Paulo Portas (5) were mentioned in the news related to the victims of BES. The presence of these political party leaders and relevant institutions made the media appointment more likely to meet the newsworthiness criterion of personalization. This criterion can, therefore, be considered a strategy used by the activists to assure their presence in the media space.

Ricardo Ângelo, Nuno Vieira and Luís Miguel Henrique were the spokespeople for the AIEPC, representing the defrauded clients of BES in the negotiations with the authorities and answering to any media inquiries.

According to the president of the association, "it was a process in which we made many mistakes in the beginning because, of course, we did not have any type of media experience or communication ... this lesson was learned by force and later learned also with some help". Despite the difficulties sometimes felt, AIEPC never appointed communication agencies services.

As said by Ricardo Ângelo "there were initially several approaches from various communication agencies, the problem is that we did

not have the funds to pay the communication agencies". For Nuno Vieira, this relation with agencies was never established because, in his opinion, there were people in the association with the capacity to perform this function. In addition, Ricardo Angelo adds that

we have not worked with any communication agency because we have a limited duration, we do not have the capacity to feed a communication agency and of course, communication agencies are always loyal to those who guarantee them during years.

Diogo Machado also said that there was no means to engage a media advisor, however, there was a group of people who did the work. In this sense, "Manuel Magalhães is a lawyer for the BES liquidation committee, who did an immense and absolutely extraordinary work from a technical point of view, and which was always very available" to produce info notes for the journalists. He further states that "if we could have disposed of the means of someone very experienced, we probably could have had a fuller, more in-depth, assured communication". However, after the formation of the working group, communication with the media was always safeguarded by written notes. According to Diogo Machado,

what we agreed upon was that when it was useful to give some general information, we would produce a handwritten note... and we also agreed that the disclosure of the note would be done through Lusa [Portuguese news agency] to avoid discriminatory and unequal treatment.

In terms of media promotion strategy, the group of victims took advantage of the political campaign period since, at the time, legislative elections were taking place in Portugal, and therefore the rallies were used by the defrauded public to protest and claim. In addition, a planned strategy was designed at the Social Democratic Party (PSD) and the Socialist Party (PS), these being the two main parties aiming for the win in the elections. The strategy was to present a proposal for a solu-

tion to the case of the victims, as described by Nuno Vieira. The strategy took effect and, although the PSD did not accept it, António Costa - leader of the PS - took advantage of the proposal in his political campaign to obtain votes. With his appointment as Prime Minister, Antonio Costa did not leave aside the situation of the defrauded and nominated Diogo Machado as a government intermediary in the negotiation with the activist group.

In addition to these actions, Nuno Vieira says, “we used the idea that the government was compromising, whenever the government committed we immediately tried to be ahead, using an amplification strategy to have more impact”. Ricardo Angelo said that communication was his best strategy, anchored in “simple voices” with effective communication skills and low rhetoric complexities.

Several studies point to the PR as an intermediary of the communication between the organization and its publics. However, this perspective is unidirectional because organizations make decisions without public involvement. Moving away from an organizational-centric vision of PR, postmodern public relations theory has shown that public activists can also play public relations roles, using communication and building strategies to achieve their goals (Ciszek, 2015, Benecke & Oksitycz, 2015).

Activists may use public relations strategies with two objectives: to influence public opinion in order to correct situations they consider problematic and to maintain cohesion in a structured and organized way. To do so, they use a set of conflicting strategies - boycotts, demonstrations, events with dramatic projection - and other information that aims at the public's understanding of the activists' problems. These strategies involve relations with the media in order to gain public attention. This attention may give the activists greater mobilization force and amplify their voices.

In the cases under study, the activist groups developed conflicting actions (e.g. demon-

strations) and informational actions (e.g. written notes), sent to *Lusa* (Portuguese news agency) aiming at informing public opinion of what was happening in the BES-related working group. For these actions to gain public attention, it was important that the group of defrauded clients developed relations with the media. The relationship established with the media was sometimes forced by the activist group, as they planned their actions according to the newsworthiness criteria. The most commonly used criteria were conflict and personalization. The conflict occurred whenever there were demonstrations and the personalization occurred whenever the victims attempted to increase media attention through important individuals or institutions (e.g. Bank of Portugal - supervising institution; political leaders such as António Costa) - figure 7.

The use of public relations by the activist groups under study did not have professional status. They were not developed by professionals with knowledge and expertise in the field, framed by professional associations or conventions (Demetrious, 2013, p. 8). Those who developed the communication and public relations actions were individuals with training in other areas (e.g. dental medicine, law) with influential personal networks.

## Conclusions

To answer the research question: *How did publicly active organizations make defrauded clients newsworthy and relevant to the negotiation process and therefore empowered them?* We have analyzed the communicative practice from the activists point of view, trying to understand the perceived importance of their contribution in the discussion of the subject and search for a solution to the problem that led to the creation of activist associations as well as the appointment of their spokespersons in the process of mobilization and negotiation.

Research have traced the public relations goals of activist organizations and the means

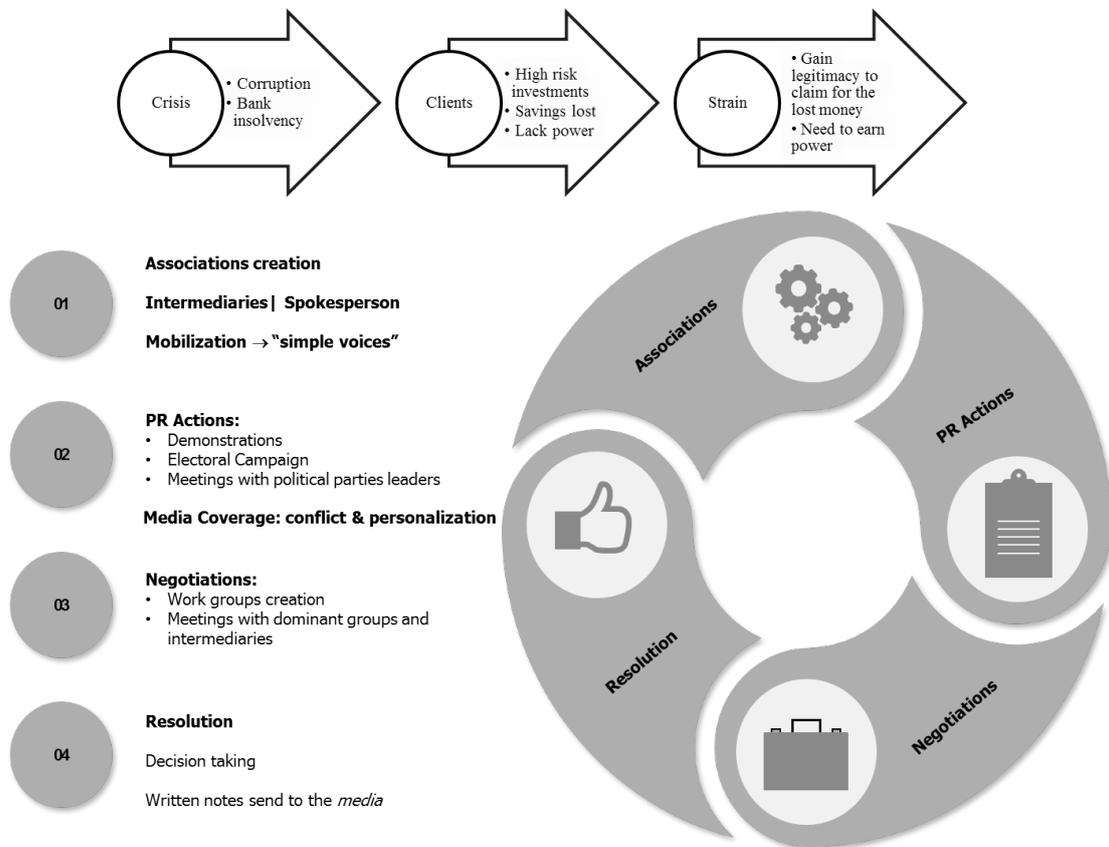


Figure 7. Summary of communication and PR actions developed by groups of defrauded Portuguese bank clients

by which they pursue those goals. In this study, activist groups defined and addressed the issue of having lost their savings due to bank malpractices. In a first moment, the victims started to gather in activist organizations. These organizations were helpful to strategically create conflict and conditions for conflict (in demonstrations); engage in media relations providing information about the victims' situation, testimonials and nominating spokespersons for media interviews and for the negotiations with the authorities.

The defrauded clients of BPN and BES are a group of aged people belonging to a low-middle-income social class with little schooling who were deceived by BPN and BES. They had been wrongly advised to buy high-risk bank products and therefore lost their money when the bank collapsed. The degree of involvement of these publics with the orga-

nization was high; however, the degree of knowledge was low. The defrauded clients only realized their deception when they lost their saving. Their knowledge of the risks only increased after the formation of activist associations who focused on active communication, between the victims and the general public, through the media.

From our analysis, it was possible to see that the leaders of the activist groups played PR roles. The creation of the associations involved a significant number of people; actions were taken to solve a problem (situation of the defrauded clients), including ensuring communication with the media and dialoguing with the government in order to resolve the situation. This publicly active organization has empowered the defrauded publics to make them newsworthy and relevant in the negotiation process. It is concluded that pub-

lic relations is important for communicative action that assures media attention (organization and mobilization of manifestations; information notes elaboration and dissemination; knowledge and newsworthiness criteria usage) without its practice being effectively developed by professionals in the area.

Some of the interviewees contended that communication agencies are too expensive and in these cases unnecessary because the activists' cause was already considered high-profile and newsworthy, easily being able to create empathy within journalists and audiences. Following Harcup and O'Neill (2016) the cases under study were perceived to be relevant to the audiences. From the intermediaries' point of view, communication agencies are not interested in working with a short period time association and some members of the association had the needed knowledge and personal influence to maintain profitable media relations.

Besides understanding the role of the media as promoters of participatory democracy and the importance of media relations within this context, we present an alternative vision to the normative approach of public relations where activist publics are perceived as an organizational problem. By adopting a critical view, the practices of the activist groups are the same as those used by the PR, and activist publics are to be considered as more than just external audiences of the organization. They have a role to play in negotiation and in the co-creation of meaning in public and political spheres. Finally, the critical approach is fundamental to the understanding of power balance between dominant and non-dominant groups, especially if we look at the media – economic conglomerates, sometimes tied to the contested dominant groups – as possible equalizers that give voice to defrauded publics in the public arenas (intermediaries type II – Frandsen & Johansen, 2014).

We consider the case of BES as a different kind of activism, because defrauded clients managed to frame a story of victimization. Nevertheless, in reality, they have made a

high-risk investment that went wrong. If it had gone right, they would be wealthy today. With the bank's bankruptcy, every taxpayer in Portugal have paid the bill of the ones who have "gambled" their money. Therefore, maybe the real victims are the taxpayers.

Considering that the problem of defrauded publics of BPN and BES is not closed (BES negotiation has fixed installments of the money) it is important to finalize the analysis trying to understand if the agreements are fulfilled.

It would be interesting, in future researches, to try to apprehend at a more comprehensive level the activist groups' way of acting and the organizations' responses to them. It would also be relevant to apply a network analysis model to understand the relations between the activist groups' leaders, intermediaries and structural holes. Another interesting study would be to appreciate what characteristics these leaders have to make them arise amongst the defrauded publics.

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# Crisis communication during a national fire disaster

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This paper combines two topics: “government public relations and public crisis communication” with the “erosion of trust in (public) authorities”. It is difficult to discuss public crisis communication without considering the damages and implications to people’s trust in public and governmental institutions.

**Purpose:** Study a particular severe situation that forced the Portuguese government to react and communicate with the public to then draw conclusions about the consequences of that reaction/communication. Mainly, establish a correlation between the government’s performance, its response strategy to the crisis that followed a big fire and the growing lack of trust in political bodies.

**Methodology:** This research followed two sequential procedures - a stakeholder analysis and a content analysis applied to information materials collected from the Portuguese government official portal, between 17 June and 12 October 2017.

**Findings:** The results point out for a crisis response strategy that tries to avoid the citizen’s distrust emphasizing the government’s competence dealing with the fire issue and its consequences.

**Research limitations:** Being a sensitive issue, there were difficulties in the direct access to eventual goals and strategies behind the crisis management in the reported situation. In addition, because this is an exploratory study the citizen’s opinion is not yet included in this research stage.

**Originality/value:** Looking at the links between the issues of ‘crisis communication’ and ‘trust’ the study intends to bring awareness to the important role that public relations function can play in helping governments to manage communication in a crisis context, providing enlightening for future crisis that may harm the trust in political institutions.

**Keywords:** Government Public Relations; Crisis Communication; Political Trust; Digital Communication Platforms

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## Introduction

The present study intends to identify the response strategy of the Portuguese government during a major fire that caused the death of many people and relate it with the political crisis that followed with the resignation of the Internal Affairs Minister and several other national authorities. In this scenario public authorities and ministers were severely criticized and even the President of the Republic, Marcelo Rebelo de Sousa, demanded for a rigorous assessment of the juridical contours of what happened, with a civil accountability of the public administration.

In the origin of this analysis was the assumption that there is a link between the responses given by political authorities during difficult situations and the lack of trust in political institutions. This assumption made it possible to combine the topic of 'government and public crisis communication' (subsumed in the main theme of the 25<sup>th</sup> edition of the Bledcom Symposium) with the 'erosion of trust in (public) authorities'.

It is important to begin by clarifying the context of the crisis under analysis in this work. First, 'crisis' and 'disaster' are seen as two different concepts, more so because the situation that underlies the study refers firstly to a natural disaster that arose unexpectedly and which has gradually been aggravated in such a way that exceeded the community and the authorities responsiveness (Jeggle, 2001, p. 318 in Yin and Jing, 2014:98). It was in the face of the events caused by the consequences of the Pedrógão Grande fire that the national authorities were confronted with a crisis, as they faced a "threat in their structure and values, given the uncertainty and pressure imposed by the disaster and were forced to take critical decisions" (Rosenthal, Charles and Hart, 1989, p. 10, in Yin and Jing, 2014:98), which turned out to be strongly contested and resulted in the departure of various governmental elements and senior officials who had the political confidence of the government. Thus this political crisis resulted on a lack of confidence in the authorities' actions

and their capacity to take decisions and deal with the various problems that have arisen. At the same time, it is difficult to clearly separate the responses to the disaster situation and the political crisis due to criticisms and accusations about the government's action during this disaster management.

This paper adopts the definition of crisis from Boin et al. (2005:2) that use this concept "when policy makers experience a serious threat to the basic structures or the fundamental values and norms of a system, which under time pressure and highly uncertain circumstances necessitates making vital decisions". In their view there are three key components addressed: threat, uncertainty and urgency. This means we are in presence of a crisis when "core values or life-sustaining systems of a community come under threat" (Ibidem, 2005:2-4), which was true in the case of Pedrógão fire where occurred serious life-threats that resulted in severe losses that the authorities were not able to address properly. This ultimately caused structural and functional changes both in practices and policies making; also "the perception of threat is accompanied by a high degree of uncertainty" which in the situation in study had a particular impact on the victims who felt helpless to act and did not know what was going to happen to them nor how they would be rescued or how their situation would be solved. But also a great deal of uncertainty by the security authorities and political leaders that were not able to fulfil their main duty to protect citizens; finally the urgency of the whole situation has to do with time comprehension making the crisis real and in need of immediate attention and action.

Coombs also defines crisis as "the perception of an unpredictable event that threatens important expectations of stakeholders related to health, safety, environmental, and economic issues, and can seriously impact an organization's performance and generate negative outcomes" (Coombs, 2015:3). In this understanding there is a larger correspondence to the reality of private organizations,

although the focus of the concept lies in the same arguments.

There has been a wide discussion about crises, crisis management, disasters and catastrophes, whether in a prevention perspective or in a solution / outcome perspective (Bundy, Pfarrer, Short and Coombs, 2017) and resilience post-crisis. However the picture of crises and disasters is changing not only in its nature and consequences, but also in its frequency, as Arjen Boin (2009) warns in his introduction to a special issue in the *Review of Policy Research* focused on the new challenges of public crisis, risk and disaster management. The case is also addressed by Patrick Lagadec and Benjamin Topper (2012) in their article on "How Crises Model the Modern World." Of course, this change "poses new challenges to political-administrative elites" and forces us to rethink the research agenda in the public sector (Boin, 2009:367).

Boin specifically refers three types of challenges for crisis management and policy making: political-administrative challenges related with the development of structures and bodies able to face sudden adversity; the challenge of resilience where governments have to be competent in re-establishing some normality; the challenge of deep-thinking to innovate and cope with newer threats (Boin, 2009:370). Facing the job to deal with crisis and disasters in a successful way seems impossible, so five executive tasks are presented to deal with the difficulties: 1. preparing for indifference; 2. making sense of an emerging and evolving crisis; 3. managing large response networks; 4. offer credible answers; 5. learning under pressure (Ibidem, 2009:371-374).

Even so the assessment of the effectiveness in crisis management is possible: "if things happen with actions that minimize the impact of a threat; if the job gets done with cooping entities; if work arounds when routines hamper; if authorities and political leaders fulfil the symbolic need for direction and guidance" (Boin et al., 2013:81).

In a text proposing a new agenda for crisis management research, Hart, Heyse, and Boin make their point by listing a set of observations attesting that all these challenges stem from three core trends in crisis management practice: the evolution from an industrial towards a risk society; the development from a heroic to a besieged crisis response; the change from episodic to continuous crisis management (Hart, Heyse, and Boin, 2001:182).

There is clearly a paradigm shift that crisis communication must follow to enable a more effective response to disaster and crisis management. Donald Macrae (2014) presents an innovative vision that proposes the development of a 'concern assessment' done in parallel with the more technical traditional risk analysis. In essence, what is proposed is that politicians take into account the public's anxiety and demonstrate knowledge and concern about the issues that embarrass the public at the time of giving their answers. This is a more humane and close understanding of the concerns of citizens and victims involved in disasters and crises. This is relevant because preparing a response to a disaster can become in itself a political problem.

As already noticed, this paper focuses specifically on a crisis that affects a political body that manages a wide range of public entities, managing public interests and wills. Interestingly, this is a poorly explored sector when it comes to research crisis management and crisis communication, being more common to find studies and theories that address the crisis from a perspective of private corporations or NGOs and their "efforts in sustaining and restoring image and trust" (Olsson, 2014:113).

Due to this trend in the Crisis Communication research, less attention has been paid to the differentiated nature of public communication and corporate communication in response to crises (Liu and Horsley, 2007; Tracy, 2007 in Olsson, 2014:113), which in itself justifies the contribution of the present study. Boin et al. (2005:70) also notice that

much of the literature in crisis communication is “embedded in management and public relations analysis in the corporate sector” and is “missing a systematic understanding of the specific challenges of crisis communication in the public sector”.

Given the particular interest of the government sector vis-à-vis its large-scale crisis and disaster management responsibilities and the need of complex communication structures able to address issues in times of crisis, it is relevant to further develop studies on new approaches within crisis communication research beyond its traditional focus (Olsson, 2014: 113).

## Political Trust in a Crisis Context

Distrust in democracy and in democratic institutions it is not a recent phenomenon but due to recurrent economic crises and also because of the increasing delegitimation of the national political authorities regarding international decision bodies, we’ve been facing a collapse of trust in government and public institutions (van der Meer, 2017; Edelman, 2017; Randeria in Bradley, 2017). There are many studies and analysis that point out to democratic systems all around the world facing pressure and countercharge. Today with more transparent societies, more informed citizens and growing distrust in politicians and government regulations there are some voices fearing we reached a tipping point where “liberal democracy may be coming to an end” (Bradley, 2017:online). For the director of the Albert Hirschman Centre on Democracy, Simon Bradley, this may be a quite radical statement. He believes that in a certain way “the spread of democracy has turned into a crises of democracy” due to different factors like: (1) new media and modern communication, (2) memory failure of totalitarian regimes (what he calls ‘historical amnesia’), (3) overpromising of political bodies, (4) inequalities with failure of the welfare state (Ibidem, 2017:online). More troubling is that citizens now may feel that their vote doesn’t deliver social or economic improvements because

politicians have no more power to meet the guidelines demanded by global markets and international institutions. They also demand for more “accountability of authorities” and watch the “raise of the citizen consumer” whose interactions with the public services is seen only as a way to fulfil his needs faster and with higher quality, narrowing the exercise of authority from those who represent us (Hurenkamp et al., 2012:43).

All of this leads to resentment and disenchantment that causes lack of trust in political elites and institutions (Bradley, 2017:online). Michel Crozier, Samuel Huntington and Joji Watanuki first brought this issue to attention when they claimed the “increasing delegitimation of authority” in their 1975 report “*The Crisis of Democracy*”.

“Dissatisfaction with and lack of confidence in the functioning of the institutions of democratic government have thus now become widespread in Trilateral countries. Yet with all this dissatisfaction, no significant support has yet developed for any alternative image of how to organize the politics of a highly industrialized society” (Crozier et al., 1975:158–159).

This dissatisfaction with political bodies was recently introduced by Jean-Claude Juncker, former president of the European Committee, when he stated that one of the biggest problems of the EU is precisely the “public negativity about politics and politicians” (Juncker, 2014 in van der Meer, 2017:2). In the same way, a study from the Portuguese Society Observatory pointed out that almost 60% of Portuguese citizens distrust the government for solving both national and international problems (Vale and Moreira, 2016). *This is why different politicians and researchers have appealed to the political class moralization in order to recover people’s trust.*

*The narrative about the so-called ‘democratic recession’ (Bradley, 2017) has prevailed over several decades leading to research and debate worldwide (Citrin and Luks, 2001:25 in van der Meer, 2017) and it is based in the as-*

sumption that political trust is fundamental for democracy and political order (Schneider, 2016:964; Zmerli and van der Meer, 2017).

Without trust in democratic governance we may risk the stability, efficiency and quality of representative governance and its institutions - whether being the parliament, political parties, local or central government structures, courts, law enforcement bodies and individual actors (Dalton, 2004; Tebaldi and Calaresu, 2016; van der Meer, 2017; Zmerli and van der Meer, 2017).

Also professor Russell J. Dalton in his book *“Democratic Challenges, Democratic Choices: The Erosion of Political Support in Advanced Industrial Democracies”* worries that the political distrust in the democratic system may “undermine the democratic process itself” (Dalton, 2004:157 in van der Meer, 2017:2). Such concerns have echoed through many researches, public speeches and opinion makers although is yet to be presented an alternative vision (van der Meer, 2017; Zmerli and van der Meer, 2017).

In a theoretical approach, van der Meer (2007:4) considers three variant perspectives of this narrative that ties the lack of political trust with the “democratic malaise”: (1) the survival of democracies is at risk with lack of political trust, a concern originated in the 1970s when scientists feared for the stability of regimes; (2) the predicted failure of the democratic system didn’t happen and it is possible that representative regimes can perpetuate themselves with low rates of trust provided that they can undergo a reconfiguration, an argument that was set out in the 1990s; (3) the assumption that distrust in politics does not cause a severe rick or crisis to democracy but simply calls the attention for something that is not being solved accordingly with the publics expectations.

Maybe these variant perspectives relay on different understandings about what actually is political trust. In fact, is not possible to deny the importance of political trust as a highly normative charged concept but it

is very difficult to meet consensus about its definition and measurement (Levi and Stoker, 2000:475; Schneider, 2016:964). In the present research, political trust is considered “a basic evaluative orientation toward the government founded on how well it operates according to people’s normative expectations” (Hetherington, 1998:791). Listhaug’s (1990) definition of trust also conforms to this setting:

“Trust ... reflects evaluations of whether or not political authorities and institutions are performing in accordance with normative expectations held by the public. Citizen expectations of how government should operate include, among other criteria, that it must be fair, equitable, honest, efficient, and responsive to society’s needs” (Listhaug, 1990:358 in Levi and Stoker, 2000:498).

What sustains public trust in political authorities is a relationship between those who govern and those that are governed – wherein the first reach out for public support to their programs while the second respond by voting and maintaining the status quo of the elites that govern. Therefore, trust can be defined as the “citizens’ support for political institutions such as government and parliament in the face of uncertainty about or vulnerability to the actions of these institutions” (van der Meer, 2017:1).

Margaret Levi and Laura Stoker both refer the importance of distinguishing between the objects or targets of trust (2000:498). In their article ‘Political Trust and Trustworthiness’ they explore the meaning of these two multi-level concepts (Weatherford, 1992 in Levi and Stoker: 2000:475) and relate them with the notions of ‘participation’, ‘cooperation’ and ‘vote’. For them political and social trust is also relational, unconditional and understood dichotomously (we can trust or distrust) (Levi and Stoker: 2000:476).

If a society trusts both the competence and the loyalty of elected representatives and believes in the work delivered by the public and political entities it is more likely to abide

by their decisions and support their policies or political measures. If citizens trust political institutions they also will perceive them as more legitimate (Tyler and Huo, 2002 in Marien and Hooghe, 2011:268).

Where there is mistrust and skepticism citizens may become more engaged and more critical to political activities. However if mistrust turns into widespread distrust we will have demoralized and disenchanting citizens that reject the current system favoring “the emergence of anti-system political parties” (Zmerli and van der Meer, 2017:1).

Levi and Stoker’s (2000:501) study concludes that there is a coincidence between the way people judge politicians and governments and their political engagement, their vote, their support to policies or institutional reforms, their compliance to authority and even the moral behavior of the whole community.

One major problem about measuring trust or trustworthiness and validate results from studies in this field as to do with the difficulty in obtaining reliable surveys that can deliver equivalent results in different cultural and national contexts (Levi and Stoker, 2000; Schneider, 2016; van der Meer, 2017). Irena Schneider (2016:967) believes that despite political trust can be “considered an important object of study it currently rests on a weak theoretical and empirical foundation”. First, there are data limitations because most surveys only focus on certain indicators comprehensive only for certain population (Schneider, 2016:965). Not always the same elements and indicators have the same meaning across different countries, nor the concepts of trust are the same to all populations or even to all classes of citizens. Sometimes even political institutions are very unlike depending on different regimes. For instance, there are many distinct ways to evaluate the conduct of a President or the performance of a political party, and many ways to consider what corruption and fraud are depending on the cultural background and values. Secondly, there are different dimensions from which we can judge the value of the subject for us

to trust on its performance: do we trust on their “capacity to govern” or do we trust on the “outcome of their governance”? (Tebaldi and Calaresu, 2015). We have also to consider the possible study subfields that point out to macro and micro-level approaches to the decline of political trust (Zmerli and van der Meer, 2017:7-8) that result on different interpretations for a correlate phenomenon.

Despite some limitations found in the literature there are recent developments in this field with “enhanced knowledge about the complexity of political trust” and “progress in a wide range of subfields, comprising theoretical accounts about the nature of political trust and its democratic relevance (...) providing broader and more detailed empirical insights” (Zmerli and van der Meer, 2017:2-3).

The concept of political trust may become even more crucial when in presence of a crisis context such as the one discussed in this paper - the political crisis that followed the Pedrogão Grande fire. In this situation, how the government responded? What strategies were used? How the government should react without undermining the citizen’s confidence?

Crisis is, in fact, a complex concept with many different approaches. A crisis can strike at any moment, at any organization, putting at risk people’s lives and livelihoods. Crisis are especially troubling for governments because public authorities are responsible for ensuring people’s health and safety. For government officials and their communication professionals a crisis represents an utmost attention by the media and a strong citizen scrutiny during and after a crisis (Lee et al., 2012:111).

Coombs (2015) defends the importance of crisis management to combat crisis and lessen damage. In this context, he identifies four key steps to take in account when managing crisis: prevention, preparation, response and revision.

In particular, response strategies - the focus

of this study – as part of the communication system are used to “achieve outcomes related to reducing the negative impact of the crisis” (Coombs, 2015:6). It seems clear that responses are able to influence the way stakeholders interpret a crisis and therefore affects their levels of trust in government’s performance.

Coombs (2004, 2015) defines the reactions taken by an organization to deal with a crisis as ‘crisis response strategies’. These responses include all strategies taken since the beginning of the crisis and all that has been done and said.

To be effective, crisis responses content usually takes into account three key components: (1) instructing information, that give essential guidelines to protect stakeholders physically during the crisis; (2) adjusting information, that explain what and why has happened, helping stakeholders to deal emotionally with the impact of the crisis; and (3) reputational management, that tries to avoid the negative effects in organizational reputation (Coombs, 2015:139). During a crisis, it is important to minimize the impact of transmitted messages and thus contribute to the success of the entire crisis management process. However, this also implies a good coordination between the type of response and the specific crisis, namely (a) form a taxonomy of crisis types, (b) form a taxonomy of crisis responses, and (c) develop a system to match appropriate responses to crisis situations (Coombs, 2004).

In the political context, administrative authorities face many challenges when it comes to manage a crisis but in literature frequently the emphasis is more on the desired performance/response and less on the actual contingences of the crisis. By doing so scholars tend to pay more attention to certain categories that divide the needed tasks into groups of capacities that must be operated to successfully manage crises (Backman and Rhinard, 2017:2) like those stated by Coombs - “prevention,” “preparation,” “response,” and “recovery”. Recently more seven strategic ac-

tivities critical for the effective and legitimate management of crises have been presented: detection, sense-making, decision-making, coordination, meaning-making, communication, and accountability (Boin et al., 2013; Boin et al., 2005:139-140). Here is assumed that when public authorities or political leaders perform these activities and also when they render account for what has happened they naturally will gain more acceptance for their decision-making. This political accountability, a key institutional practice in disaster or crisis management, helps to build public support and public trust in the functioning of institutions (Boin et al., 2005:13-14). Ultimately this increases legitimacy of the institutions involved in those activities (Backman and Rhinard, 2017:2).

For the present research were adapted the five possible responses to crisis suggested by Coombs and Holladay (1996), in order to try to get stakeholders to better judge the performance of a company or entity or to build a case favoring the organization or persons involved in a certain crisis situation. A brief description of these categories can be found in the methodology section.

To choose the proper type of responses for a certain situation it is important to know the appropriate meaning-making and have communication capacities to “formulate a message of what has happened in relation to the crisis, providing advice. It is also important to explaining measures taken in order to achieve a sense that leaders are in control of the situation” and at the same time knowing what are the most effective means to “broadcast a message regarding the risk, threat, or crisis to selected audiences such as the public, the media, victims, etc.” (Boin, et al., 2016 in Backman and Rhinard, 2017:3).

This is why the present study is supported on the responses given in a difficult moment. *The Institute For Public Relations* considers a crises response “what management does and says after the crisis hits”. Coombs says exactly the same but adds that “a crisis response can either improve or make the crisis situa-

tion worse for a corporation and its various stakeholders (Coombs et al., 2010). Thus it is important to see how things happen in practice by trying to increase the evidence-based knowledge that will later serve to help professionals responsible for communication management to solve problems in crisis situations (Coombs, 2014:2).

## Methodology

The purpose of the present exploratory study is to contribute to the knowledge of political trust in a crisis context through the observation of a real situation – Pedrógão Grande fire. So, the main research question is: what was the communication strategy followed by the Portuguese Government during the Pedrógão Grande crisis?

To fulfil this purpose it was essential to collect the formal messages available in the official government portal during the crisis period and then operationalize the research in three stages:

1. Mapping all stakeholders affected;
2. Identify trust marks in the material;
3. Cross the data with the response strategies categories to verify links between both issues.

The material selected consisted in two types of written documents available in the government portal: 26 press releases and 71 news logs. In this digital channel it is possible to find a section with all the press releases issued and another section with a news log where all the public messages and measures done by the government are recorded on a daily basis. The portal is thus an official channel that allows citizens to be informed about the government's agenda and policies.

The time line was 17<sup>th</sup> June to 12<sup>th</sup> October – the period between the date of the fire and the release of the Report prepared by the Independent Technical Commission appointed by the Parliament to investigate de fire of Pedrógão Grande. The option for this material

had to do with its accessibility and its official character.

The main procedure used to analyse this material was a content analysis. It started with an issue classification (data-driven) of the material (both press-releases and news logs available at the portal) taking into account the main subject/theme to which it refers and then built a concept-driven coding frame adapted from the Trust Model presented by Tom W. van der Meer (2017).

According to the recommend content analysis methodology (Schreier, 2012) three main steps were followed: a) divided the units of analysis into units of coding, marking keywords and separating the relevant parts of the material to be considered for analysis; b) decided the criterion of segmentation (a thematic criterion); c) applied the criterion and inserted the units of coding into the defined categories.

In this next section will be presented the different categories that guided the analysis of the subjects under study.

## Stakeholder Analysis

A Power-Interest Grid identifying all entities implicated in the situation. To understand better the distribution of the different categories of stakeholders throughout the two axes of power or interest, four quadrants of the grid were define (Table 1):

## Issue classification

Definition of six categories used to classify all materials (both press releases and portal news) taking into account the main subject/theme to which they refer (Table 2):

## Categories of Trust

Van der Meer's model (2017) defines several categories that are the causes for motivation of trust and distrust. This frame was adapted from his proposal of six categories (Table 3):

Table 1: Power Interest Grid

<p>High Power / High Interest (PLAYERS) – These stakeholders are essential for the success of the government strategy to manage the crisis. So they should be prioritise. They are strong players with political interest in forming alliances or have proximity relationships with the government. In addition, they are highly motivated to solve the situation and to support the government initiatives and diligences in this issue of Pedrógão Grande fire. They also have high power because they have authority; control resources and can influence the government actions. They possess resources that the government requires for solving the situation whether they are financial, technology/equipment or legislative and political resources. It is important that the Portuguese government continue to develop a partnership approach and maintain a dynamic and continuous monitoring of these stakeholders.</p>
<p>High Power / Low Interest (CONTEST SETTERS) – These stakeholders are independent from any government and have no particular political interest in supporting this government. They also have great authority to influence the government strategy. They can contribute to the situation without the need or the will to have a partnership relation with the government entities. They influence the context and because of that, these high power and low interest stakeholders may pose some barriers to the government strategy/work through their disinterest or neutrality. Therefore, it is important to take a positive approach, keeping them informed and increasing their interest. They should also be manage and monitor their activity closely.</p>
<p>High Interest / Low Power (SUBJECTS) – These stakeholders have high interest in the political resolutions that the government can present to solve the crisis situation. Therefore, they hope the government serves their interest. On the other hand, they have little power, and mainly depend on the government for financing and support. It is important the government clearly identify these stakeholders to protect them and keep them satisfied.</p>
<p>Low Interest / Low Power (CROWD) – These stakeholders have both low interest in the government and low power to influence its actions. They do their job anyway independently from the government but are somehow limited in what they can achieve to solve the situation. It is important to keep them in view and to monitor them but with minimum spent.</p>

Table 2: Categories of Issue Classification

<p>Means of Combat - News and Announcements that referred the means of combat in the field - the number of effective and operational firemen and mechanisms made available to face the situation with the populations; security forces involved, not only in the direct fight against the fire, but in the support to the populations guaranteeing their security and also in the actions of containment of the fires and operations of aftermath; the official mechanisms available to the Government such as the Declaration of State of Calamity or the Dispatches that extended the critical period of the fires; and also the coordination of European action in the fight against fires.</p>
<p>Social Help - News and press-releases related to the solidarity and social assistance provided, namely the medical support provided and the Health Program created for 2 years to support the victims; the installation of the Social Security Operational Centres in the different places affected by the fires; the information about the activities in the zones of the fires; the opening of the National Social Emergency Line; the creation of the Mental Health Monitoring Committee; and the mobile units of public services to the citizen in the villages and parishes affected by the fires.</p>
<p>Victims - Government decrees for national mourning or the messages of condolence for the victims and regrets to all for the tragedy that occurred in the fire of Pedrógão Grande, whether in the figure of the prime minister or in the words of any of the remaining ministers of the executive. It also includes references to the official process of identification and accounting of the number of victims, information on legal procedures, as well as calls for confidence and cooperation with authorities.</p>
<p>Clarification - Orders issued by the Government to request clarification from the various entities on what would have been the origin of the tragedy and the respective responses, documents, inquiries and reports on the fires, which were presented until the culmination of the Final Report prepared by the Independent Technical Commission on the fire of Pedrógão Grande; also includes dispatches on the termination of duties of figures with official responsibilities. This makes them accountable for some of the things that didn't went well.</p>
<p>Forest Reform - References to the Regional Plans of Forest Management that have been proposed by the governmental authorities, as well as all initiatives to revitalize and organize the territories affected by the fires.</p>
<p>Measures and Financial Support - Initiatives created by the Government to deal with this and to avoid future situations, namely directives for the various municipalities affected to develop a forest re-ordering of the region; the presentation of Revitalization Programs; the establishment of new rules for the forest industry, and preventive measures for fire crime; lines of funding and requalification, such as the request for funds to the EU, the 'Permanent Forestry Fund', the 'Municipal Emergency Fund', the 'REVITA Fund', the 'Rural Development Program', the Protocols with various forms of solidarity and support.</p>

Table 3: Categories of Trust

Competence - Use of words or expressions that reflect the competence of the government or the relevance and adequacy of its decisions and measures to solve the crisis. In other words, those contents that seek to demonstrate the capacity to respond to the situation.
Care - Use of words or expressions that indicate sadness, concern and empathy with the citizens showing commotion, regret and solidarity in the face of the consequences of the tragedy. Also demonstrations of trust, thanks and praise to all those who cooperated in supporting the victims.
Reliability - Use of words or phrases that express involvement, monitoring of the situation on the ground and accountability of the government to the situation. References of cooperation with other entities demonstrating availability, support and transmission of the necessary information.
Accountability - Use of future-oriented action verbs to express the results of decisions and measures taken to solve the situation in order to reinforce confidence in these actions and show all government's effort to prevent further crisis situations. Account is also taken of the forward-looking statements for risk prevention.
Skepticism - Use of words or phrases that try to avoid the judgment or distrust of citizens and reestablish confidence and support to the government, namely clarifying facts and misunderstandings and denying wrong information that have been made public through the several media. There are also expressions in which the Government point the responsibility of the situation to the lack of initiative previous governments, thus demarcating itself from possible responsibilities.
The cynicism (attitude that assumes the worst of the nature of political actors as reflected in their perceived incompetence and selfishness), although integrating Tom W. van der Meer's model, was not included in the coding framework because it is only possible to apply this category in the analysis of texts produced by the media or by the citizens themselves.

Table 4: Types of responses

Denial, a strategy where the government could disclaim any responsibility or blame for the way it monitored and managed the fire and ensured support for the populations;
Distance, a strategy to follow if the government wanted to detach or disassociate itself from the things that gone wrong during and after the fire;
Ingatiation, assures a response that intents to gain public support and approval for the government actions;
Mortification, if the government wanted to gain forgiveness which means they had to assume responsibility for what occurred;
Suffering, a strategy where the government would assume itself as a victim in the crisis that followed the fires.

**Categories of Response Strategies**

Coombs and Holladay (1996:284) define the following typology of responses (Table 4):

**Results and Discussion**

Starting with the stakeholders analysis it was possible to identify 30 categories of individuals and entities affected by the crisis ranging from those that are dependent from the solutions the authorities find for the situation (*Subjects*) and those that support those solutions (*Players*), or even those that simply are involved in the fire issue (*Contest Setters* and *Crowd*).

From the 16 ministries that constitute the XXI Constitutional Government in Portugal the messages conveyed reported the involvement of 11 ministries. In addition, there are references to numerous other government bodies, their offices (General-Secretary), their State Secretaries and all other Figures, Authorities, Institutes, Entities, Centres, Councils, Agencies, Services, Technicians that are related or dependent from the several ministries. This reflects an enormous effort of coordination and involvement of the government in dealing with the situation, which may be seen as a good indicator of the effectiveness of crisis management according to Boin et al. (2013:81), who believe that one of the evidences of a good response lies in "forging

Table 5: Stakeholders Analysis - Power and Interest Grid. Source: Adapted from Ackermann and Eden (2011)

<p>HIGH interest / LOW power</p>	<p><b>SUBJECTS</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- City Councils; City Hall Presidents; Township Councils</li> <li>- Community</li> <li>- Private enterprises and PMEs affected by fires</li> <li>- National Association of Portuguese Municipalities &amp; National Association of Township</li> <li>- Entities of the agricultural sector (Portuguese Confederation of Farmers; Order of Veterinarians; Portuguese Association of Animal Compound Feeding-stuffs)</li> <li>- Portuguese Institute of the Sea and the Atmosphere - Agency for the Tourist Development of the Schist Villages</li> <li>- Telecommunications Institute</li> <li>- Regional Tourism Authority of Central Portugal</li> <li>- Institute for Mobility and Transport</li> <li>- Regional Tourism Authority of Central Portugal</li> <li>- Portuguese Firefighters League</li> <li>- INDRA (Company in technology consultancy)</li> <li>- KPMG Portugal (Audit and advisory Co.)</li> </ul>	<p>HIGH power / HIGH interest</p>	<p><b>PLAYERS</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Air Force: Portugal; Italy; Spain; France (geopolitics, international political interest for future alliances)</li> <li>- Armed Force (strategic interest in the government' support)</li> <li>- Public Ministry (close political relations)</li> <li>- Professional Orders &amp; Professional Associations (interest in good political relations)</li> <li>- European Commission (recognizes political interest in the government)</li> <li>- Parliament (has political influence in the government)</li> <li>- The State Bank: (political appointed administrators)</li> <li>- International Presidents and Prime-Ministers (geopolitics, international political interest for future alliances)</li> </ul>
<p>LOW interest - LOW power</p>	<p><b>CROWD</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Union of Portuguese Misericórdias &amp; Consecrated Houses of Misericórdia</li> <li>- Catholic Church - Diocesan Caritas</li> <li>- Caloust Gulbenkian Foundation</li> <li>- Anonymous civil society (helping)</li> </ul>	<p>HIGH power / LOW interest</p>	<p><b>CONTEST SETTERS</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- President of the Portuguese Republic (independent from the government)</li> <li>- Independent Technical Commission for Fire Analysis of Pedrógão Grande (no political liaisons)</li> <li>- Republican National Guard (GNR) (supposedly independent from any political interest)</li> <li>- Judiciary Police &amp; Judicial Authorities (supposedly independent from any political interest)</li> <li>- Media (supposedly independent from any political interest)</li> </ul>

cooperation between previously unrelated agents”.

This stakeholder analysis proves to be coherent with the trust analysis made from the government’s messages that will be shown next. They focus more attention on the ‘*Subject stakeholder*’ to whom they direct their main support and initiatives (Table 5). The government strives to show ‘*competence*’ by compensating the affected families and ruined businesses and at the same time it improves the forest requalification measures and develops a strategy for local economic recovery.

In the analysis of the issue classification, the main focus refers to the category ‘*Measures and Financial Support*’ both in the information conveyed in the press releases and in the government portal news, as shown in Graphic 1. Here there is also a coherence with the results from the trust categories once ‘*Competence*’ has the higher frequency either in the press releases or in the portal news (Graphics 3 and 4). This points out to a concern in showing all the work the government has done to solve the crisis, creating measures to help all citizens affected after the fires. Almost all ministries take action by implementing revitalization measures, preventive action to avoid future disasters, creating decrees, establishing programs of help and development, organizing funds and protocols. In addition, the government is making sure that all his efforts are visible and announced to the public.

At the same time ‘*Social Help*’ and ‘*Clarification*’ are the next issues most mentioned in the Press Releases, while the portal news log give more focus to ‘*Means of Combat*’, ‘*Social Help*’ and ‘*Forest Reform*’ - which also conveys the same idea of ‘*Competence*’. The values registered in these categories show the work and endeavour of the official authorities that are in dependence from the governmental bodies (previously identified in the stakeholders’ analysis). This is in line with Boin when he states that “in fact, the crisis response in modern society is best characterized in

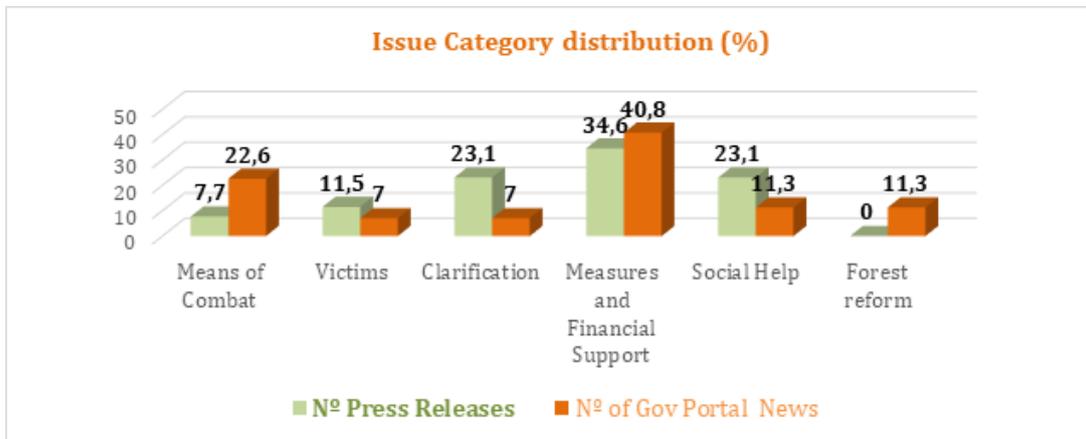
terms of network comprising a wide variety of response organizations that usually do not work together during ‘normal times’” (Boin, 2009:372).

The category ‘clarification’ also has a great significance in the information transmitted in the press releases (Graphic 1) which may denote they do not fear to be made accountable for all the processes they are involved.

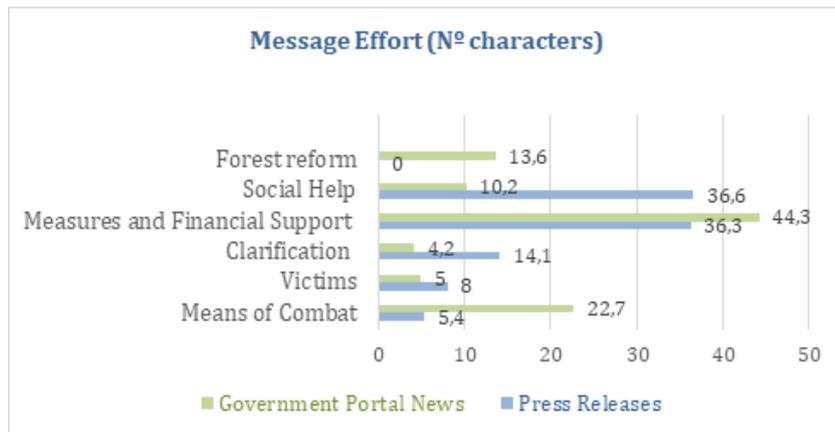
Graphic 2 presents the categories that reflected more the government concerns - that is themes/ messages with a greater development and communication effort. These conclusions result from the sum of the characters of each unit of analysis. The portal news give more importance to information about ‘*Measures and Financial Support*’ and ‘*Means of Combat*’ (summing both categories 67% of the total of characters) while the press releases give more information about ‘*Social Help*’ and ‘*Measures and Financial Support*’ (summing 72,9%).

Graphics 3 and 4 refer to political trust categories and notices that ‘*Competence*’ is the category with more units either in press releases or in portal news. Clearly, the government’s option was to present new measures (economical, legal...) avoiding references to less positive issues on the subject that might affect or put in doubt the government’s performance. This can be related to a crisis response strategy of ‘*Ingratiation*’ once it states that the government “is taking some kind of remedial action (e.g., offer compensation to victims or create new practices to prevent a crisis event from repeating)” (Coombs, 1996:284).

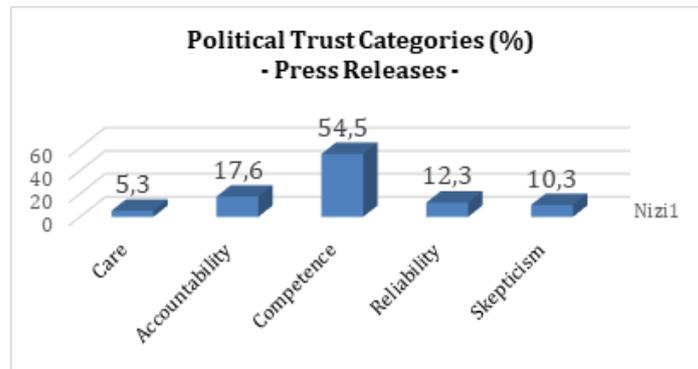
The second trust category most referred is ‘*Accountability*’, which indicates a concern in taking responsibility to solve the problem through support, on the spot monitoring and coordination with other entities but without taking blame, or even apologize. This may be a strategy to capture and maintain the trust of citizens. This also points to a ‘*Distance*’ response strategy in which the government accepts the crisis but tries to weaken possible



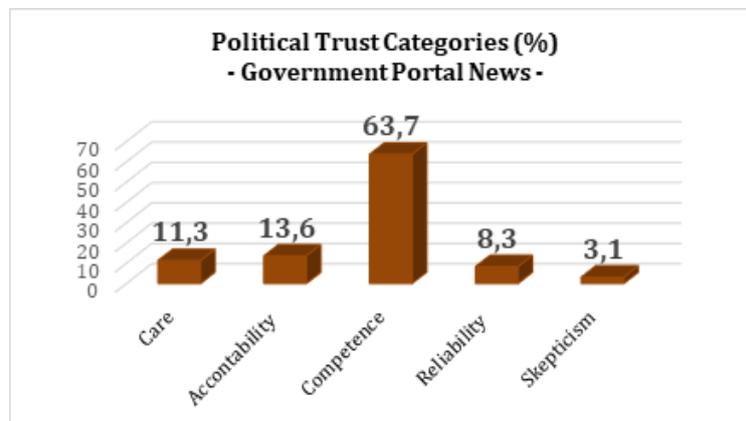
Graphic 1



Graphic 2



Graphic 3



Graphic 4

links with its performance and the dimension of the crisis.

It is also curious to note that the *'Skepticism'* category has more units than the *'Care'* category which can point out for a priority in clarifying misunderstandings and misinformation that may blame the government, then showing empathy for the victims. The strategy followed clearly avoid *'Mortification'* and *'Suffering'*.

### Final Remarks

It is essentially through their discursive practices that stakeholders get to know the organizations and keep in touch with their reality. So, the image they build and the relationships they establish must be a reflex of what those organizations say about their achievements.

Increasingly, the messages transmitted by the organizations or institutions must be adapted to the needs of more demanding and enlightened audiences, with concerns and expectations that are not satisfied with a superficial discourse. They require that this discourse presents valid arguments and concrete facts that legitimize their performance, proving that organizations/entities are useful, competent and reliable, fulfilling their mission and objectives legitimately.

In the context of political communication - the focus of this research - power relations,

legitimacy and trust are factors that must be taken into account when analyzing communications and messages from these entities.

In a crisis situation, these issues are even more important. According to Coombs (1996:280) "communication can be used to influence how stakeholders interpret a crisis and the organization in crisis".

There are no neutral words. Each word, each utterance can acquire different meanings according to the way the sender and the receiver interpret them. Communication relations can be defined as 'linguistic exchanges', but also as relations of symbolic power where there are relations of force between the speakers and the groups to which they are addressed (Bourdieu, 1998: 13-14).

This exploratory research tried to identify keywords (in the press releases and in the government portal news) that could allow the understanding of how the government produced its messages during the period of crisis, knowing that this had impact in the levels of citizen's trust. The discursive options of governmental entities can denote strategic intentions and options as well as point out to possible effects on their stakeholders. In a crisis situation it is important take into account that "efforts to impart accurate, accessible information, which can be used as the basis for appropriate action, may encounter an anxious and even fearful audience. Stress

and arousal can easily lead to the messages of leaders being misinterpreted and distorted –especially among those parts of the audience who do not see government as their ally” (Boin 2009:373).

In this particular analysis of the Pedrógão Grande fire it is possible to observe that the Portuguese government chose to win people trust mainly using a strategy based on confidence and commitment messages in its communications, which is coherent with an ingratiating response to crisis situations. The government chose to demonstrate a position of strength by appearing to the public as one who is able to find solutions and solve problems when facing adversity, avoiding the reference of possible failures in their performance. As Boin advocates, “one of the most crucial leadership tasks during a crisis is to explain what is happening and what leaders are doing to manage the crisis. They must offer a convincing rationale, which generates public and political support for their crisis management efforts” (Boin, 2009:373). Has this strategy had the desired effect in the case of Pedrógão fire?

One of the research limitations is the lack of an analysis of the citizen’s opinion and the possible impacts of this government’s strategy. It is important to grasp the citizen’s reaction to the government messages in mass media and social media to cross these results and then measure the levels of political trust after the crisis. This could be the next step of this study.

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# Nonprofits and their communication professionals – their role in today's world

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**Purpose:** The purpose of this research paper is to understand the role of the communication professionals in civil society organizations in Portugal. Do the communication professionals have technical, tactical and strategic responsibilities in the Portuguese nonprofit organizations?

**Design / methodology / approach:** Using a mixed methodology of sequential explanation two main groups of not for profit organizations were studied: the Non-Governmental Organizations for Development (NGOD) and the Portuguese Sports Federations (PSF).

**Findings:** The study highlights a total absence of any kind of strategic thinking and a lack of understanding of the role of the communication professionals in civil society organizations in Portugal.

**Research limitations:** Due to practical constraints only two major groups of civil society organizations were studied.

**Practical and social implications:** Civil society organizations are facing a considerable development and communication professionals have been playing a fundamental role during this process, by improving a better understanding among different stakeholders. As positive outcomes of this study internships for communication students are being promoted. In addition, meetings enhancing a better understanding of the communication professionals purpose, their importance for organizations and their social role for society have taken place.

**Originality /value:** Although many studies about the third sector can be found in the economy and sociology fields, only a few research studies focusing on the status of the communication professionals in the Portuguese (or in a Portuguese branch of a bigger institution) civil society organizations has been carried out.

**Keywords:** Civil Society Organizations; communication professionals; mixed methods approach; strategic communication

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## Introduction

This paper addresses the questions, perplexities and results of an ongoing project that involves mixed methods analysis and that has as its main purpose to understand the role of the communication professionals in the civil society organizations in Portugal. The specific research question that this paper addresses may be summarized as an interrogation about the role that the communication professionals are called to fulfill in these institutions. Do the communication professionals have technical, tactical and strategic responsibilities in the Portuguese civil society organizations?

The debate about the role of the communication (Public Relations) professionals in our society isn't new. Moreover, whenever the world is in crisis it is further enhanced. In the late eighties and the early nineties of the last century, Dozier (1984, 1992) among others authors (Dozier and Grunig, 1984; White and Dozier, 1992) studied which role the Public Relations (strategic communication) practitioners were called to fulfill in organizations. From playing "minor" roles as technicians in organizations, to being heard as advisers to management or to be decision makers in a broader sense.

As Dozier has put it "practitioner roles are conceptually and empirically related to participation in management decision making" (Dozier, 1992, 341). We believe, as he did, that "if practitioners are to help organizations adapt to changes in the environment, they must participate in the management decision making process, not simply implement decisions made by others." (Dozier, 1992, 342). Inspired by the articles aforementioned the authors of the study being presented here tried to understand which role, if any, the communication professionals were called to fulfill in Portuguese Civil Society Organizations (CSO) based in three levels dimensions: a strategic, a tactical and a technical.

Starting at the strategic level, practitioners where asked whether they had been able to

participate in meetings where decisions regarding new policies/programs were made, as well as being appointed to make strategic decisions or helping management to do so. For instance, being able to have a risk and crisis communication management plan or being heard at boarding meetings concerning a future strategic plan for the organization were some of the aspects specifically taken into account.

On the tactical level different issues have been analyzed. Firstly, if communication programs had some kind of continuity and if proactive programs and actions concerning different stakeholders existed within the organization. Furthermore, events and actions that are faced in a reactive way were explored. Finally, administrative Public Relations work (as the elaboration of promotional materials, the managing of websites or writing media releases) as well as technical support stuff subsumed by another unit or department were considered as belonging to a technical level (Eiró-Gomes et al., 2018; Eiró-Gomes e Nunes, 2018).

Moreover, and due to the considerable difficulty in finding an unique designation for the communication professions, a quite diverse group of names where accepted both for the professionals, the departments and the functions. For the purpose of the study it was assumed that there was no use in trying to distinguish, or even discuss, the validity of different concepts as those of, for instance, public relations, institutional, organizational or corporate communications or even consider in a separate way the designations of marketing or information departments (Eiró-Gomes e Nunes, 2013).

Two main groups of civil society organizations were studied: the Non-Governmental Organizations for Development (176), and the Portuguese Sports Federations (56). Other groups will be studied in a near future but these two groups were chosen for quite different, even though, complementary, reasons. The first group represents the main stream of the non-profit sector and is what people think about

when asked about this specific industry. The second group is almost an unknown field, the National Sports Federations are usually never considered in this kind of studies. They seem to be however very good representatives of the communitarian organizations and due to the development of adventurous and life style sports they represent also a new and important market for communication professionals. Additionally, the international federations and their counterparts, are also really important actors in the civil society not only in Portugal, as in so many other countries, due to the fact that they are responsible entities for the promotion of sports at all levels of society.

The Civil Society Organizations (CSO) may be thought as those institutions that are generally private, from a juridical point of view, have as their aim, exclusively, the public interest (Henriques, 2003). The United Nations consider that these kind of associations belong to the realm of the free will of the citizens that join forces in order to promote their values, their ideas, and the social transformations they defend. The definition proposed by the United Nations highlights one of the main characteristics of these organised groups of people: the voluntary, benevolent, action of their first promoters and at least in some areas as the administrative boards, or the work in development countries are based on voluntary work (UNRIC, 2017). These kind of organizations have been conceptualised differently in Europe and America and also in many other countries due to political and juridical aspects.

This papers uses the general understanding of these concepts and specifically in accordance to the way they are understood by the Portuguese law. Different designations that are usually used to refer to this kind of organizations are also considered. A broader interpretation of these organizations is also contemplated, considering that they all aim at the common good depend neither on any particular state nor on the business sector (Neto, 2017).

The first group under study, the NGOD's, are civil society organizations that act in three main areas: cooperation for development, humanitarian action and education for development. In Portugal their activities are regulated by the Foreign Affairs Ministry and by the Strategic Concept for the Portuguese Cooperation 2014-1020. At a first moment, the researchers considered precisely the 185 organizations that were registered in 2016 at the referred Ministry but as nine of them weren't operating any more, only 176 were considered as our primary universe.

If it's true that in big international organizations like the Red Cross, *Caritas*, *Médecins du Monde*, *Médecins sans Frontières* or Oxfam, the communication professionals are regarded, or of what in a quite general way we may consider as strategic communication, and understood as quite important elements in the general structure and work of these organizations, although the same doesn't seem to happen in Portugal (Hallahan et al., 2007).

During the last years a lot of scientific studies have been edited concerning these kind of organizations both from a socio-political or economical perspective but none was said about how these actors see the communication professionals or how they understand the role or the importance of strategic communication. The same might be said for our second research object, the sports federations.

The sports federations are an example of a group of a less well known CSO, but are a very important expression of communitarian organizations that are able to influence governmental structures as they are the entities responsible for promoting, regulating and managing at a national level a sport modality or a group of sports modalities as it is, for example, the case of the Portuguese equestrian federation, that is responsible for different equestrian disciplines that range from the dressage, to equestrian jumping or horse ball.

In Portugal as in so many other countries

the sports federations emerge from civil society and are regulated by a public entity, in the present case, the Portuguese Sports and Youth Institute. This is the institute that, according to the Portuguese law determines the legality of these institutions and their legitimacy to be considered as organizations of sports public interest. In accordance with all the other sports federations a bit all over the world they follow the guidelines of the sports international federations. These are civil society international organizations, non-governmental institutions, that are acknowledged by the International Olympic Committee. They are asked to promote, regulate and develop one or more sports at an international level in accordance with the principles and values, activities and practices as asserted by the Olympic Charter. Today, however, we must also consider a new group of sports that are in general considered under two labels, adventure sports or life style sports. Another group is also considered and recognised by the IOC, the in general designated as mind sports, where chess and checkers emerge as, maybe, the best well known ones.

### **Research design**

This research belongs to the realm of what we may consider, in applied communication investigation, as a pragmatist approach to research. This world view has its founders in three American philosophers from the late XIX century and the early years of the 20th century, Peirce, James and Dewey (Murphy, 1990). In accordance with the objectives of the empirical research that it's being presented here it's possible to assert that the main contributes, from this world view, that we must highlight, are those that deal with the defense that research cannot be isolated from its geographical, historical, social or political contexts. Another main aspect has to do with the purpose of research. The pragmatist worldview pushes investigators to go a bitter further in their understanding of reality, they drive them to answer the needs and problems posed to them by multi-sectoral

actors. It was precisely the feeling that there might be a lack of a thorough understanding of the role of the communication professionals in the nonprofit sector in Portugal, as well as the recognition of the major contributions from the communication professionals in so many international recognized CSO, issues that had been discussed both with the public entities that regulate these institutions as well as with the Portuguese Platform of NGOs, concomitant with a theoretical approach that thinks that the strategic communication (public relations) function "(...) is essential to the survival and growth of organizations facing increasingly unstable and threatening environments" (Dozier, 1992, 352) drove the researchers to develop this study.

From the perspective of the research design this study is included in the framework of what is generally designated as a mixed methodology of sequential explanation. (Creswell, 2014). In a first moment quantitative methods were used to collect information concerning descriptive aspects of the organizations. Thereafter, researchers moved to a qualitative approach in order to get a deeper understanding of these organizations.

Initially, the 176 Non-governmental Organizations for Development (NGOD) registered at the Portuguese Foreign Affairs Ministry in accordance to the report issued by that institution in 2016 were contacted by phone and by email. A survey by questionnaire was sent and a date to fill it in over phone was set. The same was done in 2017 for the 56 Portuguese Sports Federations (PSF) registered according also to the 2016 official data issued by the responsible governmental entity.

In this first quantitative approach researchers tried to get an overall picture of the organizations that could enable them to understand their structure, organigram and how their "communicative" aspects were dealt with. Did they have many full time employees or was the organization managed mostly by volunteers? How many professionals employed? Did they have a communication (Public Relations, Information and Commu-

nication, Marketing and Communication and so on) department? If not, who performed the function? Did those responsible for the communication functions had any kind of formal training in strategic communication (Public Relations)? On another level the questionnaire also helped to understand what kind of instruments, both in print and digital form, were being used to communicate with all, or least some of the main stakeholders. It must be noted that some stakeholders, instruments and issues were much more important or even relevant for one group than for the other. For instance, concepts as “communication for development”, are relevant for the NGOD, but not for the PSF. Conversely, all the aspects concerning school sports are only meaningful for the second group. All the more technical aspects that have to do with some of the idiosyncrasies of one or other group will be omitted in this article (Eiró-Gomes e Nunes, 2018).

The quantitative data gathering was undertaken over 2 months, during the second semester of 2016 for the NGO and the second semester of 2017 for the PSF. In a second moment, the institutions who had answered the questionnaire were contacted once more to set a face to face interview.

From the 77 Non-governmental Organizations for Development that answered the questionnaire only 43 accepted our request for an interview. In what concerns the PSF only 32 out of the 40 that responded to the quantitative enquiry accepted to be interviewed. All the organizations were contacted during a month by phone and email until a negative answer were obtained or, for those not answering our emails or phone, three calls were made before giving up the contacts.

To collect the qualitative data 75 interviews were conducted during 2017, first at the NGODs and afterwards at the PSF, by two different interviewers. The interview method, as a qualitative instrument to construct and gather data (Berger, 2014), is widely accepted for permitting three kinds of different ap-

proaches: an interview seen as an informal conversation, an interview based on an interview script and a structured interview. In this research an interview script was used in order to ensure that the basic lines of inquiry as well as the main topics were pursued with each person interviewed; the communications professional or whoever fulfilled that function, or was presented as fulfilling that function, at each one of the organizations under study. Although the script does not ensure how the interview will be conducted, it at least enables the main topics to be addressed. Additionally, the script works also as a guarantee that the basic framework accorded by all the research team members will have the desired attention. The interviews are a useful form of data collection, as they allow to explore different perspectives and perceptions of those involved (Daymon and Holloway, 2002).

Interviews were used to gather information about how decision-making processes were conducted in relation to the design of the communication strategies, programs, or mere actions. Furthermore, what the institutions thought belonged to the communication area, or what they thought could be developed if a communication practitioner worked at the institution, were questions addressed during the face to face conversations. The interviews were recorded, transcribed, and the material reduced. In order to avoid, or at least to reduce an excessive contamination all the interviews in each of the groups were recorded first and only after all having been recorded did the transcription process started.

Afterwards, the text was analyzed (qualitative content analysis with recourse to NVIVO software) and the interpretations were conducted by the entire team in order to reduce biases due to personal judgements. The qualitative content analysis was the method chosen as it allows to develop a systematic description of the material under examination, through its association with categories and subcategories. In this research, the coding frame was

constructed taking into account the literature review and all the data collected, that is, the content of the interviews carried out and previously transcribed.

Researchers chose a strategy that combines coding based on the knowledge acquired, in this case information collected and analyzed in the literature review, that is, concept-driven categories, and in the data collected in interviews, usually designated as data-driven categories. In the last phase of the codification frame construction each dimension/category and sub-category was defined. In accordance with the content analysis good practices for each category or subcategory a name, a description of the name, decision rules and examples of what can be included in each one must be present (Schreier, 2012). In the case of the dimensions with subcategories it is fundamental to note that the sub-categories must be mutually exclusive. For those without subcategories is the principal dimension that accommodates the registration units. After the definition of the coding frame the next step was to go along with the segmentation of the material under analysis in registration units.

It is important to remember that although the NVivo software allows for a better, faster, more complete and, at least, with less mistakes content qualitative analysis, it will not automatically process and analyse the data. The final moment was to revise and expand the categories that were going to be used across the analysis.

## Data analysis and interpretation

Focusing on the research question of this ongoing project, as said before, during the interviewing process three main communication functions were covered regarded as the three common levels of professional performance: instrumental, tactical and strategic.

In regard to the instrumental level the focus was to understand the lack of rationale related to the production of certain type of instruments such as leaflets, or spontaneous and

reactive communication actions. At the tactical level taking in account the existence of a professional at the institution that has some kind of expertise and capacity to develop a more complex and integrated approach in the communication field, as planning a campaign or by positioning the organization or the sports field. Under the umbrella concept of strategic responsibilities, aspects such as the definition of the communication priorities in a strategic and planned way, the management of the institution's reputation or the capacity to determine the style and the tone throughout the organizations, were considered. Additionally, the existence of a media relations plan or a risk and crisis communication plan were also addressed. Under the idea of a more operational approach events and actions that are managed in a merely responsive way, were studied.

### *Organization and Communication characterization*

First of all, the size of the two groups of not for profit organizations was studied. It became clear that the majority of them have up to 30 employees - 84% in the case of the NGOD and 72% in the case of the National Sports Federations. Taking in consideration the purpose of this study, to understand the role of the communication professionals in the not for profit organizations in Portugal, it was essential to know if there is a communication department who performed the role of Public Relations in these specific organizations. Under this broad designation we accepted all the structures that were presented as dealing with Public Relations issues or themes as they are usually understood in this area of research (Wilcox *et al.*, 2006, L'Étang, 2013). The results are quite similar in both groups in analysis, almost half of the interviewed organizations declared to have a structure to manage the communication issues - 56% of the sports federations and 49% of the NGOD's.

Thereby, as we found a relevant number of organizations that didn't have a specific communication structure, the researchers

tried to evaluate if this function could be outsourced, totally or partially, as a complement to the work done in-house. Here the results showed that the organizations tend to not use outsourcing models in what concerns communication services (63% of the NSF and 58% of the NGOD don't use external communication services).

Things are quite different when analyzing the qualification of the communication team. While in the National Sports Federations only in one case an employee with higher education degree in Public Relations/Corporate Communication was identified, 24% of the NGOD's had teams with specific qualifications in Public Relations and Corporate Communication field. In the majority of the NSF the employees who are part of the Public Relations department had academic training in communication sciences generic disciplines. Moreover, 23,53% of these professionals didn't have any specific training in communication. In the NGOD's organizations, 55% of the communication team is trained in other areas, as sociology (large majority), and 21% in other communication disciplines, like journalism.

This data enabled us to identify one of the problems in the not for profit sector, which is the lack of training in Public Relations, as well as the fact, in the specific case of the NGOD's, that many of the people who responded to this interview use to perform other positions other than communication work in their organizations. In short, we believe communication has not been given the importance that is advocated in this article.

### *The role of the Communication professionals*

When asked if the "communication/public relations" function is part of the annual strategic plan of the organization, what seems to happen is that in few cases the communication is understood as more than having a website or writing some press releases. As can be verified through the data collected in this research, only a few organizations have a clear notion about the role of communication

in the organization, as having a constitutive role and not merely as discursive one.

For this reason, it could be interesting to share some excerpts of the interviews conducted, that due to the number of times they were repeated became relevant. These quotes allowed us also to conclude that there is still an instrumental vision of the Public Relations function in these organizations. We have decided to keep quotes anonymous, as their aim is merely to demonstrate trends. In some cases the concept seems to be reduced to the digital context "(...) everything is on our website. Our aim with people is to motivate them to visit our website, that is being updated." or to information disseminated through the mass media "(...) we need to communicate and inform the public (...) when there are sports competitions, we always send a press release".

It is also noted that many of the organizations have activity plans and not strategic plans: "We do not have a formal strategic plan, that is meticulously implemented, but we do have an annual activity plan and communication is a part of that plan". Likewise, other organizations stated that "communication is part of our strategic plan, although it is not an issue that deserves significant investments". As in many other organizations, also in organizations that were interviewed, the importance recognized to the communication function is not aligned with the real meaning that they seem to give to it.

When questioned about the communication aims/goals, in the case of the National Sports Federations, interviewees put the emphasis on the promotion of the sports discipline and on the increasing number of practitioners. Many organizations declared: "in fact, our main goal is to promote the sports modality in the country...and attract more people to these sports modalities, we want to have more people." This concern is not surprising, as is a requirement from the regulatory body that monitors this industry. All the sports federations with the public utility status must promote the sports discipline and to ensure

the participation of the national teams in national and international sports competitions. In the group of NGOD, when analyzing the communication goals, we found a dissemination-centric communication vision, focused on visibility. Many of the objectives named are not clear, and only a few are based on changing attitudes and behaviors.

Concerning the communication strategy implementation, only two communication tools are reported by the majority of the organizations studied in this research: a website and a Facebook page. In future researches it would be relevant to analyze the objectives of these materials, their relevance, with which frequency they are updated and what kind of information is presented.

In what concerns the public/stakeholders definition we verified that most organizations, do not carry out any process of public mapping. One of the organizations stated: "Recently we created a media relations office to manage media relations and we want to communicate not only with the federated athletes, but also to inform the general public. As we intend to increase the number of federated athletes, we need to communicate with everyone." This answer expresses an intuition that much more is needed in this level. In the sector in analysis an "everyone" perspective or as we use to refer to an intention to reach the "general public" seems to be the dominant approach. There is an absence of basic concepts and notions about Public Relations or Communication and an inability from the targeted organizations to identify and to define in a strategic way the preferential groups of stakeholders. This is one more of the features that point to the instrumental notion of communication held by organizations. There does not seem to be any strategic thinking or efforts in terms of research and analysis, a basic requirement when we want to have a strategic role in Public Relations.

Analyzing some areas of communication, such as the management of the website, social media and media relations, we conclud-

ed that the communication department is responsible for managing it, taking into account the guidance of the Board. But there are also cases where this work is the responsibility of the Administrative Assistant, the Executive Board, the technicians and even the IT staff. Concerning specifically social media management, the person in charge varies from organization to organization, handled most of the time by the communications department. However, there are organizations where this is done by a volunteer, or by "a person responsible for Facebook, who works full-time, but has no communication training." This data allows us to conclude that often the communication work is developed by people without qualification and experience in the area.

When questioned about the existence of a risk/crisis communication plan very few organizations stated that they have a plan in this area. The researchers have found that there is an enormous lack of knowledge about these areas and the absence of any plan. At this point, is relevant to refer one specific case, where an interviewee said: "The plan exists in my head. One day, when I have time for it I will write it down, but at the moment, I have many other things to do. More important things to do." In general terms, we can observe that while organizations can define in their plans what we could call communication actions, a true strategic planning of the communication function, or a true understanding of the concept of "communication" or PR, is not a reality in these organizations. The notion of "communication" that we found in these institutions, is all about dissemination of information and media relations. Regarding this dissemination function, the only priority is the presence on the web, although in most of cases, as merely informative.

The few organizations that have press offices or a professional with PR training, are those that not only understand better the potentialities of a better Public Relations strategic plan but those that also note the lack of specific budgets for communication. A very

illustrative example of this reality is the testimony of one of the entities interviewed: “Our department works hard in events communication, international events organised by us. In these cases, we have some tools that are used by external services, since for this type of events there are other sources of funding and of course we have more resources to work with. If we had more resources on a day-to-day basis, we could do more.”

The prevailing vision is that of promotional activities, clearly instrumental, and very far from a vision of communication as an essential dimension, or a constitutive one, of these organizations. Even if in recent years almost all the interviewed organizations started to have an online presence, we are however confronted with a more or less amateurish way of doing digital communications. The football sports federation is the only real exception to this scenario, managing the communication function in a similar way to the corporate/private organizations. Furthermore, in the Portuguese Football Sports Federation press office there are more employees than in the vast majority of the other federations. Actually, 62.5% of the sports federations have less than 15 employees, which is the number of professionals working only in the press office of the Portuguese Football Federation.

The head of the organization recognizes the lack of investment in a more planned communication. The lack of budget has made it difficult to be able to have or to hire a press officer, and hasn't made it possible for the not for profit organizations to focus in other aspects beyond the promotion of sporting events. This is however a special case where the organization recognizes both the need of a better understanding of the role of a communication professional as well as already feeling the need to have one among its employees.

## Conclusions

The times in which we are living have brought different challenges. We are facing a global-

ized world with increasingly great achievements, in contrast with new worries. Presently, the concepts of “space” and “time” have new definitions and the social economy has suffered an enormous development, assuming a relevant role both at political and social levels.

If in Portugal the nonprofits go back to the fifteenth century with some religious institutions which are still in “business” in this first quarter of the twenty first century, never as today, do the CSO seem to have been called to perform so many and so diversified functions. From the social to the cultural or sportive areas, from the unions to the environmental arenas, alone or in partnerships with other national or supranational institutions, even in cooperation with private enterprises, supporting or refuting governmental policies or practices, the Civil Society Organizations seem to embody the best a world in crisis has to offer. In a world where the notion of “precarariat”, to use the expression of Guy Standing (Standing, 2011, 2014), seems to summarize so many of our worries, mainly those of the new generations, to understand that the nonprofits and the role of theirs communication professionals is an absolutely crucial endeavor.

This research highlights the lack of consistent work in the communication area as well as the total absence of any kind of strategic thinking. Communication functions are understood as mere discursive ones and in many cases just as a way to improve the writing or the presentation of some kind of leaflet or report. We seem to be far apart from what seems to be a more optimistic view as expressed, for instance by the European Communication Monitor (Tench et al., 2017) concerning the role of the communication professionals in our contemporaneity.

Theoretically the aspects related with the main stakeholders of the institutions are considered as belonging to the communications disciplines (from communication for development strategies to awareness campaigns, empowerment programs to advocacy, or

public affairs projects) and the finding that the organizations in study did see it to the realm of the communication activities, was an expected result. Conversely, the conclusion that these institutions didn't know what the main aspects of the work of a communication practitioner or consultant, were a real surprise.

For the Portuguese CSO the concept of communication is only understood as diffusion of information or promotion of certain events. Communication functions are understood as mere discursive ones, in many cases just as a way to improve the writing or the presentation of some kind of leaflet. The great majority of the institutions interviewed didn't know and not acknowledge the role of the communication practitioner in promoting communitarian relationships, in negotiation with funders or suppliers, in the achievement of organizational aims or in managing public affairs, or aspects that have to deal with empowerment or advocacy. The data enable researchers to assert that research or evaluation, the understanding of the environments, the different stakeholders' relationships, the correctness and suitability of the information, the pertinence of the message in accordance to its receptors, aren't taken in consideration by the Portuguese civil society organizations.

We can go back to the results found by Dozier (1984, 1992), and the concepts used by the author, and say that the most we were able to find where descriptions of "minor" roles, as technicians, as media relations specialists and (or) communication liaisons specialized in linking management with some quite specific key publics. This second idea was, however, more present in the NGOD group than in the Sports Federations group where, generally, only the punctual media relations activities was consistently referred.

It's important to note that even though there are media relations, plans of media relations weren't found - either at a strategical nor at a tactical level. The same can be said about all kinds of events that are dealt in a merely responsive or casuistically way. It's quite inter-

esting that due to the emergence of the digital media we can also rediscover one of the ideas expressed in the eighties when characterizing the communication professionals as technicians by opposition to consider them as having management roles. Our study let us think that the mere technician role seems, still today, or we would rather say, again, today, even though due to different factors, more precisely and in the present case owing to the increment of the digital media, to be connected with an idea that understands the communication or the public relations function, primarily as a creative or artistic activity. During the interviews it was often heard the idea that the NGO or the PSF might need someone to help transform the Facebook or the organization site in a better product understood, precisely as an artistic object. When asked why the social media, or whom they were trying to achieve there wasn't a clear rationale behind the efforts to have a strong presence in the social media.

If we have introduced a tactical level in order to be able to understand the role of the strategic communication practitioners in these institutions in a better way, as it was expected that maybe the strategic level might not be present in the third sector, it must be said that, in general, not even an understanding of the public relations function at an intermediary level was found. Strategic thinking, interference in the decision-making processes, construction of annual plans or crisis and risk communication plans weren't looked upon by these organizations except in very specific and well understood cases as for instances the *Médecins du Monde* the Football and Basketball Sports Federations.

At the end of this article we are forced to confront ourselves, and all those that work in this area, with the fact, as Muniz Sodré (2014) has so well put it, that the concept of "communication" seems to be one of the more used and less conspicuous concepts of our contemporaneity. The conceptual ambiguity both at a theoretical and an empirical level of the referred concept does not help those

at the professional endeavors to understand the fundamental role that the communication professionals can fulfill in the more diverse contexts and in special in the organizations under study in this paper. And as we know, and as different authors have defended more than 25 years ago (Dozier, 1992), the communication function is essential to the survival and growth of organizations special, as today, we are facing instability and uncertainty on a daily basis. It seems important also to note that it's imperative that the responsible both at the Non-Governmental Organizations for Development and at the Portuguese Sports Federations understand the constitutive role of communication, and that, quoting quite freely Dominique Wolton the fact that when we are talking about communication, we are talking about relationships being built and not merely about messages being transmitted (Wolton, 2009, 2015).

Borrowing a quite well-known dichotomy from Wittgenstein, Civil Society Organizations should not only be able to describe its missions, they should be able to express it. However, this will not be possible if these institutions do not recognize the constitutive and strategic role of communication professionals in their field.

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# Co-Creating More Citizen Involvement in Mäntsälä Municipality

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## Introduction and purpose

The role of Finnish municipalities are changing as the society is implementing a wide renewal of the national social and healthcare system of Finland. Municipalities will lose control over these two activities. Many important responsibilities will still remain the responsibility of municipalities. These include the responsibility for employment, teaching, daycare, land usage, enterprise policy, preventive wellbeing, culture, and sports (Sauri 2017, 10). Municipalities will also continue to serve as the principal agent toward participatory local democracy, culture, and vitality, and municipalities are increasingly activating their residents to participate in preparing and deciding these issues (Hakola, et al., 2017). It will be interesting to follow the development of the collaborative relationship between municipality and its residents and their various associations and networks. Co-creative methods are useful in this development (Galvagno & Dalli, 2014).

In the fall of 2017 and the spring of 2018 Laurea University of Applied Sciences ran a project with the municipality of Mäntsälä. The municipality situated 60 km north of Helsinki and it had 20.803 inhabitants in 2017(Mäntsälä, 2018). The project includ-

ed a series of student facilitated co-creation workshops of open interaction. These aimed to identify useful forms of smooth and open citizen participation. Multiple actors in the five different areas of Mäntsälä were encouraged to find solutions to involve municipality citizens in the decision making of the issues that touch the respective areas where they live. This process drew from the earlier co-creation case project by Laurea (Antura), which worked for greater social responsibility through involving network partner representatives and a voluntarily coordinated arena for citizen participation to co-create forms of smoother immigration integration and open interaction (Ruoslahti, 2017). The decision-makers and administration of the municipality of Mäntsälä are very committed to actively increase the participation Mäntsälä residents (Mäntsälän uutiset, 2018).

This paper finds that positive working models that activate and facilitate citizen involvement in municipal government should be developed and actively applied to promote positive integration of decision-making. All actors, including each individual citizen, are responsible for the conditions in their municipality. The research question of the project was: how to identify practical ways for the municipality of Mäntsälä to increase citizen

participation in democratic decision making?

### **Participatory local democracy**

The majority of Finns participate in municipal democracy in one way or another. The Association of Finnish Local and Regional Authorities finds that even many of those who in their responses showed like they did not participate, in reality did, as they were part in various social networks and activities (Association of Finnish Local and Regional Authorities, 2018). Citizen participation has a clear effect on the prosperity of the municipality (Ministry of Finance, 2012). Rättilä & Rinne (2016) find that when citizens are more involved in decision-making strengthens grassroots democracy. In practice, this means that different areas, parts of town, or villages could make independent decisions on issues that directly affect the area in question.

According to the Finnish Rural Policy Programme 2014-2020 (Finnish Ministry of Employment and Economy 2014) all citizens should have the possibility to effect the societal development of their own region. This may mean that citizens have possibilities to decide and influence how public resources, such as taxes, are used. The Finnish Rural Policy (2012) describes participatory democracy as local influencing, which means strengthening direct decision-making on local levels and societies.

Co-creation is a very useful method of promoting participatory democracy. Collaborative co-creative settings include knowledge transfers, best achieved when various stakeholders are included in the co-creation process (Ruoslahti, Tiainen, Kortelainen, & Vesterinen, 2011). Responsibilities become distributed between stakeholders, and decisions decentralized, when participation becomes facilitated. Co-creation can be face-to-face or through mediums, such as current social media applications, which can provide effective ways to promote co-creative collaboration (Hyttinen, Ruoslahti & Jokela, 2017).

Social media concepts enable municipalities

to listen to the opinions of its citizens, and to actively influence the municipal decisions. However, municipalities should be mindful that these electronic tools should be easy to use and that they require active coordination from the municipality (Díaz-Díaz & Pérez-González, 2016). Collaboration technologies can promote active and open collaboration, which in turn is key to successful co-creation. Such collaboration should be jointly constructed and lead. All co-creation processes require active facilitation (Ruoslahti, 2017).

Increasing participation has the potential to bring economic benefits by renewing services and rapid reaction to citizens' changing service needs. Participatory democracy can increase the work satisfaction of municipality personnel, the trust that residents feel for their municipality, and the possibility of presenting new innovative solutions to many social problems. Some good examples of participatory democracy are Helsinki, Tuusula, Lappeenranta, Tampere and Varkaus. (Kurikka 2018, Kuntaliitto 2018). Participatory democracy has played a strong role in the rural areas of Finland. Village action and village committees are important in the development of local democracy since the 1970s. According to the Annual Report 2017 of the Villages Association of Finland (Suomen kylät r.y.) (2018). Most municipalities in Finland can be considered rural, and there are 4.323 active Village Committees in Finland, and these committees have prepared 2.100 development plans for different Finnish villages (Kattilakoski & Backa, 2013; Uusitalo 2013).

### **Some Municipal Cases**

The city of Helsinki, the capital of Finland with 635 181 inhabitants in 2016 (Helsinki, 2018) aims at increasing citizen participation and taking advantage of the expertise of individuals and formal and informal groups. The city wants to offer its citizens equal opportunities to participate and self-organize activities. Some concrete measures are to offer people the possibility to reserve sites for happenings, follow municipal decision making on-

line, make suggestions and proposals, and vote on how to use funds in their own neighborhoods. Anyone over 12 years old may cast their vote. People can also volunteer for activities, ask for help from a municipal pilot person (stadiluotsi), and partake in service design by participating in on-line and face-to-face discussions. This aims at better including the voice of the younger generations. Also the city administrations aim at answering all citizen inquiries within one workday. (Osallisuustyöryhmä Helsinki 2017).

The municipality of Tuusula, with 38.646 inhabitants (2017), situated 30 km north of Helsinki (Tuusula, 2018), has five regional development networks, and these are supplemented by theme networks, and a business network. These were kicked-off in a series of evening events that were open to all municipality residents. Tuusula's mayor also regularly holds events open to all residents (Kurikka, 2018). The city of Varkaus, which is situated 320 km northeast of Helsinki and has 21.409 inhabitants (Varkaus, 2018), held an idea camp to involve its residents to participate toward a citizen society. This idea camp was visible in the Internet and social media. Other open events, such as coffee with the mayor, supplemented the idea camp (Kuntal-ehti, 2017).

The city of Tampere, has 231.853 inhabitants and it is situated (Tampere, 2018b) has four regional networks, which all have regional coordinators to facilitate their activities. These networks are open to all and residents, associations, businesses, and service providers all are able to co-create regional services and activities. The city, for example, appoints 5.000 Euro in annual regional funding for collaborative events in each region (Tampere, 2018a). Tampere also has working groups and resident groups, portals, and sites for gatherings (Kurikka, 2018).

The trend is clearly toward wider participation in Finnish municipalities. This trend aims to support participation, to create a basis for increased individual and regional responsibility in deciding common issues (Demokratia

ja osallistuminen työryhmä, 2014). The focus is residents participating in the decisions that affect their everyday lives.

## Participation Providing Security

The internal security strategy in Finland (2017) sets a high focus on the roles of and collaboration between municipalities, associations, businesses, academia, and different fields of administration. This multi-actor collaboration is especially important, when planning and implementing preventive actions in the fields of safety and security (Finnish Government, 2017).

Endorsing participation with open communication is an important aspect, when developing municipal safety and security. The municipality benefits from having personnel, who are dedicated to activating and coordinating open discussions between residents and municipal administrators (Tennberg, 2018). Value co-creation and citizen participation can be developed by implementing social media concepts for advanced e-government. The authors found that determination and involvement of the municipal government, an easy to use technology platform that secures the privacy of its users, and a designated community manager, who follows the community of users are needed (Díaz-Díaz & Pérez-González, 2016).

Some issues to address are related to segregation, immigration and the overall movement of people. The aim is that all actors have an up-dated situational picture and adequate security structures (Demokratia ja osallistuminen työryhmä, 2014, 16), thus shared information between schools, associations, businesses, and authorities can promote local problem solving and the creation of safety and related products and (Finnish Government, 2017). Thus, the participation project with the municipality of Mäntsälä also promotes safety and security. Collaboration between different actors drives this sense of security (Tennberg, 2018).

## Methodology

The study was completed as student integration, which is the learning method at Laurea University of Applied Sciences. Six students worked with the supervision of two teachers. The aim was to bring together municipal politicians and administrators with associations, groups, and individuals from Mäntsälä, so the study includes active cooperation, in the spirit of co-creation, between these groups. The time span of the Mäntsälä project is from October 2017 to May 2018.

Laurea University of Applied Sciences approaches learning with the concept LbD (Learning by Developing), where the student works on real world problems with the guidance of the teacher (Raij, 2014). Projects and teamwork are central, when applying the LbD method (Raij 2014). Students may come from very different backgrounds and they collaborate closely with outside partners (Dickinson 2017). One backbone in practical LbD projects is communication both within the student project team between the team and the outside partner (Salonen, Rantanen, Tallgren & Uusitalo, 2015).

The study applied a futures building approach as it models a road map of future visions that practical solutions could be based on (Meristö 1989). Knowledge transfers are central to co-creation (Pirinen, 2015), and the committed participation of the different actors partaking in the co-creation process (Ruoslahti, Tiainen, Kortelainen, & Vesterinen, 2011). Facilitating the process helps focus and divide responsibilities between participants (Ruoslahti, 2017). Co-creation also has a strong link with service design. Ojasalo & Ojasalo (2015) introduce a four step service design process, which was used in the Mäntsälä project. These steps are 1) Map and understand, 2) Forecast and ideate, 3) Model and evaluate, and 4) Conceptualize and influence, where the two first diverge and collect ideas, and the two last converge these ideas into concrete applicable innovations.

The futures based service design process,

used by this Mäntsälä democracy project, was looking to co-create toward a “Mäntsälä model” for citizen participation. The process had four phases:

The first phase in the fall of 2017 the student team interviewed 14 leading Mäntsälä politicians and administrators and collected benchmark information how citizens participate in other Finnish municipalities.

In the second phase, the students facilitated two idea workshops, open to all residents, which attracted 44 participants to list ideas on how the residents of Mäntsälä could be more involved in the decision making of their municipality.

The third phase included two development workshops, again open to all, in which the 25 citizens, who participated, made selections from the ideas collected in phase two to converge and make selections.

In the fourth phase the data, collected through phases one to three, was analyzed with the future roadmap framework by Meristö & Laitinen (2013), by listing reasons; society; solutions; enablers; barriers; resources; and benchmark.

The process and findings were presented in report, which was presented to the municipality of Mäntsälä and published by Laurea University of Applied Sciences (Laitinen, et al., 2018). The process identified and suggested some best practices solutions for the municipality to consider as a starting point toward the “Mäntsälä model” for citizen participation.

This study paves the way for finding best practices, and development suggestions for deeper involvement of the municipality population with shared vision towards greater social inclusion and responsibility in modern society.

## Results and conclusions

The study reveals ways to facilitate and promote active citizens’ participation. There are

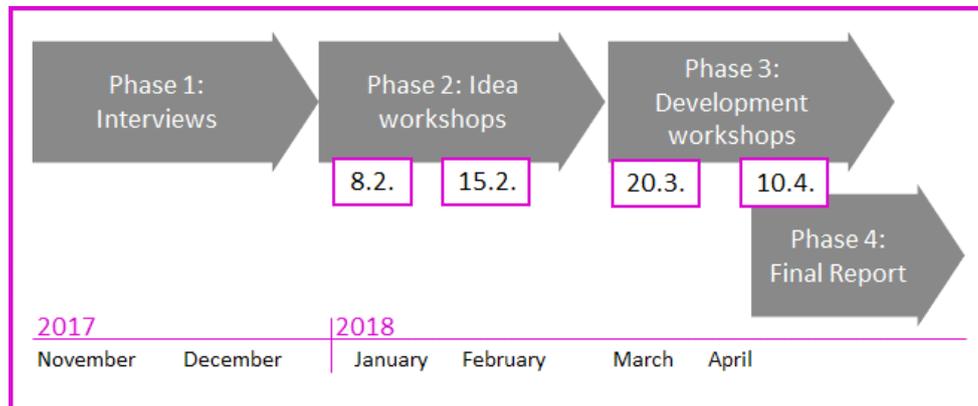


Figure 1: The process

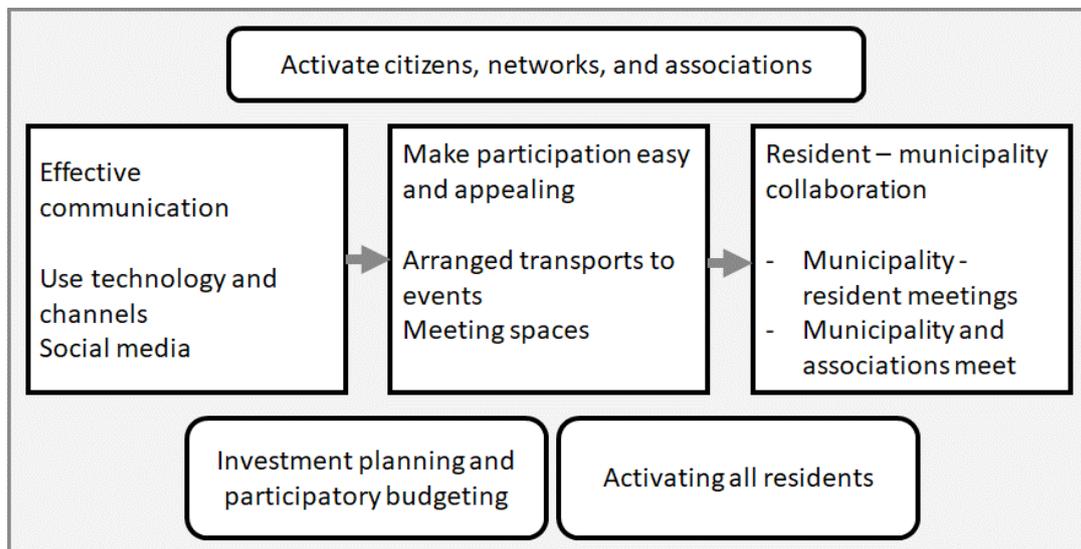


Figure 2: Main themes from workshops with the citizens of Mäntsälä

clear reasons to implement greater citizen participation, and this is in line with the current societal development in the country. Some clear solutions that came up are open communication, local meetings, and local budgets. Decision makers are expected to be more present and available to citizens, and one strong enabler, based on the results, is that Mäntsälä already has many active associations, which are very potential existing resources for future participatory activities.

Further solutions were sought, in four separate future vision workshops, to activate and help citizens and communities to organize cooperative actions to bring citizens more

involved in democratic decision making. The results open some practical steps for how to meet, engage, and integrate people in municipal affairs.

Both the interviewed municipal decision makers and the workshop participants saw that participation is very important for municipal democracy. Municipal decision makers are expected to be better available for citizens, and they are also expected to make themselves available, for example, at open local events. In addition, it was noted that Mäntsälä already has a pool of many active associations. Capitalizing this potential was seen as one practical way of increasing col-

laboration and possibly even local coordination.

Communication rose as a very important focal point in developing participatory democracy. The municipality should consider all possible means to supplement official / usual municipality channels (e.g. social media, and association channels, shop bulletin boards) to reach its citizens and to engage them in open communication.

Figure 2 shows how activating municipality citizens, communities, and associations can prevent social marginalization, grow the feeling of unity, and offer residents choices to participate in local democracy. Solutions that were identified as ways to increase local participatory democracy include monetary assistance and sites for gatherings offered by the municipality, an activity passport, and a free marketing channel to support local businesses. There are many existing municipal sites (e.g. schools) that can be used for gatherings and collaborative activities.

## Practical and social implications

This study promotes open communication and understanding in active citizen participation towards a greater involvement in municipal government. Positive co-existence adds trust in authorities and institutions in towns, cities, and suburban areas, and thus increases social responsibility in society. Active citizen participation can decrease uncertainty, complexity, and ambiguousness. Open communication and participation can build trust in public authorities.

Citizen evenings provide opportunities for citizens to meet municipality decision makers and discuss issues that are important to them. Such evenings could rotate around different municipality areas, as interaction and active communication were shown to be very important elements in engaging municipality citizens. Citizens will need to be shown that such meetings are reoccurring and worth attending. The workshops in this project demonstrated that people feel that it is worth

attending future meetings, when they feel that they have been listened to. A person, or persons in larger municipalities, should be dedicated to coordinate communication and social media interaction with citizens.

Municipalities can allow for participatory budgeting, where their citizens are given funds to use as they see best to solve some very practical issues that relate to their area or immediate lives. Some of this budgeting could be used to activate local activities that promote sense of community.

Municipalities already have many resources (e.g. school houses and communication channels), that can be actively used, and other existing structures (e.g. associations and clubs) should also be utilized to reach and activate municipality citizens and promote sense of community. The participants of this study felt strong attachment to their communities and an interest toward issues that pertain to their local areas. These types of feelings can be built on to promote participation.

Some threats against a sense of community can be movement of people, detachment from society, or just people working far from where they live. Also long distances and poor public transportation can also threaten participation, as can tradition and unwillingness to change.

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# Jungian Brand Therapy. Could the new model help find brand solutions in a post-branding world?

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**Purpose:** In a world in crisis, communication is tasked with the responsibility of maintaining interconnected, effective, global transfer of information and messaging. However, furious digital development influences the practice of strategic communication and threatens the role of practitioners in communication. This research paper discusses a framework based on Jungian concepts and contemporary branding practices that will help communication experts and their clients from small and medium enterprises (SME) [1] to establish mutual understanding and a bold communication platform in a fast manner and with clear strategic direction.

**Design/method/approach:** The framework was pretested in two phases. The first phase consisted of one-on-one semi-structured interviews with SME owners. The second phase was conducted during an international workshop.

**Findings:** The findings of the first phase indicate high evidence of a correlation between SME owner's archetypal online test results and personal identification with movie characters. During the second research phase, the majority of the participants rated the archetype chosen according to movie characters as familiar, while the artistic expressions of the archetypes were recognized with the high accuracy.

**Implications:** The framework can be used as stimuli during strategic communication planning in SME but also in personal branding and team coaching.

**Originality:** The pre-test research proposes that an authentic brand meaning can be defined according to the enterprise's brand owner's [2] resonance toward their dominant archetype and as such can be easily communicated to all the experts in charge of the brand.

**Keywords:** Jungian; Branding; Archetypes; Archetypal branding; Strategic communication; Briefing process; Brand consulting; Neo-archetypal theory; Brand owner; Social media

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## 1. Challenges and responsibilities of strategic communication and brand consultancy in the digital world

Each and every war starts and ends with communication (Verčič, 2018). In a world full of concerns about geopolitical risks, cyber wars, climate change and natural disasters, communication is tasked with the responsibility of maintaining interconnected, effective, global transfer of information and messaging. However, furious digital development also influences the practice of strategic communication and changes the business models the experts operate within.

The key digital trends social media, big data, mobility and pervasive computing, cloud, AI, VR and robotics lead the communication management landscape today by influencing consumer's behavior and power, re-shaping the needs of marketers and consequently, redefining role of communication experts and consultants.

At the beginning of Internet era, marketers cheered digital media as a new, easy to use communication channel that could simplify strategic communication management and relations with the public. Two decades later, we are witnessing the evolution of consumer power; once audiences could opt out of ads it became harder for brands to buy fame, so only a few brands have generated meaningful consumer interest online (Holt 2016). Individual-based online sources gave consumers *demand-based and information power*, while social media ubiquitously provided consumers the *network and crowd-based power* (Labrecque et al. 2013). This caused a change in the decision-making process, information sharing, and entertainment consumption. Today's creative consumers take a much less reductive journey making futile the traditional funnel strategies (Edelman 2010), while adapting, modifying or transforming the proprietary offerings, whether they be products, services, information or ideas.

Survey among 777 marketing executives around the globe, revealed that filling "talent gaps", adjusting the "organizational design", and implementing "actionable metrics" is the biggest improvement opportunities for companies across sectors (Leeflang 2014). As access to knowledge is democratized, opacity fades and clients no longer have to pay the fees of big consulting firms, opening gates to modular providers. Many companies have hired former consultants for internal strategy groups, which contribute to the companies' know-how but also increase sophistication about consulting services, moving the work in-house (Clayton et al 2013).

Traditional boundaries between professional services are blurring and brand management mandates are often shared. The relationships between clients and communication experts are often time limited, discontinuous and superficial.

As examples of the new reality (Kluz and Frilej 2017) state that the most popular social media creates no content (Facebook), the fastest growing banks have no actual money (SocietyOne), the world's largest taxi company owns no taxis (Uber), and the largest accommodation provider owns no real estate (Airbnb). To complement the list we may add Comatch, a platform that matches clients with management consultants. The company was founded in 2014 by former McKinsey & Company consultants and recorded a compound annual growth record of 422% in the initial three-year period. Among other marketing and strategy topics, Comatch offers branding, marketing and communication planning consultancy.

This new, threatened role of consultants and strategic communication management results in pale, unrecognizable, purposeless brand communication (Figure 1).

If there is no focused brand positioning based on meaningful differentiation, the audience will take over, because marketers have very limited control and consumers are more likely to trust their peers than branded content.

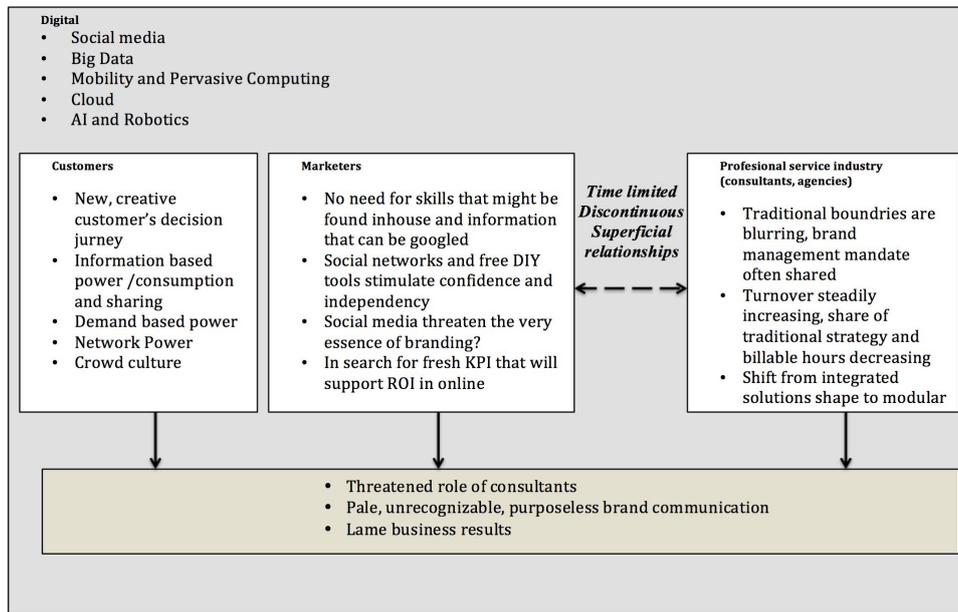


FIGURE 1: Brand communication consultancy in digital age

Brands are becoming more transparent and success goes to the ones that are authentic and able to deliver quality (Kohli et al 2014).

## 2. How to responsibly develop and implement brand for small and medium businesses?

In today's consulting landscape the strategic marketing firm devoted to small and medium enterprises (SME), searched for a practical framework for collaboration with clients, that could prevail against problems disrupting strategic communication management and could ensure excellent, long-term brand strategy, creative ideas, and business results. The process should be (1.) fast; with no need to additional education, (2) focused; to deliver clear direction and (3.) inclusive; to ensure long-term cooperation with all the experts involved. While sharing the central struggles of large company brands, SMEs have specific details (Figure 2) that influence the strategic planning processes and overall communication management: small companies often do not have a strong marketing team, people in charge of communication lack knowledge and marketing skills, limited marketing

budgets create a strong temptation for using DIY tools. The company owner is usually the decision maker in every segment of the business, which makes the branding process very fast and ensures overall implementation; not limited only to communication but also concerning product development, customer services, market research. However, decisions often depend solely on the owner's taste and mood, threatening the brand development and communication.

The strategic marketing firm, which considers strategic planning dynamics and relationship with the client as their responsibility, explored ways to adjust the planning process according to the SME traits and needs, and the current state of the overall communication landscape.

The result is related to the audience's desire for authentic communication with the role and the power of the company founder. Small businesses generally share the vision and values of the owner who is at the core of the organization, and who has the power to establish and implement business and communication strategies that will be reflected in every touch point with consumer and other stakeholders. Examples of the iconic brands

<p><b>Strenghts</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• No many corporate politics, because the company owner is the clear brand owner.</li> <li>• Fast planning and branding process because it is clear that the owner is decision maker.</li> <li>• Easy to implement strategies because the owner has power in the company.</li> </ul>	<p><b>Weaknesses</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• No money to invest in marketing.</li> <li>• No skills, no marketing know how.</li> <li>• Personal taste prevail decisions, don't know how to run the process and often does not trust other people, including experts.</li> <li>• No people to do the work.</li> <li>• No time to do the strategic planning and marketing, to take care of branding.</li> <li>• Often run campaigns on social media on her own.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Opportunities</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• If defined brand well-easy communication and online presence control.</li> <li>• Easy to stick above the local competition.</li> <li>• Way to build long-term relationship with customers.</li> </ul>	<p><b>Threats</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Without branding there is no consistency in consumers touch points and there is no focus in communication.</li> <li>• Hard to communicate in recognaizable way, can't stand out of the competition.</li> <li>• Lost of influence among customers, industry and society.</li> </ul>

FIGURE 2: SWOT analysis of SME communication management

Apple, Virgin or Microsoft evidence how the leader’s personality reflects the core meaning of the company’s brand.

Nevertheless, during development, it became clear that the brand-planning framework should be applicable regardless of an individual owner’s charisma, with the primary goal of providing a focused, inspirational strategic platform, which the brand owner and their team can understand and connect with in long-term.

The primary question arises: How can one articulate a brand-owner’s personality in order to communicate it precisely to all the experts in charge of the brand — from designers and copywriters, through digital and social media experts, to PR and media people?

### 3. Digging up personal authenticity

The solution is found in Jungian and neo-archetypal theory. Jung regarded the psyche as made up of four separate, but interacting, di-

visions. The three main ones were the ego, the personal unconscious, and the collective unconscious (Hall 1934, McLeod, 2014) (Figure 3).

The ego, a small part of a human psyche, represents the conscious mind: status, garments, ego maneuvers. It is subject to fast, radical changes and is easily impacted by others (Bar, 2018). The ego is largely responsible for feelings of identity and continuity. Jung proposed that the unconscious consists of two layers – personal and collective unconscious.

Personal subconscious, or the shadow, encompasses all the hidden, rejected and repressed parts of each of our personalities, or in other words, “the thing a person has no wish to be” (Hall, 1983).

The deepest layer is the collective unconscious (or objective psyche), which has an apparent universal structure in mankind. Within the collective unconscious there are archetypes and archetypal images. Jung (1954) believed archetypes are an intrinsic set of im-

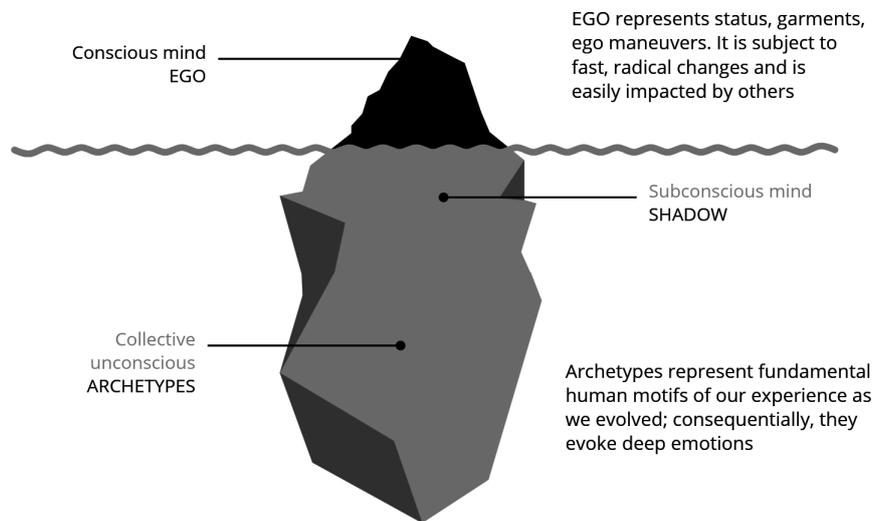


FIGURE 3: Personality structure according to C. G. Jung

ages and feelings that repeat across cultures and generations, and shape human collective unconsciousness. Jung contended that people employed unconscious or implicit mental models of other people in the world based on a network of “primordial, mythological images” and ancient beliefs that were ancestrally common to all humans, and provided the “true basis of the individual psyche”. Any real person, situation, or event could conjure up these powerful and ancient images from the collective unconscious, eliciting a powerful and otherwise inexplicable emotional reaction (Shelburne, 1988; Faber&Mayer, 2009).

In neo-archetypal theory, archetypes possess five characteristics. Specifically, archetypes:

(a) are story characters, (b) are represented psychologically as mental models like “self and other” schemes and prototypes, and (c) often elicit intense emotional responses when encountered. Also, such archetypes (d) operate at an automatic or unconscious level, and (e) are culturally enduring to be easily learned and widely recognizable (Faber&Mayer, 2009).

Jung claimed to identify a large number of archetypes but paid systematic attention to few that he found were “fundamentally unobservable.” Contemporary theorists regularly discuss the basic twelve or thirteen ar-

chetypes.

Faber&Mayer (2009), in their comprehensive research study, explored people’s reactions and preferences to archetypal characters in modern mass media: popular music, movies and classic art. Research findings offered surprising new evidence for possible existence of dominant archetypal themes in our lives, indicating that people’s resonance towards neo-archetypes predicts their personal themes and media preferences — provided the indicators that people respond to are archetypal characters, which reflect their own personalities.

Faber’s (2009) findings sparked the idea that enterprise owner’s personality can be articulated through their predominant subconscious archetypes.

#### 4. Connecting the dots to create the framework for Jungian branding

As an enterprise owner’s personality might reflect the core meaning of the personal and company brand, and their personality can be articulated through their subconscious mind, it is possible to establish the relationship between personality and brand structure.

The hypothesis arises that the brand owner's taste and decisions are connected only to their conscious mind, their *ego*, and as such are subject to fast, radical changes, and are easily impacted by others. That would explain SME owner's unfocused briefings, tentative decisions, and unsteady, inconsistent judgments of the strategic and creative works. The *inner self* is consistent and close to the brand meaning (Figure 4).

Another underlying insight from the Faber's research (2009) supported the model we explore: by identifying with a particular archetype, the individual has an automatically created support group for his or her tastes, since the archetypes unify the people they represent through common interests. This finding provoked the presumption that if an enterprise owner defines their archetype, it would be possible to precisely communicate it to other experts in charge of communication.

## 5. What has been done to pretest the framework?

### 5.1 Hypothesis and research questions

**Hypothesis:** The personal taste and decisions are connected to ego, while the inner self is consistent, connected to fundamental archetypes and close to the brand meaning.

If the above hypothesis were supported, it would be possible to construct a framework that would help the enterprise brand owners and communication experts to define focused, authentic brand strategy platform in a fast, easy manner, which will ensure consistent, recognizable, long-term communication with all the stakeholders.

### 5.2 Research questions

To test the hypothesis, we defined the two research questions:

**RQ 1:** Is there a correlation between a prevailed archetype of the participant according to an online questionnaire and the archetypal movie character the participant is attracted to?

If we confirm the correlation between test result and the chosen archetype, the framework may be used for defining the archetypal foundation of a brand.

**RQ 2:** Could the participant describe characteristics of a chosen archetype in a way that the communication expert can recognize as the archetype?

If the communication experts familiar with Jungian concepts and archetypal theory can correctly recognize archetypes that participants describe, then the framework may be used as a briefing tool during the strategic planning processes and branding.

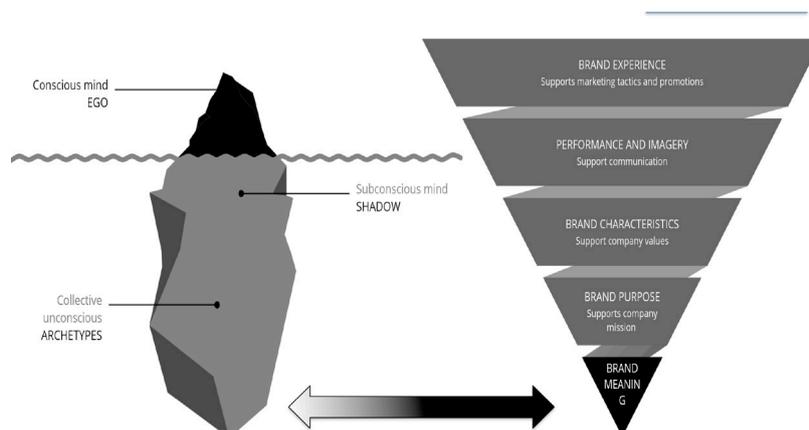


FIGURE 4: Personality and brand structure relationship

These research questions were tested during two phases of the research.

### 5.3 Methodology of the first phase

The first research question we tested through five one-on-one semi-structured interviews, supported with an online test and a specially created stimuli tool based on archetypal movie characters.

#### 5.3.1 Participants of the first phase

Five SME owners, clients of the agency without previous knowledge of archetypes, participated in the first phase of the study.

#### 5.3.2 Materials for the first phase

In order to introduce the Jungian concepts of personality structure and the theory of archetypes, the researchers prepared a 15-minute

PowerPoint presentation. To determine the dominant archetypal type of participants, we used an online personality test (Figure 5).

To check which archetypal movie character the participant was most attracted to, we created two sets of twelve A4 posters, for the twelve fundamental archetypes (Mark and Pearson, 2001) (Table 1).

On the front side of posters are photos of well-known movie characters with strong archetypal traits, and on the back we gave comprehensive description of the archetype (Figure 6). To choose the characters and to describe the archetypes, we read previous studies on the topic of archetypes (Mark and Pearson, 2001; Faber and Mayer, 2009; Sener and Bir, 2017) and made a list of thirty-five movie characters. We used twenty-four movie characters to produce the basic set of posters, while the remaining eleven were kept as



FIGURE 5: Online personality test

backup. The basic list was sent to the participants before their interviews, to check if they are familiar with them. If one would not be familiar with some of the movies on the list, the appropriate character on the poster would be replaced with a backup. To avoid gender preferences, we made two sets of the posters; one with female and the other with male characters. The posters were mounted on foam-boards and before the research were displayed along the wall.

**5.3.3 Procedure of the first phase**

The participant was left alone to take an online personality test, using thirty-six closed multiple-choice questions to determine the prevailing archetypes. After taking the test, the researcher moved on to the movie characters, asking the participants to recall the movies and to choose the character they were the most attracted to. Only the posters with characters of the same gender as the participant's were displayed. The participant was allowed to browse through the twelve exhibited A4 posters for five minutes in order to choose their character. The whole process took approximately thirty minutes.

**5.3.4 Results of the first phase**

The results showed high evidence of correla-

tion between the online test results and the preferred film archetype (Table 2).

**5.4 Methodology of the second phase**

The second research question we tested during the international workshop held at Expressive Arts in Action Conference 2018 in Athens. The workshop simulated the development of communication brief and the briefing procedure.

**5.4.1 Participants of the second phase**

In the second phase of the research the workshop participants were accompanied by two communication experts, both certified Jungian coaches. The workshop was comprised of fifteen people, artists and psychologists with backgrounds in coaching and therapy, with limited knowledge of Jungian concepts and no previous knowledge of marketing communication and branding (Figure 7).

**5.4.2 Materials for the second phase**

For the second phase, the researchers used the introductory PowerPoint presentation, the set of twelve foam-board posters with the archetypal movie characters and their descriptions, and the wide selection of art



FIGURE 6: Front and back side of a Jungian male movie poster

equipment and tools; different coloring pens, scissors, glue, duct tape, fashion magazines and collage paper. The posters with only female characters were exposed, because fourteen of the fifteen participants were women.

### 5.4.3 Procedure of the second phase

At the beginning of the workshop, the researcher held the fifteen-minute introductory presentation explaining the foundation of Jungian concepts, archetypal theory, and branding processes.

After that, the participants were given five minutes to choose between the twelve movie characters that were exhibited; during the selection process, the participants were not allowed to see the backs of posters.

After choosing their characters (some char-

acters were chosen by multiple people), the participants were asked to turn the posters around and review the archetype's description for three minutes and to rate how the archetype's description resonated with them. The following ratings were offered: 3-familiar, 2-interesting, and 1-dislike. Jungian coaches were not aware of the participants selections.

After choosing an archetype and rating the resonance, the participants were given thirty minutes to use the art equipment and create a mood board [3] that would represent

their expression of the archetype. The participants then presented their mood boards as the creative communication briefs to the Jungian coaches. During the presentation, stating the name of the archetype was prohibited, and the coaches had to define the



FIGURE 7: Workshop in Athens, 2017

archetype only according to the expressions on the mood board. The workshop lasted 120 minutes. The overall scheme of the workshop's procedure is given in Figure 8.

**5.4.4 Findings of the second phase**

The results of the second phase are shown in Table 3. The second column holds the abbreviations of the chosen archetype. Some of the characters were chosen more frequently than others, such as the "lover" that was chosen four times, and the "revolutionary," "explorer," and the "ruler" that were each chosen by two participants.

The third column shows the participants' responses toward the archetypes they chose after seeing the archetypes' descriptions. A majority of the participants (ten out of fifteen) rated the resonance with the chosen archetype as "familiar", four participants rated the archetype as "interesting" and only one participant disliked the archetype of her choice.

In fourth and fifth column are the abbreviations of the archetypes that coaches selected as the best to represent the participant's mood-boards. The final column shows the match between the archetype according which the participant created the mood board and correct response from the Jungian coaches. 0-none of the coaches correctly recognized the archetype, 1-one of the coaches recognized it and 2- both of the coaches rec-

ognized the archetype on the mood board.

The results shown the significantly high match in archetypes that participant's were expressing and the ones that coaches recognized from their mood boards. Five mood boards were correctly recognized by both of the coaches, eight by one while only one was addressed wrongly by both of the coaches.

**6. The final discussion**

**6.1 Review of findings**

At the beginning of the manuscript it had been stated that the characteristics of today's relationship between the marketers and marketing communication professionals are discontinuous, time-limited and superficial. It results in: (1) threatened role of consultants; (2) pale, unrecognizable, purposeless brand communication insufficient for creative audiences empowered by the digital world and finally, (3) lame communication results, no matter if it is a matter of sales, social problem awareness or election.

The main aim of the research was to pretest the original framework based on the Jungian concepts and contemporary branding practice that will help communication practitioners and their clients establish mutual understanding and a bold communication platform in a fast manner and with clear strategic

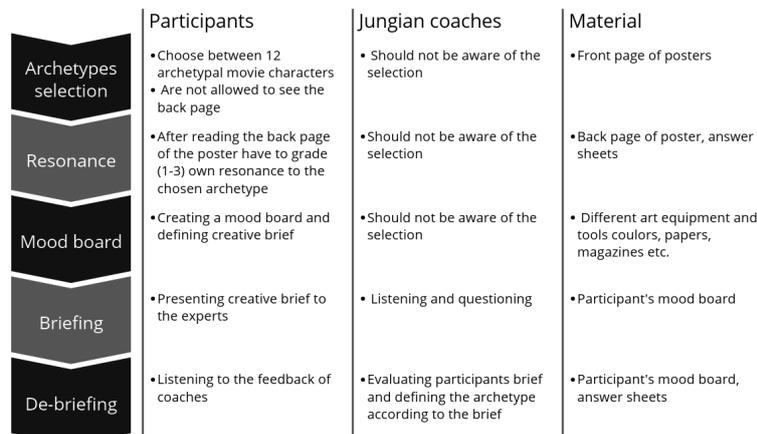


FIGURE 8: Workshop procedure

direction.

The first findings in the first phase of the research shown significant evidence of the match between a dominant archetype of the participant according to an online questionnaire and the archetypal movie character the participant is attracted to. Additionally, the findings of the second phase shown that the majority of the participants rated the archetype chosen according to movie character as the highest of familiarity. These findings offer the possibility to use the Jungian movie cards in defining the archetypal foundation of a brand.

During the second phase of the research, communication experts educated in Jungian theories recognized the artistic expressions of the archetypes with the high punctuality, which indicates that the framework and the Jungian movie cards can be used as a briefing tool during the planning processes and branding.

## **6.2 The originality of the pretested framework**

The archetypal branding is no novelty in the branding practice. As Mark&Pearson (2001) state, advertising always has used archetypal imagery to market products, and the brands that capture the essential meaning of the category and communicate that message in subtle and refined ways dominate the market.

The traditional archetypal branding approach strives to define the target audience's desired archetype to adjust the brand position accordingly. The process is robust and long-lasting, it includes extensive market researches, client's briefings and strategic development of brands that should appeal to the target group. The framework we tested put the enterprise brand owner in the center of the process and build the brand meaning over her dominant archetype. Such an approach will ease the strategic planning of the communication, implementation and further communication management. The tested

framework implies a change in the communication model toward the stakeholders' pool and insurance of long-term communication authenticity.

## **6.3 Practical and social implications of the study**

The given results of the pre-testing the framework imply that method and the Jungian movie posters will work across the branding process in different firms in charge of communication.

They will work for: (1) strategic planning in companies with the apparent decision maker in branding and communication (most often the company owner herself); (2) personal branding and media training; (3) personal and team coaching. The tested framework and Jungian posters will, by bringing the discussions to the mutual understandings of fundamental archetypes, work for as: (1) stimuli in brainstorming to overcome the enterprise brand owner personal taste but also extend habitual communication expert's individual style; (2) facilitating tool in briefing process; (3) inspiration tool for creative and other communication experts.

Pre-testing the framework pointed the power of archetypes in communication. Mark & Pearson (2001) described the charismatic influence of people, who are strongly connected to the fundamental archetypes, giving examples of Madonna who changes her lifestyle and hairstyles, but she is always the outrageous archetypal Rebel; or Diana Spencer's life that had many chapters and styles, but she always stayed Lover, catching so profoundly the audience attention. Charismatic leaders (whether in religion, politics, or elsewhere) may appear at any time, they most often emerge—or are called into existence—during a crisis. The study implies that recognizing the archetypal patterns may be one of the tasks of communication professionals today.

SMEs are defined as non-subsidary, independent firms, which employ fewer than a given number of employees. This number varies across national statistical systems. The most frequent upper limit is 250 employees, as in the European Union. However, some countries set the limit at 200 employees, while the United States considers SMEs to include firms with fewer than 500 employees. Small firms are generally those with fewer than 50 employees, while micro-enterprises have at most ten, or in some cases five, workers. Financial assets are also used to define SMEs. In the European Union, SMEs must have an annual turnover of EUR 40 million or less and/or a balance-sheet valuation not exceeding EUR 27 million (<http://www.oecd.org/regional/leed/1918307.pdf>)

In the manuscript "Enterprise's brand owner" defines person continuously in charge for decisions in company. Usually this is the company owner herself, but can be a CEO with decision-making power.

A mood board is a type of collage consisting of images, text, and samples of objects in a composition used by graphic designers, photographers, copywriters but also by other people involved in creative processes to visually illustrate the style they wish to pursue. They are not limited to visual subjects, but serve as a visual tool to quickly inform others of the overall look & feel of an idea.

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# Difference of CSR activities and communication between B2B and B2C companies

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## 1. Background and Purpose of the Study

Companies are engaged in business activities related to many stakeholders including customers, customers, business partners, shareholders, investors, governments, communities, and employees. And companies operate on these various relationships. Corporate communication is a management function that offers a framework for companies to continue to exist by establishing and maintaining favorable reputations with stakeholders (Cornelissen, 2008). It is the responsibility for companies to actively disclose information to stakeholders and fulfill accountability through corporate communication, which supports the sustainable development of themselves.

On the other hand, since the characteristics of B2B (Business to Business) companies and B2C (Business to Consumer) companies are different, the content, purpose and target of CSR activities are different, which may affect CSR communication to the community. If there are problems in the same management method as the B2C companies in the field of CSR activities and corporate communication, a method adapted to the B2B companies should be explored.

B2B is a domain for the relationship between organizations (companies), and it is a concept paired with B2C. Regarding stakeholder management, there is hardly any discussion on the distinction between B2C companies and B2B companies, despite the importance of B2B companies.

Because B2B companies are dealing with industrial materials and do not frequently contact with the community, accumulation of research on stakeholders other than customers is small, and systematic discussion has been lacking so far. Although there are some previous researches as some elements of B2B marketing and B2B branding, we cannot find discussion on corporate communication of B2B companies for a wide range of stakeholders.

The reason for this is that, from the perspective of the third party, the only difference between the B2B companies and the B2C companies are their customers, and it is recognized that the response to stakeholders such as the employees, the shareholders and the community are the same.

However, even for B2B companies, it is an important management task to increase compatibility with diverse stakeholders, not limited to direct customers. B2B companies

should conduct corporate communications in a different way from B2C companies.

As the business environment and prerequisites become complicated, a paradigm shift of corporate evaluation standards has occurred, and social factors such as environmental conservation activities and CSR management have become important, in addition to economics such as sales and profits. At the same time, companies have more and more multiple stakeholders. Attitude and behavior of stakeholders directly affect companies. Companies will ensure continuity while their value is recognized by stakeholders.

Based on these considerations, we extract the characteristic elements in CSR activities and CSR communication in corporate communication of B2B companies, which occupies an important position in their stakeholder management. The aim of our research is to obtain a theoretical and practical implication by considering the background of corporate communication done by B2B companies. For that purpose, we conducted some research interviews and present the differences in CSR activities and communication for communities between B2B companies and B2C companies.

## 2. Literature Review

In this chapter, we will review previous researches on B2B corporate communications, and clarify the areas that need to be explored. First, we grasp the concept and characteristics of the B2B domain which is the main field of this research. Next, we will outline the research of stakeholder management. And, we will organize the company's CSR approach and finally review the B2B corporate communication research.

### 2.1 B2B domain

B2B stands for "Business to Business" and is established as a general term like B2B company, B2B transaction, B2B marketing, B2B communication. However, compared with the B2C (Business to Consumer) domain, it is

hard to become a subject of research due to the limited relationship with people in daily life. Until the term B2B is emerging, and still now, like "industrial marketing" or "industrial goods," the term "industry" is commonly used. B2B is not limited by the characteristics of the goods handled, but is a classification targeting transactions between organizations (companies). B (Business) is not limited to companies, but it is considered to include government, schools, hospitals, non-profit organizations, etc. Therefore, "B2B" and "industry" are treated as synonyms in practice, but B2B has a broader target area if strictly considered (Yamasaki, 2014). The B2B domain covered by this research is especially a domain with private B2B companies.

As B2B companies which focus on long-term organizational purchasing are able to maintain stable management by supplying high-quality products at reasonable prices, communication targeting non-customer stakeholders are not recognized as important management task (Yamasaki, 2014). But, in these days, compared to B2C companies, various stakeholders including communities lack the recognition and understanding of company names and businesses, so various problems are becoming obvious.

### 2.2 Stakeholder theory

Freeman (1984, p. 53), a pioneering leader in stakeholder research, defines stakeholder as "any group or individual who can affect or is affected by achievement of an organization's purpose." Specifically, it refers to customers, users, business partners, shareholders, investors, governments, communities, employees, and so on, who interact with organizations such as companies. Since Freeman, research on stakeholder theory has been accumulated.

Miyasaka (2000) is considering stakeholder management from the aspects of business ethics.

He argues that the foundation of CSR is symbiosis with diverse stakeholders and that the

keyword to adjust the interests of stakeholders is a trusting relationship between companies and stakeholders.

Although the nucleus having a relationship with stakeholders is a company, research on stakeholder management have not distinguished B2B from B2C, and generally assume B2C company as its subject.

In this research, in analyzing the difference of CSR activities and communication between B2B and B2C companies, we focused on a stakeholder map where stakeholders are positioned.

A stakeholder map generally visualizes relationships by radially arranging stakeholder groups in the periphery of focal companies, such as the map proposed by Post, Preston, and Sachs (2002) (Fig. 1).

This typical stakeholder map is arranged as if each stakeholder were independent and companies were facing each other stakeholders alike. This map does not express the scale of stakeholders' influence or interrelationship. There are stakeholder maps that have attempted to respond to these problems (eg. Freeman, Harrison, and Wicks, 2007), but it

does not apply to all companies.

It is not particularly applicable to B2B companies, and there is no stakeholder map unique to B2B companies.

Harrison and Freeman (1999) stated that as one aspect of stakeholder management, economic and social fields should be handled integrally, because it is difficult to divide the economic and social effects clearly and is fused together.

On the other hand, Clarkson (1995) tried to think about the analysis and evaluation of corporate social performance in the stakeholder framework. He concludes as follows. The measurement of corporate success has traditionally been limited to creation of wealth for only one stakeholder, the shareholder. But the economic and social purpose of the corporation is to create and distribute wealth and value to all primary stakeholders.

Bosse et al. (2009) clarified the reciprocity of companies and stakeholders, and reciprocity behavior creates more value than pursuing self-interest, which is not only occurred in the two-part relationship but also among stakeholders in the network. Tan-

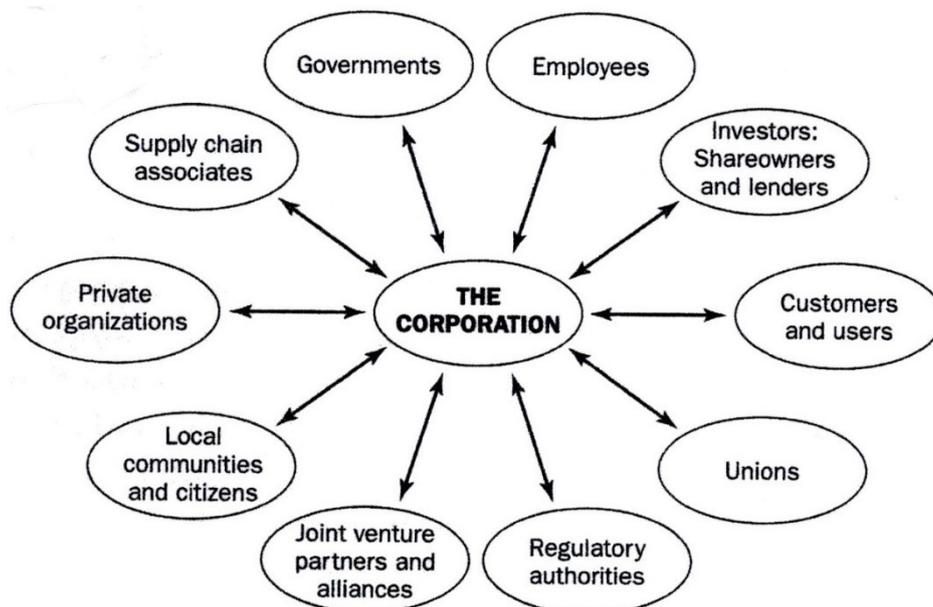


Figure 1: Stakeholder map (Post, Preston, and Sachs, 2002)

imoto (2013) points out that the sustainable development of society will be discussed by multi-stakeholders, and will be grasped in the interrelationship between companies and multi-stakeholders.

As we have seen, research on stakeholders has not been conducted with each company's characteristics and attributes, and no discussion has been made separating B2B and B2C.

Mizumura (2004) argued that, although the existence of stakeholders is applicable to general companies, the constituent elements differ depending on individual companies, industries, business types. Furthermore, they are different on the spatial axis of geography, and the time axis of past, present and future. In other words, the feasibility of generalization of relations between companies and stakeholders depends on the extent of subdivision of companies and stakeholders, and it is difficult to do strictly. It might be true, but we think that it is meaningful to consider the B2B domain which this research attempts as "degree of subdivision" separately from the B2C domain, because BtoB and BtoC are a major domain division in the industry.

In this paper, we consider communities as an aggregation of living persons, and we position them as independent stakeholders to be managed while overlapping with other stakeholders as individuals.

For B2C companies, customers who are purchasers of products and the community are almost identical. Therefore, B2C companies need not locate communities as independent stakeholders for management object. As a result, B2C companies are presumed to have little intention of managing the communities clearly separated from customers as stakeholders. On the other hand, customers of B2B companies are corporations and organizations. There are only a few individual "customers" who are participants of purchasing belonging to the organization. B2B companies recognize the community as a stakeholder that is managed separately from customers, as the overlap between customers and communities is small compared to B2C companies. This is a great difference between stakeholder management between B2B companies and B2C companies. Figure 2 shows the degree of overlap between customers and communities of B2B and B2C companies.

From this point of view, B2B companies and B2C companies may differ from CSR activities and communications, especially for the community. However, the difference between CSR activities and communication between B2B companies and B2C companies has not been discussed.

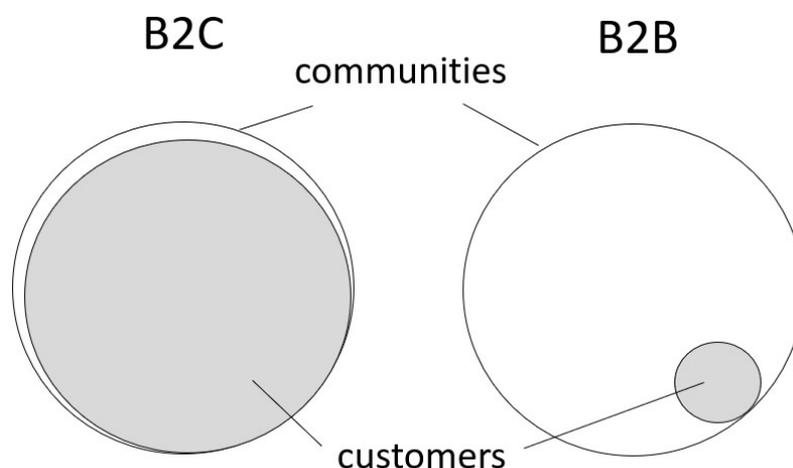


Figure 2: The extent of overlapping of communities with customers (Yamasaki, 2014)

### **2.3 CSR - Corporate Social Responsibility**

There are many discussions about CSR, and here we review what seems to be deeply related to this paper.

Post, Lawrence, and Weber (2002, pp. 58-59) stated that the concept of corporate social responsibility is “a corporation should be held accountable for any of its actions that affect people, their communities, and their environment.”

Carroll (1991) classified corporate social responsibilities into four hierarchies: economic responsibilities, legal responsibilities, ethical responsibilities, and philanthropic responsibilities. This pyramid of corporate social responsibility portrays the four components of CSR, beginning with the basic building block notion that economic performance undergirds all else. A frame of CSV (Creating Shared Value) is that a company creates social value by responding to social needs while creating economic value (Porter & Kramer, 2011).

As mentioned above, the concept of corporate social responsibility is not different for B2B companies and B2C companies, but it seems that there is a difference in the purpose and contents of communication for individual stakeholders. For example, one opportunity for B2B companies to place society as an important stakeholder was a pollution problem (Yamasaki, 2014), B2B companies were pressed for corresponding communication.

Not only for B2C companies but also for B2B companies, stakeholders have become multi-tiered, and environmental and social outcomes are becoming important as corporate evaluation standards in addition to economic outcomes. As community's antipathy and negative evaluation be a hindrance, and the possibility that B2B companies will be unable to run smoothly increases. It is not limited only to pollution problems, but by increasing voice in various areas, the community has become a presence as a valued stakeholder

in the management of B2B companies.

### **2.4 Corporate communication**

Inoue (2009, p. 108) defines CSR communication as “dialogue and information exchange with stakeholders on CSR concept, attitudes and initiatives, for realizing CSR, building trust and sharing value between the company and stakeholders, and improving corporate value and social value”.

The research of corporate communications on the B2B domain is less likely to be covered, as compared to the B2C domain, because the contact frequency between the community and the companies is small. On the other hand, In the marketing field, research has been accumulated, and has established fields such as industrial marketing and industrial advertising. In B2B marketing, the relationship marketing framework has been developed focusing on customer relationship management (Yoda, 2000). Relationship marketing is a research area to explain continuous trading and functional relationship between companies.

While the concept of branding has developed in B2C domain, B2B domain has paid attention to branding only limitedly (Bengtsson & Servais, 2005). Nowadays brand management in B2B is not only related to product or service but rather to the whole company itself (Kotler & Pfoertsch, 2006). Even for stakeholders other than customers, branding approaches such as company reliability rather than approaches with products and services which are hard to be understood by the community are required.

## **3. Method**

With the problems we became aware of and previous research mentioned above, this research set up the following two research questions.

What are the differences in CSR communication for communities between B2B and B2C companies?

What are the differences in CSR activities between B2B and B2C companies?

Our research method is the case study research with interviews. First, we contacted seven B2B companies and five B2C companies, and asked their CSR communications. Second, we contacted two B2B companies and two B2C companies, and asked their CSR activities. We conducted a semi-structured interview method which let us list questions and also ask other questions about relevant areas, and selected companies with considering the balance of industries, convenience sampling. For details of the interview, see Yamasaki (2016, 2017) and Yamasaki et al. (2017).

In investigating the difference in CSR communication between B2B companies and B2C companies, we asked each company the following three points.

1. Objects of communication
2. Contents of communication
3. Media used for CSR communication

In investigating the difference in CSR activities between B2B companies and B2C companies, we asked each company the following two points.

1. Main target of CSR activities
2. Contents of CSR activities

We followed the case study method of Eisenhardt (1989), especially the sampling method and sample size (theoretical saturation), regarding the difference in CSR communication between B2B companies and B2C companies. Eisenhardt (1989) stated that as the theoretical building step, the number of cases is not defined before data collection but added until reaching the theoretical saturation state, that is, even in a new case, the same characteristic is repeatedly found.

## 4. Results

### 4.1 Difference in CSR communication

On CSR communication, we found the difference between B2B and B2C companies as follows (Yamasaki, 2016, 2017).

#### (1) Objects

The common purpose of both companies is disclosure. The difference between the two is that the objects for the B2C company is sales promotion, whereas the objects for B2B companies are sustainability of the company. "Although the objective is disclosure of management information to stakeholders, there are also aspects of making fans," housebuilder company (B2C) answered.

Meanwhile, the machine manufacturing company (B2B) said as follows. "If B2B companies do not continue their efforts to let people understand the significance of their existence, no one will be on the side when falling into a crisis situation." In this way, CSR communication of B2B companies realizes smoothness of operation. Moreover, improving corporate awareness and comprehension level is consistent with recruitment purpose for gathering talented people.

#### (2) Contents

The common contents of both companies are environmental protection and CSR activities of their own. For B2B companies, not only these but also social value and presence of their business is the content of their CSR communications. B2C companies need not bother to consider their presence because people are aware of the existence value of their company. This difference can be seen from the following statements.

"In addition to improving corporate recognition, we are widely appealing the realities that contribute to solving social problems with businesses and technologies." (B2B / chemistry)

“The environmental response of products such as eco cars is product information itself. The recognition rate of our company and social functions is saturated in Japan.” (B2C / car manufacturing)

### (3) Media used for

B2B companies use website, events, or corporate advertising. In addition to those media, B2C companies make good use of social media and publicity.

“We are sending out all information by the CSR report and website, but we are interlocking with all media such as TV and newspaper, social media, events, publicity etc.” (B2C / beverage)

“We cannot make full use of the interactive function of social media in our current system, so we are not using it.” (B2B / machine)

To sum up, while B2B and B2C companies both have similar objects, contents, or media usage, we found there are also many differences between them.

## 4.2 Difference in CSR activities

Based on the interview survey of the four companies, we found the difference of CSR activities between B2B and B2C companies as follows. (Yamasaki et al., 2017).

### (1) Main target of CSR activities

On CSR activities, main target of B2C companies is customers. On the contrary, B2B companies target the communities. For B2C companies, every stakeholder might be a customer or a potential customer, and the community is not the exception. “There are many parts of CSR activities related to business practices such as sales, and we focus on relationships with customers **at store**.” (B2C / retail) As such, B2C companies place great importance on customers.

B2B companies, on the other hand, are not conscious of customers in the community as seen in the comments below. “CSR activities are implemented by each office and

factory according to their own ideas and local needs.” (B2B / machine) “There are no supervising organizations in charge of social activities so far. Each department is involved in related activities individually.” (B2B / precision equipment)

### (2) Contents of CSR activities

We found both B2B and B2C companies execute the CSR activities which are connected with their own business. However, B2C companies carry out more customer-oriented activities, and B2B companies carry out more society-oriented activities.

B2C companies are more conscious of customers. “Our CSR activities are “customer involved” type, such as inviting neighborhood customers to tree-planting in stores under construction.” (B2C / retail) “We are holding events to learn about health at the stadium that we have acquired its naming right.” (B2C / food)

On the other hand, the comments of B2B companies are as follows. “We are hosting a work place experience. We will use our core technology to aim for CSR activities that are interesting and easy to understand for the public.” (B2B / precision equipment) “We are accepting internship students at factories and donating books introducing projects in cartoons to schools and libraries.” (B2B / machines)

## 5. Discussion

CSR activities and communication of B2C companies are customer-oriented and conscious of sales promotion. On the other hand, those of B2B companies are society-oriented.

For B2B companies, customers are limited, and rationally decide whether to make deals with the company or not. B2B companies use their CSR activities and communication not for increasing their sales like B2C companies, but for gaining the presence of their own and sustaining their business.

The difference between B2B and B2C com-

panies comes from the fact that the level of cognition and understanding by stakeholders other than customers is low due to the lack of opportunities for communities to contact with business in their daily lives. It leads to a lack of awareness of the social value and significance of companies and businesses. It can be handicapped for B2B companies to acquire management resources such as human resources and funds from the outside, and various problems can arise in order to achieve smooth management. Besides, in terms of cooperation at the time of establishment of a factory or acquisition of support when a scandal happens, the way of evaluation from society is different from that of the B2C companies and affects the sustainability of B2B companies.

The reason B2B companies place emphasis on improving corporate recognition and social value transmission is such a management issue. B2B companies position CSR communication as an important corporate communication for the community in order to maintain smooth management and to survive the organization.

The reason why the communication media of the B2B companies is limited compared to the B2C company is that B2C companies also use the various media used for sales promotion to the community. In contrast, it is not so in B2B companies. B2C companies are aware of the community as an unspecified large number of customers.

Why “disclosure” is a common purpose for CSR communication of B2B and B2C companies that satisfying accountability by showing financial information is not enough now. Recognition that companies is responsible for information disclosure of non-financial information has come to be shared.

## 6. Implications

From the results of this research, B2B companies would be asked to draw their own stakeholder map, which is different from that of B2C companies. To do so, B2B companies will

be able to reach their important stakeholders more effectively.

Also, B2B companies and B2C companies need to separately consider CSR activities and communication activities. CSR activities and communication of B2B and B2C companies have not been discussed separately so far because the difference between B2B and B2C companies, which are important stakeholders and objectives, was not recognized. However, since B2B companies have different characteristics from those of B2C companies, it is the achievement of this research that we were able to show the different characteristics of CSR communication also existed.

In this research, we showed the difference of CSR activities and communication between B2B and B2C companies in their stakeholder management. This is not only academic knowledge but also practical. This research will enable B2B companies to make appropriate discussions, develop strategies and make rationale decision-making in order to do appropriate CSR activities.

## 7. Limitations and Future Research

We just used the qualitative method, so for the future research, quantitative investigation for the difference of CSR activities and communication between B2B and B2C companies is needed.

Triangulation that combines multiple approaches will increase the relevance of the research.

In the case of adopting the triangulation approach, a method combining qualitative and quantitative surveys is common. There are many discussions on comparison and combination pattern of quantitative survey and qualitative survey. Bryman (1988) stated that the validity of findings can be enhanced by checking the results of two types of study on the triangulation that combines both qualitative and qualitative research.

Furthermore, in the interview survey of CSR activities, the number of samples is small. It is necessary to investigate by adding samples or to ensure validity by quantitative survey.

Finally, this study adopts only Japanese cases. In globalizing this research, it is necessary to investigate companies other than Japan and to conduct comparative research.

**Keywords:** CSR activities, CSR communication, B2B, B2C

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As a systemically important financial institution, the NLB Group is aware of its social responsibility.

*“Southeast Europe is our home. The heart and the head of the NLB Group lie here, which is why our wish and goal is to make sure that this region is successful. As a systemic player, we accept the challenge with pride and great responsibility – responsibility to our clients, employees, and the environment in which we operate.”*

**Blaž Brodnjak,**  
President & CEO



For every story,  
only one address  
is the right one!



**ALWAYS WITH YOU!**

When you are the right one for running a business in the cloud and nothing can stop you on your way to success. When you need a spare part or a partner who will take care of you every day. When the bank is already closed or you wish to add to your collection a new stamp. When you want to bring smile with a good wish or surprise with a nice gift. **For every story, only one address is the right one!**

 **Pošta Slovenije**  
*Always with you!*

# Dream your worries away.

We don't spend all the time thinking about insurance, but we live with the feeling of security it provides every day.



Everything will be alright.

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**We co-create trends,  
manage changes, and  
round up strategic  
communication on all  
platforms in a meaningful  
and sensible way.**



propiar

# Bloom!

Taking care of your body is an investment for the future. **REfresh functional waters** contain a combination of vitamins, minerals and antioxidants that helps to protect the body from the consequences of stress and exertion and boosts the immune system.



Tadej Golob  
writer  
Leninov park, 2018

She put on shorts and a shirt that was too big and almost resembled a student, and not even a student about to graduate. She held a Mercator's bag ...

Bus station Mercator  
Ljubljana

**WE HAVE BEEN ENTERING YOUR LIVES FOR OVER SEVENTY YEARS.**

Dan D  
PLAC under former hipermarket  
Mercator, Novo mesto

**INTO YOUR BOOKS, BUS STOPS,  
MUSIC, SQUARES, AND STREETS.**



**WE DO GOOD.  
FOR OVER 70 YEARS.**



# CONNECTED TO POSITIVE ENERGY.

We believe in a bright future of energy. As the largest Slovenian producer and seller of electricity from its own, domestic sources, we accept with positivity the responsibility for sustainable energy transition in Slovenia. Today more than three-quarters of all electricity produced in our power plants already comes from renewable sources. As the main pillar of the Slovenian power system, we provide a stable and reliable supply. Our operations and development are based on the principle of responsibility towards the environment and society. With the experience and know-how of more than three thousand experts, the HSE Group opens new development opportunities, while paving the way to a reliable future of electricity production by constantly upgrading strategic partnerships both at home and abroad.



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